

THE EDIBLE GARDEN



April 2014

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GARDEN ACTIVITIES

- To prevent compaction of garden soils avoid walking on the garden and lawn until the ground has dried out after the thaw. If the soil sticks to your shoes it's too wet.
- Clean up fallen leaves, and remove winter protection from plants to allow the soil to warm up. Leaves can be composted.
- Prepare the vegetable garden for spring planting of cool season crops. Sowing can begin when the soil has warmed up. Most seeds germinate when daytime temperatures are above 7°C.
- When the day time temperature rises above 10°C start hardening off plants started indoors by placing outside in a sheltered location, at first for a couple of hours each day; then slowly increasing the length of time out by an hour every 3 or 4 days to all day.
- Turn the compost heap when it has thawed, to aerate and give microbial activity a boost.
- The Master Gardeners of Ottawa Carleton present an one-Day Garden Design Workshop

Saturday, April 26th, 2014

http://mgottawa.mgoi.ca/Garden_Desgn_Workshop.php

DID YOU KNOW?

- Potatoes prefer a slightly acidic loamy soil at pH 5.5 to 6. Adding pine needles is one way of promoting acidity in soil.
- Colorado potato beetles overwinter in the soil. Moving the potato crop to a new location and using floating row covers will help to prevent infestations.
- It is believed that the potato was first domesticated in the South American Andes. Many of the 4,000+ varieties of potato grown world wide are still cultivated in Peru, although only a few are available in North America. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency has a list of potatoes registered for cultivation in Canada.
- Potatoes come in many shapes, sizes and colours including blue or purple.
- In Zones 4–8 the correct time to plant beets, carrots, lettuce, spinach, cole crops of the Cruciferae or mustard family is when leaves first appear on *Syringa vulgaris*, the common lilacs

POTATOES IN A POT: WHY NOT?

GROWING POTATOES IN CONTAINERS

Josie Pazdzior

Master Gardener of Ottawa Carleton



Spuds have always been a staple in my household, especially with my dad; like many men a meat and potatoes guy! I haven't grown them for some time now. I lacked suitable space - or so I thought until last summer when I started growing a few in a container, just for fun. Now I plan to grow more in the future.

There are many different ways of growing vegetables and you can find endless information on the internet about using all sorts of containers, from built wooden boxes (100 lbs (45kg) in only 4 square feet, 0.4m²!) to cloth bags, plastic garbage bags, and other devices. There are also over

1,000 different varieties of potato available, though we see only a few in the supermarket. Be sure to use certified seed potatoes rather than old sprouting potatoes from the pantry for more certain results.

The strange container I used was found on the property, it is made of black plastic with a grid of rectangular holes forming

the lower section: round, 15.5 in (40 cm) across at the bottom widening to 22 in. (56cm) at the top, 17 in (43 cm) deep. I made drainage holes in the bottom, and lined it with heavy green landscape fabric to hold the soil in. Once planted up, this sat in the back of the yard, in almost full sun, from June until harvest at the end of August. It got regular watering, to maintain a constant moisture level, as with tomatoes; good drainage is also important to prevent rotting tubers.

The planting medium was a mix of garden soil, old container soil, some compost and sheep manure, not measured out. I didn't check the acidity level, which may have been a bit low. For best results a pH of 5-6, slightly acidic, is recommended. Too much alkalinity can encourage scab disease. After allowing the cut seed potatoes, each with two "eyes", to callous over, I put a few inches of soil in the bottom, and planted about six, covering them with a few more inches of soil. One website (www.smartpots.com) says to plant one seed potato or piece per 3 gallons (4 litres) of soil in their fabric pots. The usual planting distance on the ground is a foot between plants, but they can be placed closer in containers. I watched the sprouts come up a few days later, and as they grew, kept adding soil and some straw on top. The pretty purple flowers bloomed about late July, and the foliage started to die back a couple of weeks later.



