

Talk about Fresh

Local restaurateurs cook some of what they grow

By Sally Miller Wyatt
Special to the Reporter

If the menu at Pietro's No. 2 in Vacaville says "garden fresh" you better believe it.

Some of the zucchini in the minestrone, the peppers in the pasta sauce, the oregano and basil seasonings we all grown in the home garden tended by Theresa and Gino Monteleone.

The Monteleones, owners of Pietro's No. 2 for more than 30 years, have been avid gardeners for nearly as long. Their home garden plot is large and full of a variety of vegetables and herbs.

"We have green beans—three kinds—a big old patch of onions, beautiful, beautiful basil," says Theresa Monteleone. "We get the green beans from Italy; they're the kind that won't make that string you can get on some. We brought the seeds home when we visited the last time, or family will bring us some when they come."

The Monteleones also grow oregano, and this year their garden produced a bumper crop that they recently cut and then dried.

"You should have seen it, we had a tarp full of it out on the deck," Theresa says. "If you cut

it right, it will come up again, and you can get two crops."

Home-grown and dried oregano is much better. Theresa says, because "you can just pick off the best part. When you buy it, they grind up everything, including the stems."

The Monteleones never order seeds to plant in their garden, but rather will rely on relatives to send seeds or they will save seeds from last year's best crop.

As with many gardens, tomatoes take center stage here, but like gardens all over Solano County, the fruit has yet to ripen. "My tomatoes are beautiful, beautiful, but are still green," Theresa says. "Everything is so late."

The Monteleones grow three big batches of tomatoes, some of which are Big Aces, and others are Beefsteaks. What's Gino tip for success with the Beefsteaks? "When they are still green, he takes the leaves off the tomatoes so the sun can bit them – just the leaves without the flowers. It really pushes them to produce when he does that."

Another secret getting so much out of this soil is a yearly load



of cow manure, which is brought in from a dairy farm in Dixon. "It's getting hard to find because there aren't so many dairy farms anymore," she adds.

They Monteleones also have a number of fruit trees, including an Italian pear, and several kinds of table grapes. They don't grow grapes for wine. Theresa says, nor will they grow corn. : No, corn takes too much out of the dirt for what you get. Besides, you can buy it for so cheap, anyway."

A garden this large does require a fair amount of tending, but it is something the Monteleones manage to fit in between working at the restaurant, either early in the morning or in the evening after the heat of the day has passed. "There's always something to be done when you have a yard," she says.