

OUR COMMON VEGETABLES

People owe a big debt to the forefathers of the Boers. More than half of the vegetables eaten every day go to England straight from Holland. It is difficult to imagine that three hundred years ago a boiled potato or a dish of mashed turnips was not to be had in Great Britain for love or money. In those days English people lived chiefly on bread and meat and beer, and the bread and meat were as a rule of such quality as would have caused a riot in the work-house of to-day.

Beans they did have—at least, the upper classes had them. Henry VIII. was very fond of beans, and had a Dutch gardener over, who found English soil would grow broad beans every bit as well as Dutch. They rather sneered at peas in the year 1600. Such as were eaten were imported from Holland. 'Fit dainties for ladies; they came so far, and cost so dear,' says one writer.

Some years ago, in the Isle of Bute, a splendid crop of peas was raised from seed which was at least 2000, and probably nearly 3000 years old. This seed came from an Egyptian tomb. The flower had a beautiful red centre, surrounded by white petals, and the peas were well up to the modern market-garden standard. Cabbage has always been a pet vegetable of the Dutch. We got it from them in 1510, and in 1915 we still use thousands of pounds of Dutch cabbage-seed. And the extraordinary part of it is that cabbage is in reality a native of Great Britain.

All our garden vegetables are merely types improved by long cultivation of wild species. The British cabbage is common enough in places by the sea in the South of England, but it is no use for food in its wild

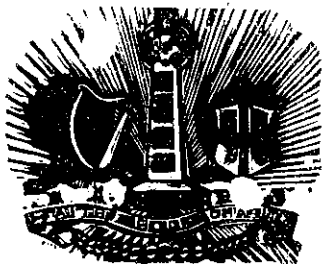
state. Indeed, it would take a botanist to tell that it was a cabbage at all. Scotland owes the cabbage to Cromwell's soldiers. The cauliflower is but a cultivated improvement on the cabbage. It was brought to perfection in Cyprus, and was very little known in England till about a century ago.

The parsnip is another native of Britain. You will find it along almost any hedge-row, but it is small, and intensely bitter in its wild state. Parsnip is grown more in Ireland than in England. In Ulster a sort of beer is made from the root.

Celery is a third native of Great Britain. It grows luxuriantly in ditches and brooks; but, like the others, wild celery is nasty, even poisonous. We owe the delicious eatable celery to a French prisoner of war, Field-Marshal Tallard, whom Marlborough beat at Blenheim in 1704.

If asked what was the most important event in the history of British vegetables, most people would say the bringing over of the potato from its home in America. They would be wrong. The introduction of the turnip—that is, of the Swede variety—was of much greater value. Until we got the field-turnip, all England had to live during the winter chiefly on salted meat. And severe winters were dreaded, on account of the terrible mortality amongst sheep, which were then left out at pasture all through the cold weather. The growing of swedes changed all that, by providing cheap and wholesome food for stock when penned up. Turnips, like so many other vegetables, came to us from Holland about 1690.

The artichoke is a vegetable not as popular now as it was some years ago. It grows wild in Turkey and Italy. The Jerusalem artichoke, which is now much better known, is not really an artichoke at all, but a sort of sunflower.



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