

Workshop Title: Root Cellaring

Speakers: Robin & Rebecca LeBlanc

Executive Summary:

The LeBlanc's share their many methods of preserving their harvest. Together they explain how they store summer's bounty and give insight to where certain crops should be stored.

Detailed Notes:

1877 Cellar

- Their basement cellar's floor is sandy bare ground.
- This cellar is kept at a stable temperature of 5 degrees Celsius during the winter. It used to stay around 10 degrees Celsius, but after insulating the upper floor it has helped keep it desirably cooler. They also make us of a dehumidifier down there as well as a heater that will go on if the temperature drops below the 5 degrees.
- Potatoes should always be cured and unlike others, they are **not** stored in sand. They spend first 5 days in the garage, then they go to the basement in an area without sand.
- Their favorite root crop is turnip and it is left out in the garden until the deer come.
- Oppose to leaving their leeks under a cover of snow, they are processed all at once by blanching and the freezing the. Therefore giving them low maintenance access all winter long.
- Roots vegetables including sunchokes, carrots and beets are stored by being covered in sand. They recommend putting the largest size at the bottom, getting smaller as you continue to pack them in sand. The smallest in size are canned.
- Must be covered very well with sand (again, except potatoes), otherwise the root vegetables will dry out.
- The shorter and fatter carrots varieties store better then the long skinny ones. They plant Nantes carrots.
- The greater the volume on the inside in contrast to the outside, will keep fresher longer.
- Leaves are used for covering and storing kohlrabi.
- A portion of their parsnip crop goes to the downstairs cellar, while the others are keep in the garden. They are planted near the end of the garden allowing them to be able to till the remainder in the fall. Parsnip seeds should be saved each year for best crops, but is otherwise a nice low maintenance crop to grow.

1912 Cellar

- Detailed photographs of the cellar's build are shown, including the foundation of rocks and wooden frame. There is one north facing door, though if they were to rebuild they would include a second door.

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- PVC pipes are installed, to both draw in cool air and push out the warm air that rises. The pipes are screened with fine mesh to keep out the insects and small rodents. The top most pipe is sited high in order to stick out of the snow.
- Apples are stored in this outdoor cellar. They are left in ventilated bins that help deter rodents. They are left to sweat for 3-4 weeks before being made into cider with the LeBlanc's own cider press.
- A rodent trap is fashioned out of a bucket with antifreeze, ramp and pop can with peanut butter.
- If desired during the summer months they could early on pack in ice and use to keep things cool.

Q: Is the second cellar kept at 5 degrees Celsius?

A: Yes, it is kept at the same temp as lower cellar and is insulated.

Q: Where do you get your sand for storing root vegetables?

A: They source there from their kid's sandbox and local beach, and highly recommend sourcing it from a masonry. Keep in mind sand needs a certain amount of moisture and cannot be too dry.

Q: How long do apples in the cellar keep?

A: This all depends on the variety, Cortland for examples store very well but apples like St. Lawrence that have a very high sugar content are used in their ciders. They recommend sourcing older apple varieties and contacting local nurseries like Corn Hill for varieties that may not be listed on their catalogue. Bigger apples tend to store better, with Belle Fleur Jaune being another good storing apple – though they do not taste the best when just picked.

Q: Inquired about dwarf trees.

A: They would rather have a long lasting orchard, oppose to one made up of solely dwarf trees. They currently have grafts on semi dwarfs and standard trees

Q: What kind of freezer do you have?

A: They have a 24 cubic ft. chest freezer.

Q: How deep is the cellar in the ground?

A: The mass around the cellar is more important that depth, if it is too deep water would seep in.

Q: Do you use the outdoor cellar all year?

A: No at the moment, they would need to install another door for winter access.

Endives

- Grow the crop from seed
- Let the frost come and uproot the roots. Then cut of the leaves, place in a bucket that has a layer of compost or sand and wait for second harvest.

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- They recommend rotating the endive buckets between under the sink and basement, and getting several harvest from each plant.

Attic

- They use their attic for drying garlic, onions, winter squash, sunflower heads and corn.
- With their cooler climate, sunflower varieties with larger flower heads do not always ripen quick enough to harvest the seeds. They suggest picking a variety best for your region if you plan on growing them for their seeds not as a cut flower.
- In addition their staircase is used for winter storage for crops like winter squash.

Q: Do you keep any vegetables in the attic during the winter time?

A: No, just for drying and curing, otherwise they would freeze.

Q: Do you have to cure potatoes? What is involved in that?

A: Yes, they need to dry out of the light. The harvested potatoes first go to their garage for the initial drying and storage. No sand is used here. They use small barrels to bring them into the kitchen as needed.

Q: What is the temperature of your staircase?

A: 10-15 Celsius. They say it could be cooler for storage, but keeps well.

Cheese

- The bacteria must first be present prior to adding the rennet.
- After being formed, the cheese is placed on planks of wood, such as maple and brought down to the basement.
- It is then rubbed daily with a solution of salt and water, while wearing rubber gloves. This creates a natural rind.
- Large batches of ricotta are made and then frozen for future lasagnas.
- There is no cause for alarm with blue mold but black mold is very bad.
- The unpasteurized cheese must sit for at least 2 months, but gets better at the 5-6 month mark.