



From the soil onto your plate

To grow vegetables as a "cook-gardener" means that you already have a particular dish in your mind while planning your crops.

This is at least what I could experience at [Rosendals Trädgård](#) in Stockholm. Here you find a very special situation regarding vegetable growing. The peculiarity is that this garden is based on producing all vegetables mostly for its own restaurant. That means that there is not the same pressure as there is for a normal market production but rather a lot of potentialities and creativity concerning the cultivation. It's work from hand to hand. The biggest amount of all crops coming from the field goes directly into the kitchen. So it is always fresh and already processed at the same place when it is delivered to the customers.

Furthermore is Niklas Karlsson, one of the head gardeners there, not just a biodynamic gardener but also a trained chef. Through him I learned how to see vegetables through a cook's eye. Due to Niklas' background working in fine-dining restaurants he has a very careful view for the field crops. He sees the whole plant in its different steps of development and considers each stage or each part of a plant with its own quality regarding processing and taste. He tries to be always in close contact with the chefs so that it comes to very creative cooking.



How does this work in practice? To begin with it starts already with the cropping plan. It matters not only the choice of sorts but also their specific varieties. For instance did we grow several chicories, some crispy and some more bitter varieties, which we were harvesting especially in winter or autumn when there is not so much else to be freshly harvested. Then it is used either blanched or uncooked for salad.

Further on timing is very important. The decision of when and also how to harvest. Why not harvesting fennel when it is only a few centimeters high? There are some crops which we were growing in rounds that is at least twice up to five times a season. This is of course only possible with fast growing crops such as all kinds of salad, spring onions, garlic, fennel or fava beans. But it is also all about the ripening process. That means that we were harvesting from the same crop and seeding at different times. For instance did we want very small spring onions or use the fresh leaves of fava beans only before they start to flower for salad. Regarding this technique you can always plant or sow something else afterwards so that your soil won't be uncovered. With this you can avoid to let weeds gain the upper hand but also take advantage of the field to a larger extent.

Well, we sow fennel three times this year and harvested it not only once it was big enough or ripe but also several times already the young and thinner plants. Therefore we took up the whole plant with its root and leaves to just being blanched as it was without cutting off anything. This gives a different and very fine taste compared to the common use of only the fennel bulb. The green part of it is quiet soft and sweet while the root has a somewhat celeriac-ish taste which gives also a bit darker flavor reminding you that it was growing in the soil.



Another time we were even using the annoying and overgrowing weed called gallant soldier (*Galinsoga parviflora*). Since Rosendals Trädgård is also delivering a small amount to one or two fine-dining restaurants the harvest can get quiet creative and exceptional sometimes because they like to carefully select exclusive goods and create extraordinary dishes. That is why we once

harvested this weed while weeding it at the same time. We took only the first very fine leaves right before it starts to bloom. Afterwards they used it fresh for salad and also combined with some herbs as a sauce. Its taste is neither strong nor very outstanding but has a little bit of a carrot flavor and is at least interesting enough as an addition considering how fast and increasingly it grows.



Last but not least we were even more creative and made some “chocolaty garlic”. For this we made a vacuum-package with some garlic bulbs, went to our compost heaps and dug it at least 20 cm deep into it. Important is that the compost needs to be still processing so that it has a high temperature about 50° to 60°C. After about one month we went back to check if it is ready “roasted”. At this stage the color is important. The garlic cloves should turn dark black. Not until then it is ready to get it out and to be served. Even though it looks quiet unappetizingly it has a fascinating taste. You wouldn't believe it!

Check recipes on: www.devote.se/Foodstories

And there is even more to experiment with and to discover.

With this I want to thank Rosendals Trädgård for this insightful and inspiring year and especially Niklas as a teacher for all I could learn by him and for all experiences I had as an apprentice. I will always remember this fantastic place as an inspiring example with all its reativity, aesthetics and holistic thoughts and all the nice people working there in particular.