

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2013

Three Girls, Three Gardens, Thirty Days by Jennifer Verprauskus

One hot summer day I went to visit my former client's organic garden and she said to me, "One day I want to eat just from my garden. I wonder if I could do it for a month?" I quickly responded that I loved the idea and wanted to try it. Our friend, who is an organic urban grower, wanted to take this challenge as well. The three of us planned to live off of our gardens from September 1st- September 30th. Since the beginning, our goal has been to promote the awareness of affordable organic gardening through education to empower individuals to make changes to their health and life. In this challenge, the rules were simple. We could share our food, use oils &



seasonings, and drink liquids (I was not about to give up my wine for the month as well!) but we could not have any fruits or vegetables we didn't grow, no flour, quinoa, barley, wheat, rice, pasta, meat, lentils, beans, fish, soy, candy, chips, nuts, chocolate, ice cream, or cheese!

Although I knew it wasn't going to be easy, I was excited. None of us planned our garden to sustain this challenge, but we figured we could be creative with what we had. In my backyard, just over 1,100 square feet, I was growing over 50 varieties of fruits and vegetables. Kathleen had a smaller back yard and Barb had a much larger yard with vegetables growing everywhere. Between the 3 of us, we had every green imaginable, peppers, tomatoes, acorn squash, zucchini, tomatoes, cucumbers, eggplants, hens and much more. It should have been easy, right?

The first few days were some of the hardest. I had to become use to planning, harvesting, preparing and cooking every meal. My first day I had a lemon cucumber, kale and golden beet smoothie for breakfast, sautéed beets and kale for lunch and zucchini 'Alfredo' with a salad for dinner. I made the Alfredo sauce by pureeing a zucchini in my VitaMix and adding a touch of olive oil and fresh herbs. It wasn't terrible! The next few days I found myself hungry in the morning and again by late afternoon. I knew I wouldn't survive if I kept feeling hungry so I decided to get creative and plan my meals in advance. I started to make a lot of soups, kale, cabbage, and root vegetable, and decided to dig up some of my potatoes. After the first week, Barb wasn't feeling well and decided she needed more variety. She gave me over a dozen eggs from her hens and then she was out. A complete week after we started, I decided to run a half marathon I had signed up for earlier in the summer. I learned running a half marathon on beets and kale probably isn't the best idea. Despite the potato and egg I had the day before my body felt weak!

Week 2, A.K.A. cabbage soup week, did not start off well. Hail ripped through the Denver area and damaged many of my large-leafed plants. My chard, eggplant and squash were hit the hardest. I thought I was going to lose it all but miraculously after pruning they all came back with an abundant harvest. I made a large batch of cabbage soup and it held me over most of the week. One of my favorite meals was baked eggplant with tomato

sauce made from heirloom Black Krim & Cherry tomatoes. During week 2 Kathleen had social obligations that involved going out of town so she decided to leave the challenge as well. After the hail, excess cabbage soup and the 2 other girls giving in, I came very close to quitting!

By week 3 my watermelon was perfectly ripe and the broccoli was ready to eat! The only obstacles left were the social events I attended surrounded by delicious food and the smell of fried chicken that lingered outside my house for what seemed to be an entire weekend! I knew I needed to somehow make comfort food. One day I harvested some potatoes, carrots and broccoli and headed to the kitchen. After roasting the carrots, steaming the broccoli and mashing the potatoes, I realized the only thing my dinner was missing was the gravy! What was I to do? I did what any other desperate person in my situation would have done. I got out the VitaMix, threw in a zucchini, some water and I seasoned the heck out of it. After dimming the lights you could hardly tell the gravy was green and made of zucchini!



By the time week 4 came around nothing was going to stop me, no hail, no aphids or diseases could stop me now! I was determined to make it. I was running out of eggs, couldn't stomach the thought of cabbage, and saw kale when I closed my eyes. One of my favorite dishes of week 4 was mashed acorn squash, topped with chives, steamed broccoli and a side of mustard greens.

After the 30 days ended, I felt relieved of surviving the challenge but most importantly I felt a sense of peace. I realized that with my minimal skill set I could provide food for myself. It made me understand even more the fragility of our food system and the challenges we face. It's gravely important to be connected to our food source and to realize, "Growing your own food is a dangerous act because you're in danger of becoming free." - Intensive Urban Gardening.

Jennifer Verprauskus, a Jefferson County CSU Extension Colorado Master Gardener, is the owner of UpBeet Landscapes, a landscape design firm specializing in edible landscape design.

POSTED BY CAROLLEE AT [11:59 AM](#)  [SHARE THIS](#)
LABELS: [VEGETABLES AND HERBS](#)

[Newer Post](#)[Older Post](#)[Home](#)