

The Great Garden Experiment



By Linda Opp

We moved from our city apartment to the country shortly before planting time. Dad kept his accounting job, and Mom was going back to teach school in the fall. But my parents were hankering for life in the country and a chance to grow their own vegetables, so away we went.

Our new place was an old two-story house on an acre of land. Next door, to the east, lived Mr. Ballard. He raised pigs—a lot of pigs. It was all right, except when the wind blew from that direction. On those days, we tried to stay indoors.

After we got settled, our first shopping trip was to the Big Valley Hardware Store to pick out our garden seeds. Mom and Dad rummaged through the racks of seeds like kids in a toy store.

“Look, Stan,” Mom called to Dad. “Here are seeds for zucchini¹ squash. Let’s get some.”

Dad looked at the picture on the front of the seed package. “I don’t like zucchini much,” he said.

Mom got a determined look in her eyes.

We bought the zucchini seeds. We also carried home seed potatoes, tiny tomato plants, and other packages of seeds—corn, peas, beans, and more.

While we were planting, Mr. Ballard stuck his head over the fence. “Howdy,” he said. “Nice garden you got.”

¹ **zucchini**: a long, dark green member of the squash family

"Thanks," Dad said. "We—"

"What's that?" Mr. Ballard interrupted, squinting at the seed packet Mom was holding. "Zucchini?"

"That's right," Mom said, pleased.

"You didn't plant the whole package, did you?" Mr. Ballard inquired.

Mom looked puzzled. "Why, yes."

"What's wrong with that?" Dad asked, sticking up for Mom.

"Oh, nothing. Nothing at all." Mr. Ballard disappeared, but we could hear him laughing.

Our garden grew fast, especially the zucchini. "Look at this, Allison," Dad said one day. "These zucchini vines of your mother's are choking my cucumber vines." Andy and I were helping him weed the garden. We were in a hurry because there was an east wind that day.

Two weeks later, Mom picked the first zucchini. "I can't wait to try some of the recipes in my new zucchini cookbook," she said proudly.

At first, it was interesting and kind of fun to see how many ways we could eat zucchini. But the fun was soon over.

There were two hundred recipes in that cookbook. We ate zucchini steamed, fried, baked, and stuffed. We ate zucchini-carrot cake, zucchini nut bread, and zucchini-oatmeal cookies. Slices and chunks of zucchini turned up in salads, soups, casseroles, and stews.

"Why don't you try giving some away?" I suggested.

"I have," Mom said. "I've already given so many away that people lock their doors when they see me coming."

"I am going to become malnourished," Dad said. "My body is crying out for a tender tomato or some crisp green beans. And all I get is zucchini." He glowered at Mom over his meatloaf, which he had cut into tiny pieces to be sure there was no zucchini in it.

Mr. Ballard thought this was hilarious. "How are the zucchini farmers today?" he would ask whenever he saw Dad. "You city folks are strange. Nothing but zucchini."

"Maybe," Dad said icily. "But I'd rather have a garden full of zucchini than a farm full of smelly pigs any day."

Mr. Ballard shrugged. "Pigs are pigs," he said.

One morning when Mom had gone out early to pick zucchini, I served Dad his breakfast omelette, which Mom had left in the oven to stay warm. Dad was delighted when I set it down in front of him.

He took a big bite. Then his fork clattered onto the table.

"No," he said, standing. "I will not eat a zucchini omelette." He took a swallow of juice and set his glass down with a gulp. "That does it. Zucchini-orange juice. She thought I wouldn't notice."

At that moment, there was a yell from the garden. Dad, Andy, and I ran outside. There stood Mom, holding the biggest zucchini I had ever seen. It was at least three feet long.

"Stan," Mom whispered, "I don't understand. They were only half this big yesterday."

We stared at the zucchini patch. An army of green monsters gleamed in the sun.

Mr. Ballard looked over the fence. "You folks got trouble?" he asked.

Dad put his arm around Mom and gave Mr. Ballard a frosty look. He didn't want our neighbor to know how bad our trouble really was. "Nothing that concerns you," he said.

"Oh, well," Mr. Ballard said, scratching his head. "I guess I've got enough trouble of my own. Confounded worms ate my whole corn crop. Don't know what I'll feed my pigs until I can find some corn for sale." He walked away, muttering to himself.

Fortunately, I had an idea. I explained it to Dad and Andy.

"No, Allison," Dad said when I told him what he would have to do. "Anything but that."

"It's the only way, Dad," Andy said.

We finally got Dad to make the phone call. He handled it well, even though he was awfully embarrassed.

Then we got to work, urgently picking every zucchini. Mr. Ballard arrived with his truck and his hired hand and helped us load the zucchini. After that, Mr. Ballard got his tractor and plowed under the zucchini vines. That was part of the deal.

I don't know whether the pigs liked the zucchini. I didn't ask them.



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