

Tale from the Garden

Aah, August. August is probably my favourite summer month, produce-wise. The shops are just heaving with fresh local produce & Harry's allotment is bulging with greens of all shapes & sizes – courgettes to name but one!

Courgette (or Zucchini) is a variety of summer squash which includes Crooknecks and Patty Pan. It is a squash that is harvested while immature and while its rind is still tender and edible. Its skin is dark green, light green, orange or deep yellow. Winter squashes differ from the summer squash in that they have a hard skin. Botanically Courgette is a fruit, but it is treated as a vegetable in a culinary context and is often cooked and prepared into savoury meals. It is harvested when it is about 25 cm long because it loses flavour if it is left to grow older.



The 'courgette' was one of Christopher Columbus's discoveries. Here we look at some other facts behind the green vegetable:

- The courgette, a member of the cucumber and melon family, comes from Central and South America, where it has been eaten for thousands of years. Squash seeds have been found in Archeological digs in Mexico, that date back to between 9000 and 4000 BC.
- When European explorers came to the Americas, squash was one of the 3 major foods the native Indians used, along with beans and corn. The explorers had never seen them before so they thought they were melons. Squash seeds were brought back to the Mediterranean by Columbus on his travels around 500 years ago.
- The modern variety was developed in Italy, where it is called 'zucchini', derived from the word 'zucca' meaning a small squash. This led to it being called a zucchini in the US when Italian immigrants took the vegetable with them. Courgette is the French word for the vegetable.
- It is very low in calories and contains nutrients including vitamin A and potassium. Because this is such a mild vegetable you will find recipes for almost any kind of dish, appetizer, soup, salad, main dish, side dish or dessert. You can steam it, poach it, sauté it, bake it and fry it. You can make cakes with it, there are recipes for bread & you can add it to home-made relish. Countries around the world have their favourite way of featuring the courgette in their national cuisine.
- Or how about trying Harry's recipe, as recommended by Judith W in the latest edition of our Diary Plus Extra! Simply cut it into batons, put into an oven proof dish along with some butter, salt & pepper & cook in the microwave for 2 minutes before finishing off in the oven for 20 minutes at 180°C – delicious!

How many of you like cheese and tomato sandwiches? A friend of mine plants lots of tomato plants each year & has lots of tomatoes at the end of the season to give away – a ready supply for my sandwiches! Courgettes are the same – one plant produces an abundant crop! ABUNDANCE - that remind me of the dictionary's definition of the word

'thriving' which means to prosper, be fortunate or successful, increase in prosperity or wealth, grow richer or rich, to grow or develop vigorously, flourish or succeed. Tomatoes, squash, and zucchini are three plants that thrive rather than merely struggle to survive. Surviving means to "barely hang on." How often have you heard people asking, "How's it going?" (especially after the year we've had!) & people mostly replying, "Oh, I'm hanging on in there."

In today's economy people seem to be struggling to survive rather than thriving, but this is not God's plan. God can change dire circumstances and cause a turnaround to occur in the most discouraging of times or circumstances.

Growing courgettes is a kind of miracle, a multiplication that takes place in every summer garden. God takes that little seed, smaller than my pinky fingernail, and produces a dozen gourds bigger than my arm. And they all have more seeds! It's actually a little bit scary. Particularly when you think about how often the Bible uses the imagery of seeds and green and growing things - and not just in parables, but in prayers & songs. Today, we've heard the author of The Song of Solomon rejoice in the arrival of the springtime when 'the flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtle-dove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance.' It is a song for strengthening and fullness and growth, and it is beautiful - this is a song to the God who invented courgettes!

What if we grow like squash? What if we end up with the spiritual equivalent of boxes of courgettes, filling the aisles, so much giftedness and abundance that we have to sneak out and leave it on other people's doorsteps in the dead of night because it's just too much grace for us to keep for ourselves?

The gospel brings us good news and bad news. Every story of abundance in the Bible begins with the fear of scarcity. It begins with a child's lunch when what you need is a catered-for feast. It begins with an idea for ministry and one disciple saying, "We don't have the budget for that." It begins with Jesus responding to that kind of scarcity-thinking with, "That's amazing. Bring me what you have." And then he takes the gift, and gives thanks to God for it, and blesses it, and breaks it. And he hands it over, and says, "Here. Share this."

It solves the problem of scarcity. But it also requires that we let go of our understanding of the world, and especially of the church, as a place with a problem of "not-enough."

Here, after all, we gather to worship a courgette-creating God, a God who doesn't just feed five thousand people, but makes sure that there's twelve baskets left over. Those baskets are a symbol of the twelve tribes of Israel—that is, everyone who *wasn't* there on the mountain that day. In other words, God not only answered the need of the crowd, but made them the answer to the prayers of others.

Which is exactly what God does to us, every Sunday. Take God's 'plenty' with you, and let it anchor a prayer for the week: a prayer in which you ask God what seeds God has given you. A passion or hobby, something you love to do. Bring that gift to God in prayer, and as Christ did once so long ago, give thanks for it. Ask God to bless it. And then ask God to help you break it and share it. Perhaps God will call you to use that gift in a way that you and I can't even envision right now, a way which is only possible thanks to the power at work within us through the Holy Spirit.

There is only one thing that is certain: this is the God who created courgette. Anything could happen.