

Letter to the Editor, Driftwood by Maggie Ziegler
Reducing Green House Gas Emissions: Eating local

Summer garden feasting has continued into October. Our orchard brings an abundance of apples, pears and walnuts. Late raspberries provide small treats. There's been a fantastic harvest of wild mushrooms: shaggy manes, puffballs and giant meadow mushrooms. Tonight a garden stir-fry: carrots, zucchini, kale, peppers, mushrooms, garlic and onions. Yesterday a quiche with broccoli, mushrooms and local eggs. The day before an off-island lunch included a sandwich well padded with tomatoes and lettuce, a little bag of carrots, a pear and an apple.

It's not a hardship to eat local, even if you don't grow your own produce. Everything in our garden and much more is grown by local farmers and available in local stores. It's a great way to join the hundreds of islanders who have signed onto the one tonne challenge - a voluntary effort to reduce individual or family green house gas emissions by one tonne over the next year.

It does take a mental shift to shed our conditioned craving for having everything available right now. When my partner and I made a commitment to eat primarily local produce a couple of years ago, there was some letting go to do. I admit I yearned for bananas. I missed avocados. But these desires passed surprisingly quickly, replaced by a deep appreciation for our food and a growing connection to our bio-region. We wanted to experience food tied more to the seasons and the local climate. We wanted to challenge our collusion in the phenomenal fossil fuel emissions involved in moving food around the world.

The rewards far outweigh the challenges. The food tastes better, for one thing. We eat our own carrots well into the winter, then buy BC grown organic, but when these run out pass on the California organic carrots that have a vastly inferior taste. Better to wait for the new season. Tomatoes and cucumbers are amazing when you gorge on them for two to three solid months after months of abstinence. And that first giant cauliflower is an awesome moment well worth waiting for. We figured out that our diet is so healthy that there's no problem with eating less fresh produce for a couple of lean months, relying on food that we froze, canned and dried. We saved money.

We haven't managed 100% but we've done well. We've developed more awareness of the origins of the little bit of non-BC produce we do buy, for example, the California onions we purchased after our onions and leeks were finished in April. We went out of province for citrus and a few southern grown veggies in deep winter. We are thinking about the next step. We're mostly vegetarian, but Amazon rainforests are being clear cut to satisfy the west's soy craving. Maybe give up soy and munch on local free range chickens?

Our little local produce effort isn't going to save the planet, of course, and doesn't take away from the need for systemic changes to our agricultural production systems. But it has made us more conscious of the chains of energy, effort and resources that get the food to our table. And there's tremendous joy in living a little more seasonally, a little more lightly, a little more responsibly on the land.

Maybe you could lighten your own footprint just one small step. Maybe support local farmers by eating more local produce. Maybe give up just one food when it's not in season, even for a short while. Maybe ask your grocers where your produce is grown. The Earth Festival Society, organizers of the One Tonne Challenge, calculate that Salt Spring vegetarians who consume some local and organic food produce roughly two-thirds the greenhouse gas emissions of the average North American consumer of conventional food. To find out more, visit the One Tonne Challenge website: www.saltspring-onetonnechallenge.org.