

THE EDIBLE GARDEN

JUNE 2019

Harvesting and Storing Potatoes

*Dale Odorizzi
Master Gardener of Lanark County*

Many people grow potatoes for the ultimate prize: new potatoes. Like a freshly picked tomato, there is no potato more delicious than a new potato. You can harvest your new potatoes about 3 weeks after the flowers on your plant fade. If your soil is light, try digging with your hand and feel around under your plant and remove a couple of the larger tubers. Go to each hill and repeat the process until you have enough for your meal. Do this close to meal time so that you can cook and eat almost as soon as they come out of the ground for ultimate taste. Eat them on the same day. Do not put them in the fridge. Just wash and cook. Try to get tubers that are close to the same size and cook with their skins on. They will not mash well but are delicious boiled and served with butter. The tubers left behind will continue to grow and will not be overcrowded. If your soil is heavier, you can dig back from the plant taking care not to dislodge the potatoes left behind.

You can tell it is time to harvest your potatoes when you see the plant wither and die off. The potatoes can be kept in the ground for up to 7 weeks. This time in the ground helps to cure the potato skin which is a good thing for longer term storage.

Harvesting potatoes is akin to going on a treasure hunt. You approach the plant gently, a little distance from the stem and gently insert the fork or spade about 20 cm from the base and loosen the soil. There's one! Move around a little and carefully insert the fork—there's two more -- and on it goes. Once you have lifted the plant, it is time to feel around to see if there are any more.

Check the skin on the potato. If the skin rubs off easily, they are still considered new potatoes. You can put them back in the soil to toughen them up or use them more quickly, as they will not store as well. If the skin is green, throw the potato out; it can indicate the presence of a toxin created when potatoes are exposed to light. If you have dug too close to the plant and "forked" a potato, keep it for more immediate eating. It will not keep as well.

If you have grown too many potatoes to eat soon, you can store them. Place your potatoes on a newspaper in a dark room. This gets rid of the dirt and hardens up the potatoes. Keep them like this for about a week out of rain or sunshine. Next, put your potatoes in a suitable container such as a cardboard box, a burlap sack or a bushel basket for storage. Keep the stabbed potatoes separate and use them first. Store the potatoes in a cool, dry and dark area where it is not too humid. Do not store them in a refrigerator. When they turn intensely cold, they get an unpleasant sweet taste.

Check your stored potatoes from time to time to ensure they are not rotting or turning green. If you find any rotting potatoes, remove them immediately before they rot the complete container.

It is best to not use your leftover potatoes the following year as seed potatoes. If there were any disease spores on the potatoes, you may be transferring them to a new section of your garden. However, admittedly this is a case of "Do as I say and not as I do" as I have often used my potatoes grown the previous year as seed potatoes.



©Jon Last

Need help? Contact us at:

Telephone help Line: Wednesday and Thursday 1–3 pm (all year) :

613-236-0034 -

Ottawa E-mail help Line, monitored daily :

[mgoc_helpline@yahoo.ca](mailto:m goc_helpline@yahoo.ca)

Lanark E-mail help Line:

lanarkmg@gmail.com

Recipe: Chive Vinegar

*Rebecca Last
Master Gardener of Ottawa Carleton*

If you are lucky enough to have a mature stand of chives, they should start flowering for you about the middle of May. Most experts advise us to remove herb flowers because they coarsen the flavour of the leaves, but chive flowers are so pretty and they can also be used in the kitchen, so why waste them? For the past few years, I've harvested my chive flowers to make a lovely, pink-coloured onion-flavoured vinegar. Here's how I do it. You will need:

For step 1:

- Chive flowers
- White vinegar
- 1 big glass jar with lid
- A pot for warming the white vinegar

For step 2:

- A sieve to remove the chive flowers
- A bowl to pour the chive vinegar into
- A funnel to pour the vinegar from the bowl into the jars
- Smaller mason jars or recycled bottles with lids
- White wine vinegar (optional)
- Labels

Step 1

As with all herbs, I harvest the flowers in mid-morning – late enough to allow the dew to dry, but before the full heat of the day. Judge for yourself if they need to be washed. I have cats, and visiting cats, so I gently rinse the flowers, then I spin them

Bee Line: Honeybees, Native Bees and Butterflies

Julianne Labreche
Master Gardener of Ottawa Carleton

This spring, I decided to purchase a single share in a beehive from a reputable Ottawa beekeeper. For my investment, I'll be able to reap the benefits at harvest time including a drive out to the honey farm in September to collect twelve jars of honey. I'll also have a chance to meet my bees and learn more about beekeeping.