I could have waited longer, but decided to harvest them when the grandchildren were visiting. That's another advantage of growing in pots; it's fun to just tip them out and find the potatoes without digging into them. The haul was not impressive - 44 spuds ranging from tiny to decent sized ones, maybe 4-5 lbs (2 to 2.5 kg) in total. Some were scabbed quite badly, but others were perfect and very tasty!

Home-grown potatoes must surely be healthier, too, than most commercially-grown crops which may suffer several applications of fumigants, herbicides, insecticides, pesticides, and chemical fertilizers, as described by Michael Pollan in *The Botany of Desire*.

Notice that I didn't mention dealing with any of the pests and diseases that can afflict potato crops. That's because I didn't have obvious problems besides scab. I suspect the elevation off the ground helped to keep the plants free of plagues, another possible benefit of growing in containers. Moreover, growing food in the back yard can be magic for kids and potatoes in pots are a good crop choice for-involving young children, as well as producing some tasty meals. I do wonder, though, if I'd left them another couple of weeks, would the baby ones have grown bigger and how much? All in all, a project to repeat on a larger scale next season!

BOOK REVIEW

*Edythe Falconer,
Master Gardener of Ottawa Carleton*

CROPS IN POTS

Bob Purnell - Readers' Digest 2007
ISBN-13978-0-7621-0842-8

Purnell's Table of Contents is set up like a restaurant menu – each arrangement of plants is another entrée in the never ending “pottibilities” he presents. It's enough to make a person start nibbling on some of the tastier looking pages! This book is fun to use and fun to have as an ongoing reference.

This spring I again embark upon my annual journey of experimentation. A lot of my puttering will concentrate on finding out just how many different edibles I can successfully and attractively grow in containers. 'Crops in Pots' takes container gardening to new heights and right into the world of creative art. I won't lack for inspiration.

The gardener who works in small spaces will find there's

Recipe

*Dale Odorizzi,
Master Garden of Lanark*

Company Potatoes

For over 50 years my Mom has made this recipe (not sure where it came from). Anytime meat was cooked in the oven, except for a roast from which she made gravy, Company Potatoes was on the menu. She usually puts the cheese on top, I rarely do.

1 onion (thinly sliced)
2 tbsp butter
Potatoes, enough for everyone
Salt
Paprika
Grated Cheese (optional)

almost no limitation to what can be grown in a pot – even just a single pot! The homeowner with abundant space will have the luxury of arranging tasty creations all over a much larger palette.

Purnell also provides a wealth of basic garden advice that is especially helpful to new gardeners. Best of all, though, there are those entrees that come with full-page colour photographs and comprehensive lists of “ingredients”. Finally, as if he hasn’t already done enough, there are recipes for turning the “edible” into the “delectable”. I highly recommend this delightful excursion into the art and science of growing edibles in containers.

1. Scrub or peel potatoes. Slice thinly.
2. Rub butter around the casserole dish.
3. Layer Potatoes and Onions, sprinkling with salt as desired. Dot the top of the potatoes with butter. Sprinkle with Paprika.
4. Bake covered in Oven Preheated to 375°F, 190°C for 45 minutes. If its partner in the oven calls for 400 °F (205 °C), that’s OK. If it calls for 350 °F (180 °C), bake potatoes longer.
5. Remove cover from Potatoes and return to the oven and bake 15 minutes more so the top is crispy. If desired top the Potatoes with grated cheese prior to returning to the oven.
6. Enjoy!

Watch for **Trowel Talk** the Master Gardeners of Ottawa Carleton electronic monthly gardening newsletter available on the 15th at <http://mgottawa.mgoi.ca/>

Visit the Almonte online community newspaper ‘**The Millstone**’ - <http://millstonenews.com/> -for a column by David Hinks of the Ottawa Carleton Master Gardeners; under the Gardening tab

The Edible Garden logo was created by Jon Last (jonlast13@rogers.com)

Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton is a member group of Master Gardeners of Ontario Inc., a registered charity with the mission of providing gardening advice to homeowners