

Jack and the Beanstalk

by Lynne Belluscio

The first graders' marigolds were looking a little parched, so I dragged out the hose and bought a new sprinkler and gave them a good watering on Saturday. I thought I'd better water the beans and the herb garden, but didn't get the chance. No matter. The heavens opened up today, and everything got at least 3 inches of rain.

The beans that we planted this year are a very old variety known as Scarlet Runner beans. They are pole beans so we put up a "tee pee" for the beans to climb on and they are reaching for the top. We had some visitors ask about the red flowered vine and I explained that they were Scarlet Runner beans. They aren't a bush bean. Which prompted the question about what is a bush bean.

Not all beans are the same. I've shared the story about Calvin Keeney and his beans. He was the man from LeRoy who developed a "stringless" bean. In fact he developed several varieties of stringless - - or snap beans. His story and a description of his beans are included in a book "Beans of New York." His beans were bush beans - - they didn't need to climb on a trellis. Bush beans became popular because they could be harvested commercially. Scarlet Runner beans, on the other hand, need to climb. In fact some of the Scarlet Runner beans can climb 15 feet in the air. (They might be the beans pictured in Jack and the Beanstalk.)

For the Indians, beans were one of the "Three Sisters" of corn, squash and beans. The corn was planted, and beneath the corn the beans were planted, so they could climb up the corn stalks and the squash grew on the ground and protected the ground and held the moisture.

Beans were "discovered" in the Americas and taken to Europe. Today, Scarlet Runner beans are grown in the United States as an ornamental, although they are still a popular eating bean in Europe. The pods, when very young are very good. The beans can be eaten like Lima beans and can also be dried. The

beautiful flowers can be added to salads.

Scarlet Runner beans are actually a perennial and in certain climates can be grown as a perennial, but usually they are grown as an annual. They are also a type of bean, that when planted, the "seed" (cotyledons) stays in the ground. If you grow beans, you know that when they begin to sprout, some varieties push the cotyledons above the ground, while the root grows down into the earth.

Written mention of the Scarlet Runner can be traced into the 1700s. It is included in seed catalogues. Although considered an Heirloom vegetable, the seeds are readily available at garden stores. And because they are not hybrids, you can save the seed from this year to plant next year. There are some great recipes for both the young pods as well as the large black beans. They are great in soup and bean salads.

French Beans to Dress

Boil for more than two hours, in two quarts of water, a pound of the seed or beans of scarlet runners; fill a pint basin with onions peeled or sliced, brown them in a saucepan, with rather more than a quarter of a pound of fresh butter; stir them constantly; strain the water from the beans, and mix them with the onions; add a teaspoonful of pepper, some salt, and a little gravy. Let them stew for ten minutes, and stir in

the beaten yolks of two eggs, and a tablespoon of vinegar. Serve them hot. The Cook's Own Book 1833 p. 80

The story of Jack and the Beanstalk has early origins in English folklore and there are many different versions. One of the earliest printed versions of the story dates to 1807, but the story we are most acquainted with dates to the 1890s. In the 1920s the Jell-O Company commissioned a painting of Jack and the Beanstalk. The original painting is in the Woodward Memorial Library. It was said that the giant



Jack and the Beanstalk



Jack is stealing a box of Jello not the goose that laid the golden eggs.

in the painting is so scary, it frightens the kids.



Bean Tee Pee



Scarlet Runner Beans