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That Autumnal Feeling

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Autumn is now descending on our garden and we are gradually putting it to bed. The runner beans have produced a magnificent crop and are now dying back. The pumpkins are turning from a dark green to bright orange and we will leave them until the vines completely die away. We are digging up the last of our carrots and will be bottling a lot of our beetroot. The cabbages and celeriac are also ready for removing - it is always a problem knowing what to do with one's cabbages and we will probably turn them into saurkraut.

A big bonus at this time of year is foraging for wild mushrooms. Our house in Poland is situated in the middle of a large national park and so we are surrounded by forest on all sides. The best time is to go out early in the morning, particularly after a period of rain and then sun, and we now know the best locations to find the mushrooms. Our favourite are porcini (boletus) - known as borowik in Polish - but these are now finishing and the podgrzybek (xerocomus badius) and maslak (suillus variegatus) are taking over. These are all delicious and can be either fried with onions, used in soups or sauces to accompany meat dishes or simply dried for eating in the long winter months. We have also harvested our first homegrown porcini - my wife bought some roots in gel, injected this into holes in the soil near some oak trees and we picked 1 kg (ten mushrooms). We are also trying parasol mushrooms (kania in Polish) which are best planted near a compost heap and these are already growing after two months.

Other produce is also in season. We have a lot of sloeberries growing along the border with our neighbour and we use these to make sloe vodka, a great drink at Christmas time. We have also just picked our chokeberries (aronia in Polish) which, although inedible, can be used to make both juice and as a liqueur using wild cherry leaves, and are prized for their high vitamin C content. We also picked our barberries for the first time this year - these are small red berries that were used in the Middle Ages as candy but later became unpopular as they are difficult to pick because of their thorny bushes. Having only a small amount, we made some barberry jelly which is similar in flavour to redcurrant jelly although rather more tannic. This is also the time for late-ripening raspberries that we like to pick and eat straight of the bush to capture their flavour at its freshest.

On the livestock front, our small flock of hens are fattening themselves up for the winter, needing to rely on their fat reserves to get them through some very cold nights. Our five young duckgeese (a relatively new breed) are also eating like crazy and the extra vitamins we add to their daily feed is definitely bulking them up. Our three guinea fowl are slowly reducing their egg production - if you haven't tried a guinea fowl egg, you should do. Although smaller than a hen's egg, the yolk is much more golden and we think they taste better!

So, overall it has been a good year in the garden and we are looking forward to eating our preserves, frozen fruit and veg - much more appetizing and flavoursome than anything being sold in the local supermarkets.

Image (optional):

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