

Vegetable Prompt

Let a vegetable be central in your poem today.

Radishes

Smoke and ash of November.

A landscape of sediment and char,
lead and gold leaf, mutilated sod
racing on its planetary camber.
On a kitchen table's crude altar,
a bowl of radishes is offered

with a dish of salt for dipping whole.
That's how my father would eat them.
My mother sliced them thin.
Theirs was no house in a fairy tale.
Yet the knife that trimmed the stem
and scraped the blemished skin

would halt at her intrepid thumb.
Radishes of rosy cheeks, of snow,
peppery radishes of yesteryear,
which made my tongue go numb,
why are you so much milder now?
You don't set my mouth on fire.

Did something in your cultivation change,
or does sensation wane with age?
In a French film, I saw two friends
spread butter on radish halves: strange,
I thought, but now it's all the rage
to sauté them. Their trailing ends

clog my drain-stopper. Best is raw:

it's "war" backward, like a spell
grown in the cold ground, color
of rose and snow—good to gnaw
a vegetable so filial and feral
late in the year when the knife is duller.

Ange Mliko
in The New Yorker
5/20/2024

Carrot

The carrot says
don't be confused

by appearances.
My lacy green

friendship with air
gives me the confidence

to make demands
of dirt. Consider me

a prospector probing
with my own gold.

James Bertolino

The Traveling Onion

*It is believed that the onion originally came from
India. In Egypt it was an object of worship...From
Egypt the onion entered Greece and on to Italy,
thence into all of Europe.*

Better Living Cookbook

When I think how far the onion has traveled
just to enter my stew today, I could kneel and praise
all small forgotten miracles,
crackly paper peeling on the drainboard,
pearly layers in smooth agreement,
the way the knife enters onion
and onion falls apart on the chopping block,
a history revealed.

And I would never scold the onion
for causing tears.
It is right that tears fall
for something small and forgotten.
How at meal, we sit to eat,
commenting on herbal aroma,

but never on the translucence of onion,
now limp, now divided,
or its traditionally honorable career:
for the sake of others,
disappear.

Naomi Shihab Nye
in *Everything Comes Next:*
Collected and New Poems

Rutabaga

You darken my knife slices,
blushing at what you become.
I save your thick leaves,
your purple skin
to feed the cows.

A peasant guest at any meal,
you agree to hide in fragrant stew

or gleam nakedly
in butter and chives.

Though your seeds are tiny
you grow with fierce will,
grateful for poor soil and dry days,
heave up from the ground
under sheltering stalks
and wait to sweeten with the frost.

Tonight we take you into our bodies
as if we do you a favor,
letting your molecules,
become a higher being,
one that knows music and art.

But you share with us
what makes you a rutabaga.
Through you we eat sunlight,
the soils clamoring mysteries,
gain your seed's perfect might.

Laura Grace Weldon
in *Poetry of Presence: An Anthology
of Mindfulness Poems*
Editors: Phyllis Cole-Dais and Ruby R. Wilson

The man pulling radishes
pointed the way
with a radish

Issa

trans: Robert Hass
in *The Enlightened Heart*
edited by Stephen Mitchell