



• By Jennifer Burcke | June 5, 2013 1:49 pm EST

As a food lover and gardener, **Thanksgiving** provides me with the perfect opportunity to plan ahead for a meal that will be served months from now. As I walk through the spring garden, I find myself dreaming of our Thanksgiving feast.

I can't help it. As I mentally picture the heirlooms that will be planted in our garden this year, I also visualize the dishes that will be made using each of them. The garden harvest will be enjoyed all year long, but it will be the star of our family's Thanksgiving table — for the most celebrated single meal of the year, I plan to feature a cornucopia of ingredients that were produced right in our backyard.

The Thanksgiving holiday started in much the same way. It was a celebration of the harvest, a commemoration of the growing season's bounty. Nearly 400 years have passed since that first celebration, yet we still gather with friends and family at Thanksgiving to share a meal and reflect on all that we are thankful for.

The **Thanksgiving** meal has changed over the years. For example, the wild fowl that supposedly graced the first feast has been replaced with our modern-day turkey. And history tells us that there would not have been cranberry sauce, mashed potatoes, or pumpkin pie at that inaugural celebration; the settler's sugar stores had been depleted, the potato had not yet made its way to North America, and using butter and flour to make a pie crust was a luxury far beyond the reach of those gathered at the first celebration.

Instead, the menu would have featured the best of local, easily accessible food products. It is likely that venison, seafood, corn, beans, and squash were present at the multiday celebration. By the time Abraham Lincoln officially made Thanksgiving a national holiday in 1863, sage dressing and mashed potatoes were making their way onto the menus of many Americans and our modern-day menu was taking shape.

I intend to see to it that my family's Thanksgiving is a celebration of our garden harvest. Over the last few years, we have incorporated increasing amounts of locally produced foodstuffs into our Thanksgiving meal. This year, we will be growing heirloom vegetables in our garden specifically for our Thanksgiving table.

To help you get your Thanksgiving harvest ready, here are step-by-step guides for planting some of the most influential crops: herbs, pumpkins, potatoes, and sweet potatoes. This guide will show you that it's not hard to feed your families with fresh, all-natural foods that were grown with your very own hands.

When we sit down at our family table on Thanksgiving Day, we will be surrounded by food that represents the hard work of many months in the garden. It will undoubtedly be a proud moment when we survey the delicious, homegrown holiday dinner before us. The knowledge that we have grown our own Thanksgiving dinner will be one more reason for us to be thankful.

Jennifer Burcke is a writer and fifth generation New England farmer who lives with three generations of her family at 1840 Farm in New Hampshire. She shares their journey on her blog

1840 Farm.