



Blue Jeans and Rubber Boots

By *Susan Schaefer*

Growing up on the farm shaped my passion for gardening.

I've never thought much about it, but as I get older, I can see how growing up on the farm shaped my childhood and inspired me to continue farming in my adult life.

I can still see my mother sitting at the kitchen table after all the dishes were done, leafing through seed catalogues. She would draw out maps for her flower and vegetable beds. I do that now.

I would ask my mom about the difference between annuals, semi-annuals and perennials. She would describe each one in detail. She could talk for hours about the different flowers, showing me pictures and what would have the longest blooming period. My mother truly loved her flower beds, as I do mine.

The vegetable garden was a way to keep her family nourished until the following year. It was huge in comparison to my raised beds in our backyard. As a little girl, it seemed enormous, as we spent many Saturdays out there trying to keep the weeds down and the mosquitoes from carrying us away.

I used to help my dad plant potatoes in the field. He would load up the back of an old pickup with buckets of sprouting potatoes from last year's crop, and off we would go. My dad would dig the hole, and my job was to quickly throw a potato seedling into the hole before he dug the next one, covering up the first. Sometimes, he would be too quick, or I would be daydreaming, but eventually, we would get into a nice rhythm. I always enjoyed this small chore, and I was happy to spend the time with my dad.

I gave up part of my backyard two years ago for a potato bed. Easy to grow, with a high yield, I was proud to have fresh potatoes for the two of us right

through Christmas. Last fall, I asked my husband to make us another bed.

When I was growing up, I never really appreciated the joy of gardening. We picked and shucked wheel barrels full of peas; we harvested crate loads of tomatoes and a truckload of potatoes. These were all chores to us. In my adult life, this brings me great joy and a proud sense of achievement. Again, I am doing it on a much smaller and more manageable scale.

Our garden expands a bit each year, and so does my appreciation. We plant bee-friendly flowers; everything is organic, and last fall, we incorporated two rain barrels into the mix to help with the hot and dry summers. We enjoy eating fresh from our garden, and it is a place of great nourishment for the entire year.

All those years growing up on the farm have influenced me; as they say, once a farmer, always a farmer.

Happy gardening.

