

Digging Deep-Gardening with Cynthia Brian

In Praise of Farmers

By Cynthia Brian

“Let us never forget that the cultivation of the earth is the most important labor of man. When tillage begins, other arts follow. The farmers, therefore, are the founders of civilization.” – Daniel Webster



Apples are ripening and will be available through the fall.

Photos Cynthia Brian

With so many luscious fruits and vegetables at their peak of perfection in August, the prospect of the perfect meal awaits! Ripe and juicy nectarines, peaches, apricots and Asian pears are devoured right off the tree, or drizzled with olive oil to be grilled on the barbecue. Tomatoes, peppers, corn, cucumbers, zucchini, eggplant, blackberries, melons and beans offer the promise of culinary creativity as we harvest yet another bushel. Farmers' markets tender the very best of the season, a good reason to stock up on freshness and quality to freeze or can for the winter months.

But have you ever pondered the labor involved from the farmers behind the superior produce you discover at the farmers' markets or in your local grocery aisle?

Throughout my teen years, I worked in the fruit cutting sheds along with my two sisters where we would halve and pit apricots, peaches and pears, laying them on wooden flats to be sun dried, packaged and sold. For years afterward I couldn't eat any of these three fruits because of the memories of the dirty, exhausting work in the hot summer sun. We were



A half lug of fresh peaches.

paid by the 50-pound lug of fruit cut, with apricots earning us about 20 cents a box containing two or more “cots.” Peaches and pears paid half as much because they were bigger and therefore, less fruit was packed in a lug. Cutting peaches was the nastier job. The peach fuzz stuck to our skin as the juice ran from the peach pit to our armpits. When the gong rang at 4:30 p.m. indicating that our nine-hour shift was terminated, our itching bodies would dash home for a shower. If we had earned \$20 for a full day's work, we were considered in the top 1 percent of farm employees.

Although the work was tough, when I reminisce about those farm day experiences, I am grateful for the manual labor of my youth. Whenever I purchase a fruit or vegetable that hasn't grown in my personal garden, I am filled with appreciation for the toil of the farmers and the laborers who have worked rain or shine for many seasons to bring these crops to market. These hard working people are the unsung heroes of our lives.

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