Like most people, I love honey and so do my friends and family who will be receiving jars of honey as gifts this winter. I want to support local beekeepers that have honed skills needed to raise non-native, commercial and healthy honeybees.

However as an urban gardener interested in pollinators, endangered species and biodiversity, I will not keep beehives myself.

Not only is it illegal, given the current laws on where we can keep hives; they also won't help endangered bees. Even though we've read a lot in the news about Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD), honeybees currently are not threatened with extinction. If honeybees die, beekeepers just buy another queen and start again. Native bees, however, are seriously threatened. Some species face extinction.

It is difficult to conduct native bee counts because there are so many different kinds of bees that live in so many different habitats and depend on so many different plants for their survival. Nevertheless, evidence continues to grow that their numbers are diminishing worldwide. A report called **Wild Species: The General Status of Species in Canada in 2010**, includes rankings for 26 Ontario bumblebee species: two may be at risk, five are sensitive, nine are secure and 10 are undetermined. The rusty-patched bumble bee, once common, now is rare in Ontario. There hasn't been a sighting in many years.

Land use change, pesticides, the spread of pathogens and fragmentation of habitat all pose formidable threats to these pollinators. Indeed, there is mounting evidence that honeybees may be part of the reason for native bee declines. Native and non-native bees often compete for pollen and nectar. Honeybees can transmit diseases to native bees.

Cities can be safe places for native bees, especially with Ontario's ban on pesticides in urban spaces. Pollinators need our protection, including native bees. Honeybees, meanwhile, are doing just fine.



Monarch on joe-pye weed
Anna Sipos

So, in my garden this year I'll focus on trying more native plants, including germinating some natives from seed. Based on the advice of one native plant grower for our region, I bought some Wild Senna (*Cassia hebecarpa*), Prairie Blazing Star (*Liatris pycnostachya*) and Ohio Goldenrod (*Solidago ohioensis*). All are non-invasive, well suited to our zone. I'll also purchase more native plants at local plant sales and reputable garden centres.

Of course, it's not just about the bees, but also their pollinator friends that visit the my garden. I'll continue to plant joe-pye weed (*Eutrochium purpureum*) for Painted Lady butterflies, viburnum for White Admirals, sunflowers (*Helianthus spp.*) and bee balm (*Monarda spp.*) for the Eastern Tiger Swallowtail and zinnias, cosmos, blazing star (*Liatris*

dry in a lettuce spinner and put them into a big glass jar. Then I heat white vinegar until it is quite warm but not boiling. Pour the vinegar over the chives, seal the jar and place it in a cool, dark spot for the next 6-8 weeks.



Chive vinegar at the end of step 1
Rebecca Last

Step 2:

By late August, your vinegar should be ready to decant. First, taste test to see if you like the flavour or find it too strong. If it's not oniony enough, put the jar back in storage for another few weeks. If the flavour is good, have some mason jars or recycled glass bottles on hand. Wash your jars or bottles thoroughly in hot water. Sieve the vinegar to remove the blossoms. I prefer a more subtle flavour, so I fill each mason jar or bottle to only about two-thirds full with the decanted chive vinegar. Then I top up the rest of the bottle with white wine vinegar to dilute the oniony flavour. Now label your jars, and consider giving some as gifts to friends and neighbours!

Potato Towers

Dale Odorizzi
Master Gardener of Lanark county

Over the past few years, many Gardening Product companies are touting Potato Towers. These towers allow you to grow all the potatoes you need by planting only one plant. You simply plant your seed potato in the bottom of the container and continue to add soil in layers as your potato grows. It is essentially extreme hilling—you add 60-75 cm of soil instead of the typical 10-15 cm. In theory each additional layer doubles the yield. At the end of the season, you take the tower apart and hundreds of pounds of perfect potatoes tumble out at your feet. The only problem is

spp.) and milkweed (*Asclepias spp.*) for the Monarchs.

