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# Preface

It was the mid-1970s, and I was in the back seat of the family Volkswagen van as we traveled from Lafayette to Brentwood, California. It was early summer and already a hot day in the East Bay. All the windows were open, and thick, dry wind blew in our faces as we drove down Interstate 680. We were going to pick fruit in Brentwood. We all waited in anticipation of the fresh fruit to come. I was looking forward to the treats—sweet, juicy peaches that melt in your mouth. Harvesting the fruit of someone else’s labor—picking fresh fruit—was one of my favorite activities.

The town of Brentwood, affectionately known as the U-pick Capital, is home to scores of fruit and vegetable farms, many of which have operated for generations. The soil and ideal climate make for fruit and vegetable heaven. I don’t remember too much about the town of Brentwood in the 1970s. In fact, I am not sure if there was much of a downtown or city as we know it today. It seemed like a very long drive to the middle of nowhere, with a series of orchards and farms spread far apart. But, in reality it was only forty miles away. Even though there were a lot of different fruit farms, we timed our visit specifically for picking peaches. When we arrive, we jump out of the van to get our buckets. After a quick safety briefing (not much, believe me), we head off to find a private row and the very best peach tree. As we walk through the orchard with discarded peaches and peach pits, we finally reach a full tree and descend upon it with

vigor. Per protocol, we are discouraged from eating the product before paying for it. We feel guilty when we decide we must taste a little bit of the peaches. Those tastes grow larger as we proceed, eating one whole peach, then a few more, and even more after that. Soon we are stuffed with peaches. Suddenly, we get hot and are ready to head to the next farm to pick something else! We load the car and drive off with the aroma of peaches in the air.

I was raised in the small town of Lafayette, California. At the time, it was a commuter town known for its seclusion and suburban feel. My father commuted many years to San Francisco to work in a high-rise building. Lafayette is a part of the East Bay Area and the recipient of fresh fruits and vegetables grown in the Central Valley of California. California's Central Valley is a 450-mile-long region extending the majority of California's length and is bordered by the Pacific Coast Range and San Francisco Bay to the west and the Sierra Nevada Mountains to the east. The Central Valley is one of the most productive agricultural zones globally, leading the nation's production of many fruits and vegetables. Thus, fresh produce was the norm in the East Bay, just a short drive from the Central Valley. I moved in the 1990s and was adopted into the Central Valley breadbasket. Now, I have a backyard large enough to plant my own fruit trees and vegetables and produce my own food. Growing fruits and vegetables is challenging and rewarding, and my respect for farmers grows every day. It is the passion for growing one's own fruits and vegetables that inspired me to write this book.

I live in Lodi, in the Central Valley of California, and this book is aptly written based on the hot-summer Mediterranean climate of this region. The weather in the Central Valley of California is referenced by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) climate zone based on winter tem-

peratures. The Lodi USDA zone is 9a or 9b, depending on which side of town you reside. The tips and techniques I offer will work well for any hot-summer Mediterranean region; however, temporal adjustments may be needed depending on your climate type.

This book helps backyard growers plan and harvest their bounty every month of the year. I've included some introductory chapters on gardening basics before getting into specific plants. All pictures included are taken by yours truly unless otherwise stated. In the first chapter, I present what I hope is a compelling list of reasons to grow your own food. I hope that I will convince the reader (you) that vegetable and fruit growing is worthwhile and healthy. The second chapter addresses the basic requirements and considerations for growing your own food. These basics include climate, sun, water, and soil. In Chapter three, I address the significant and economical aspects of composting. Composting is not required for growing your own food; however, it offers many benefits for you and the environment. Chapter four addresses fruit trees from a broad perspective and covers items such as planting requirements, pruning, rootstock, and other fruit tree needs. Following the fruit tree chapter is the vegetable chapter. In this chapter, I review some pros and cons of vegetable gardening. I include suggestions on the location of your vegetable garden, raised bed considerations, and other aspects specific to vegetables.

Chapter six covers common fruit and vegetables and their care needs. I typically don't grow all these fruits and vegetables every year. There are some plants that I will always grow and some that I will grow if I have room and time. For example, I will likely always plant tomatoes, squash, potatoes, peppers, garlic, onions, and cucumbers. These vegetables produce a huge bounty, are readily eaten by my family, and grow well in my area. I am a giant pumpkin grower and will cultivate a huge squash every year

for entertainment. The other vegetables I plant, if I have room and time, include asparagus, carrots, beets, broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, lettuce, and kale. These do well in my area (just about everything does); however, they are not enjoyed as much by my family. They are also grown at slightly different times than summer vegetables, and sometimes, I am not as active in the yard when it is planting time.

In Chapter seven, I bring the calendar together so you can plan your backyard growing. Vegetable and fruit growing is about timing. It has to do with when you plant, when and how you care for those plants, and when you harvest. Growing takes long-term planning to figure out what you want and when to harvest it. In this chapter, I provide monthly vegetable and fruit growing tasks as well as a to-do list. You can spread out your labor, planting, and harvesting throughout the year to get food most frequently. I am trying to avoid the case where you have three months of food in one month during the summer, for example, when all your tomatoes ripen in the first week of July. I think it's wise to spread food production throughout the year.

Chapter eight finishes the book with two very important tables. The first table shows the proper monthly periods to sow seeds or transplant plants. The second table illustrates the approximate monthly periods of fruit and vegetable ripening times.

Some vegetables taste awful to me, and some take up a lot of room or are just obnoxious to grow and may not be suitable for your situation. The artichoke is one such example for me. These vegetables are healthy and delicious tasting, but the plants get enormous. I also don't think they produce enough artichokes on one plant to deserve the space they use. In my garden, they will take up an entire raised bed. Thus, I did not include

a description of artichokes. In addition, I omitted brussels sprouts. It's fun growing brussels sprouts because they look like miniature cabbages growing on a stock, and the history of this plant would be fun to write about; however, they seem prone to pests in my situation. They are not worth it to me. Celery, rhubarb, spinach, and corn also didn't make the cut in my book due to taste and space needs. In terms of vegetables, I will plant several of the same variety to maximize yield.

Fruit trees are very prolific in general, and I strive for variety. I like how fruits exhibit a wide variety of ripening times, so you can spread out your harvest much easier than vegetables. I try to grow most types of fruit trees, and I address many in this book. My big fruit producers include peaches, nectarines, apricots, cherries, apples, and hybrid types such as Pluots®. I included a summary of all these plus grapes, citrus, pears, and plums. I also summarized care for berries, although I don't grow them currently and have not figured out how to keep raccoons and birds from destroying them. There is no tropical fruit-growing information in this book for obvious reasons. I also didn't include nut trees. There are plenty of nut trees in my area. There is no need to grow more. I also included a bit of information about herbs. Herbs are not technically fruit or vegetables, but they are edible and a good addition to any garden.

The great thing about gardening fruits and vegetables is that you can plant what you want. The omission of certain types of fruits and vegetables in this book is by no means a statement that they are inferior. This is an equal-opportunity fruit and vegetable book!