

THE UGLY VEGETABLES
an adaptation of Grace Lin's book
by Kelli Pryor

SCENE: A PLEASANT NEIGHBORHOOD

Three GARDENERS are ringed around the back of the STAGE.

MRS. CRUMERINE works with a delicate TROWEL.

MRS. FITZGERALD and her son MICKEY have nice little WATERING CANS.

And MRS. ANGELHOWE has BRIGHT seed packets on popsicle stakes.

STAGEFRONT are MAMA and MEIMEI who dig with TWO comically HUGE SHOVELS. They are working hard.

Mama digs up a WORM. Holds it out on her shovel.

MeiMei picks it up and walks it to the side. Drops it.

MeiMei stops and talks to the audience.

MEIMEI

In the spring, I help Mama with our garden. I am in charge of the worms!

MRS. CRUMERINE

Good afternoon, Mrs. Lin. Good afternoon, MeiMei. It's a beautiful day for gardening.

Mrs. Crumerine waves her tiny trowel.

MEIMEI

(to Mama)

Why do we have to use da shovels? Mrs. Crumerine only has a xiao shovel.

MAMA

(enthusiastically)

Our garden is da! It needs more digging!

Mama and MeiMei get down on their knees and start poking SEEDS into the soil.

MRS. FITZGERALD

Hello, over there! Beautiful day for planting!

MAMA

Sure is!

MICKEY

Hey, MeiMei, I found a lady bug!

A LADY BUG (child in costume) follows him around the stage (and does for the rest of the play).

MEIMEI
Wow!

Mama and MeiMei start DRAGGING a HUGE GARDEN HOSE over to their garden.

MeiMei notices the Fitzgeralds' watering cans.

MEIMEI
Why are we using a hose, Mama? I like Mrs. Fitzgerald's watering can. It's cute. Even Mickey gets one.

MAMA
Our garden is very thirsty. It needs a lot of water.

MEIMEI
Me too.

*She tips back her head and drinks and drinks and drinks from her CANTEEN.
Mama gets down on her hands and knees and starts painting big signs for the garden... with Chinese characters.*

Meanwhile, MRS. ANGELHOWE is putting pretty little seed packets in her garden.

MRS. ANGELHOWE
Good morning, neighbors!

Mama and MeiMei wave.

Mama starts sticking her signs in the garden.

MEIMEI
Why do we have all these pictures in our garden and Mrs. Angelhowe has pretty pictures?

MAMA
(proudly)
Our vegetables are Chinese.

CURTAIN CLOSES

*Ribbon dancers with silver ribbons dance out to symbolize rain.
Next a big SUN shines her way across the stage.
[OR a younger class could file in and sing a spring song in Mandarin here.]*

CURTAIN OPENS.

MeiMei runs from one neighbor's garden to the next, inspecting how everything grows: LUSH GREEN LEAVES sprout everywhere.

She is disappointed when she gets to her own garden, where her mother stands proudly looking at sprigs of GRASS.

MEIMEI

Mama, why do our plants look like grass? And the neighbors' plants look different.

MAMA

The neighbors are just growing flowers.

MEIMEI

Why can't we grow flowers too?

MAMA

(proudly)

These are better than flowers. You'll see. [In Mandarin: You can't eat hua. Ni bu chi hua.]

MeiMei looks skeptical.

CURTAIN CLOSES.

Butterflies flutter by either as a DANCE. Or there could be a chorus singing while they dance

MeiMei steps in front of the curtain and speaks to the audience...

MEIMEI

Soon all the neighbors' gardens were blooming. Up and down the street grew rainbows of flowers.

HERE LITTLE KIDS dressed like FLOWERS should line up in front of the stage.

MEIMEI

The wind always smelled sweet, and butterflies and bees flew everywhere. Everyone's garden was beautiful.

CURTAIN OPENS.

MEIMEI

Except for ours.

The STAGE is filled with actors in UGLY VEGETABLE costumes and also PAPIER MACHE VEGETABLES.

Mama HUMS while she works among them but we can hardly see her for all the BIG BOLD FOLIAGE.

MEIMEI

Ours was all dark green and ugly. Some were big and lumpy. Some were thin and green and covered with bumps. Some were just plain icky yellow. They were UGLY VEGETABLES.

Mama hums louder.

MEIMEI

(whining)

Why didn't we grow flowers?

MAMA
Vegetables are better than flowers.

MEIMEI
I don't think so.

MAMA
You wait and see.

Mama starts PICKING the vegetables. She loads them into a WHEELBARROW and hauls them away.

CURTAIN CLOSES

CURTAIN OPENS.

SCENE: MAMA'S KITCHEN

Mama stands over a very very ugly vegetable. She lifts her big KNIFE and uses all her muscle to chop down on it.

MAMA
Aie-yow!

Mama starts handing vegetables to Mei Mei.

MAMA
This is hwang gua.

MEIMEI
Hwang gua!

MAMA
This is shiann tsay.

MEIMEI
Shiann tsay.

MAMA
This is torng hau.

MEIMEI
Torng hau.

Mama starts throwing them all into a HUGE COOKING POT.

MAMA
You go play now!

MeiMei runs off to play CATCH with MICKEY.

come out and stand on their porches. They take deep breaths of air, as though they are trying to eat the good smell.

MRS. CRUMERINE

What a delicious aroma! Do you smell that Mrs. Angelhowe?

MRS. ANGELHOWE

I've never smelled anything so lovely. Not even my roses!

MRS. FITZGERALD

If you ask me that smells good enough to eat!

MICKEY

That smell makes me hungry. What is that great smell, MeiMei?

MeiMei takes a big sniff.

MEIMEI

I don't know. But it's coming from my house!

MeiMei runs home.

Mama hands her a bowl of SOUP.

MeiMei tastes it. She swoons with happiness. It is DELICIOUS.

She holds her bowl out to her mother.

MEIMEI

More! Please!

MAMA

Now the vegetables aren't so ugly, are they?!

MEIMEI

Mama, our ugly vegetables are DELICIOUS!

The NEIGHBORS approach with HUGE BOUQUETS of flowers from their gardens.

MRS. FITZGERALD

We noticed you were cooking.

MRS. CRUMERINE

Can we trade some flowers for some of that soup?

Mama laughs. She is delighted! She hands out bowls of soup to everyone.

MRS. ANGELHOWE

HOW did you grow these amazing vegetables?

MAMA

I'll tell you all about it!

MRS. FITZGERALD

And will you share the recipe for this yummy soup?

Mama smiles. Of course she will!

MEIMEI

This is the best dinner ever!

CURTAIN CLOSES.

MeiMei steps in front of the curtain.

MEIMEI

I ate five bowls of soup! And all the neighbors took home the recipe!

FLOWERS and UGLY VEGETABLES now begin joining MeiMei.

MEIMEI

The next spring, we planted some flowers next to our ugly vegetables. And our neighbors planted ugly vegetables next to their flowers. Up and down the street, little green plants poked out of the ground. And when the flowers started blooming, you could smell soup in the air.

All the vegetables and flowers hum. MeiMei smiles. They all BOW together.

THE END.