If caterpillars come crawling, I'll also be careful not to pick them off the plants because, who knows? Those same caterpillars might someday become butterflies themselves. Let nature take its course. My garden belongs to pollinators too.

Meanwhile, those jars of honey will be waiting at harvest time. The same beekeeper, turns out, also is a big fan of native bees – even though honeybees are not native bees' best friends.

Anise Hyssop

*Faith Schmidt
Master Gardener of Ottawa Carleton*

Anise Hyssop (*Agastache foeniculum*) is a beautiful and fragrant herb that is a wonderful addition to any garden or landscape. This plant is a member of the mint (Lamiaceae) family with square stems, lanceolate leaves and striking purple flower spikes. So far, it has not shown itself to be as invasive as some members of the mint family.

About three years ago, while perusing seed catalogues on-line, I came across a photo of this herb and decided to give it a try. The seeds germinated easily in our small greenhouse and transplanted with no problems to outside. It is an easy plant to grow, enjoys the sunshine and requires little care once established as it and reseeds itself each year. Anise Hyssop grows up to about 1 1/4 metres tall and forms a clump. It is an attractive border plant next to our pond.

I love this herb as it is not only beautiful, but an incredible pollinator magnet (bees love it). It is quite drought resistant and does not appeal to the deer population. Since we do not do our garden clean-up until spring, the seeds provide the juncos and other small birds with food over the winter.

Apparently, the flowers of Anise Hyssop can be used in salads and the leaves to make a tea. The flowers can also be dried and used in a pot-pourri. I have not used this herb in the kitchen as I personally find the licorice smell unappealing! However, there are many recipes on-line for those who are interested.

Anise Hyssop is worth including in a garden, not only for its beauty, but also for its appeal to pollinators. In one of these photos, bees are clearly visible on the flower stalks.



Bee visiting the flowers of as anise hyssop
Faith Schmidt

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

Visit the Almonte online community newspaper 'The Millstone' - <http://millstonenews.com/> - for a column by David Hinks of the Lanark County Master Gardeners; under the Gardening tab.

Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton and Master Gardeners of Lanark County are member groups of Master Gardeners of Ontario Inc., a registered charity with the mission of providing gardening advice to homeowners. The Edible Garden logo was created by Jon Last (jonlast13@rogers.com).

IT IS NOT TRUE!

There is no research, scientific or otherwise to support this idea.

Now, you can grow potatoes in a tower. You will get a good yield in a tower. You just won't get better results than growing them in the more conventional way. Hilling your potatoes beyond 15 cm brings no benefits and may reduce yield. Potato yield is limited by foliage area, not the amount of soil above the tuber. Conventional container growing works fine but potato towers **do not work** as claimed.

Introducing soil part 2

What does soil consist of?

*Susan Bicket
Master Gardener of Ottawa Carleton*

Soil is composed of the following components:

- **Mineral particles**, - the results of physical, chemical or biological forces on rocks known as weathering. These particles can be, from largest to smallest: - boulders, stones, gravels, sand, silt, or clay or mixture of all these. Usually when talking about soils we consider only the last three. The size of the particles dictates the main physical characteristics of the soil and texture. Plant nutrients such as potassium, phosphorus, calcium, magnesium, sulphur, iron and so on are primarily derived from these particles.

- **Organic material**—Plant and animal remains (leaves, stalks, branches, fruits..., dung and corpses) either in the process of decay or fully decayed, called humus. These materials are found in the highest concentrations near the surface of the soil and have a huge effect on soil structure and overall soil health.

- **Spaces between the soil particles**. - This is where all the action takes place. Water and gases (oxygen, carbon dioxide, nitrogen, methane...) move, chemical reactions happen, or not, allowing nutrient uptake, (plants take in nutrients dissolved in water – mineral soup), and organisms from micro to macro, including plant roots, live and die. The size of the spaces is primarily governed by the size of the mineral particles, but organic material can modify soil structure and hence the size of the spaces.