



the reactor

by Paul Azevedo

There are quite a few plants that cannot be grown along our coast. There are the trees that require a frosty time in winter to do well producing fruit in the summer.

There are the fruits, like pomegranate, and the vegetables, like eggplant, which need a hot summer sun. There are enough of these kinds of plants to discourage a local gardener, if he or she is easily discouraged.

Well, let's look at the bright side. And there is a very bright side indeed. Rather than complain about the minuses, here are some pluses. There are some plants which grow along the California coast better than anywhere else in the nation, and sometimes in the world.

The artichoke is the most famous example. This educated thistle is a gourmet's treat. San Pedro Valley was one of the major producing spots in the nation 35 or 40 years ago.

If it can be grown commercially and successfully around here, you know that you can grow it as a vegetable in your garden. What's more, it's a vegetable that you can grow in your front yard. If you let the 'choke stay on the plant, you'll have a unique electric blue flower that outshines many that are more famous.

Everyone knows that artichokes go with the area, but did you know that 60 years ago they canned peas in

this area by the hundreds of thousands of cans?

One year production reached over 900,000 cans, for one canning company alone. Peas, and their flowering counterpart, sweet peas, are a natural cool weather crop, something to plant later in the summer in time to mature in the cool part of the year. The Sunset Western Garden Book says "Peas demand cool, humid weather: The fog belt is ideal."

This is also the ideal area for cabbage family vegetables. If I was an enthusiastic cabbage lover, or brussels sprout gourmet, I'd feel more enthused. I'm not, but if you are, set some out. They, and broccoli, are cool weather crops you can plant in late summer.

It's probably too late now to plant the flowers that you see growing so prolifically in the fields around Half Moon Bay. But those acres of daisies and other flowers being grown commercially between here and Pescadero are an example of what you, too, can grow.

It's not as easy as falling off a log. Those farmers earn their living. But they start with the same weather Pacifica gardeners have to work with, and if they can succeed, so can we.

Another crop that grows well when planted in the fall, the fava or broad bean, is an interesting plant with a long history. Favas, or horse beans, are the original European beans. Favas and peas were dietary mainstays before the discovery of America.

What corn, beans and squash were to the Indians of the southwest, wheat, favas, and peas were to the European peasantry. Since all of us are the descendants of peasants, we ought to be grateful for these important crops.

What most of the items I've mentioned have in common is: it's not too late to plant them for a crop you can eat before spring.

Pacifica gardening is a year round pleasure.