

# The Last Leaf

## Final Harvests

by Aurelia C. Scott

It is late October. In our garden, only the carrots remain earthbound — a solitary patch of green lace in the middle of brown soil. I plan to pull them after the first long hard frost and store the trimmed roots in damp peat moss for fresh eating during the coming months. Our garage, which stays cold and dry, makes a fine root cellar.

I turned the last of the vegetable beds this morning, tilling under tired lettuce and spinach leaves. Beds turned earlier in the season have a winter coat of annual ryegrass. For these later beds, a covering of leaves and manure will suffice. They can age together under the snow, producing beautiful brown stuff in the spring. I left the French marigolds, though, marching brightly through the beds. They look rather solitary now, with no vegetables to guard and the pests gone South, but they are cheerful and will last until the hard one. Then, turned deep underground, the seeds in the dead flower heads will sprout in the spring. Next year's vegetable garden will be full of them. Though they may differ from their hybrid parents, they'll be free.

The pepper plants are gone, pulled the other day with regret for the loss of those glossy green leaves. Their flowers were long vanished, and the remaining reddened fruits would grow no larger. I'm freezing the sweet ones, while my husband spends his World Series evenings patiently stringing the serranos. It's an autumn chore — threading the chilies one by one, as fall descends on the boys of summer. The finished strings hang in

corners, drying red against the white walls.

The ubiquitous zucchini plants met their end last week. Not that the weather forced their demise; they were still producing their usual overabundance. It was just that we were tired of — nay, exhausted by — zucchini. I was fed up with lying awake at night, devising new guises for it: sautéed with mushrooms and basil, baked with Parmesan, marinated and grilled, pureed with cumin for soup. And my husband was

tired of asking, "What's this? Ah, zucchini."

Tomatoes are the ultimate harvest, though. It is a bountiful yield. And an endless one. For weeks the kitchen has been filled with the sights and scents of tomato preservation — tomatoes drying in the oven, tomato sauce and tomato paste cooking down in the microwave, cooling jars of plum tomatoes lined up along the counter. The hum of processing is interrupted only by the sound of the jars cooling.

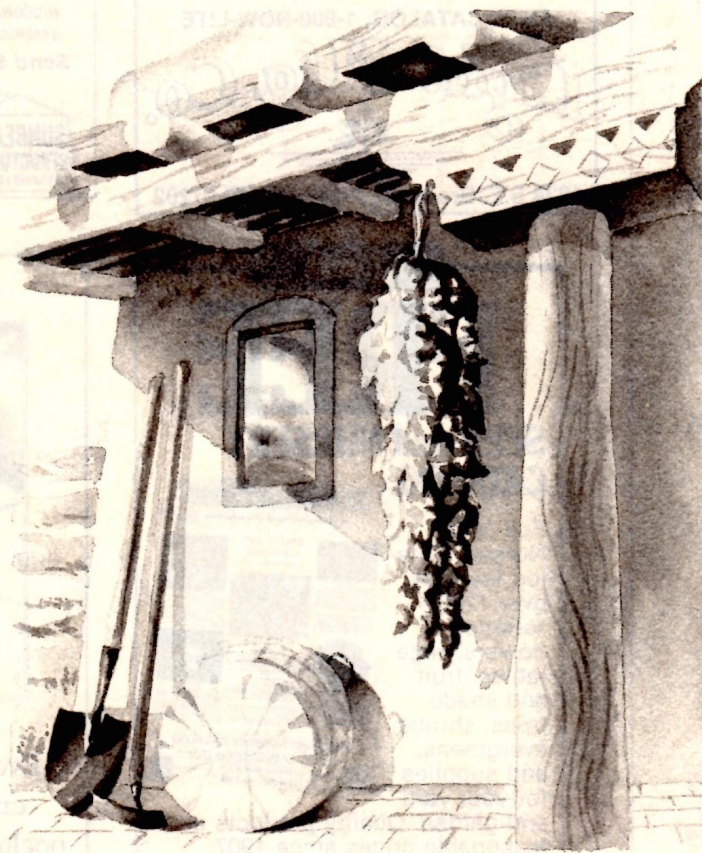
"Another one!" I call out. The metallic *thwack* of jars sealing must be the most reassuring sound of autumn.

Gone now until next year. We succumbed to the threatening skies yesterday and pulled the tomato plants

from their cages. Baskets of full-size green tomatoes were rolled onto a garage shelf to ripen under the *Taos News*. A bowl of little green ones was kept to sauté with garlic. And that was it.

The rest, as they say, is compost.

*Aurelia C. Scott gardens in Arroyo Seco, New Mexico.*



CYNTHIA AMRINE