



BETWEEN THE ROWS
WENDY SCHMIDT

Plants that can make soil better

“Dynamic accumulators” is one of those complex terms. It simply means that a particular plant is like a factory. It takes chemicals that neither plants nor animals can use, breaks them down into useable active compounds and elements that can be readily used as is, or absorbed and recombined into other compounds or in some cases deposited in the soil.

An example of what a dynamic accumulator does, is the way legumes absorb nitrogen from the air and soil. The plants accumulate nitrogen and form it into nitrogen-rich compounds, and store it in nodules on their roots for their future use. When the plant dies or is composed into the soil, the nitrogen is available readily to other plants because it has enriched the soil. Another name for this process is nitrogen fixation.

Other plants break down or add other enriching chemicals to the soil. In some cases their roots reach down where the chemical supply is richer and access the chemicals for their own use and ultimately enrich the soil by breaking down the compounds to simplify them so other plants can make use of them.

As legumes accumulate nitrogen, other plants accumulate other essential chemicals to use and eventually improve your soil. Besides, the decomposing plants increase soil fertility and organic matter making the soil looser and aerated and turning it into humus.

Plants that accumulate very high concentrations of chemicals are called hyperaccumulators.

Plants have been used to prospect for certain kinds of ore, since the plants so closely match the content of the soil. If you find a hyperaccumulator of nickel, you likely find that plant growing in soil rich in nickel ore.

Phosphate accumulators include legumes such as alfalfa. When it is left in the field there is a slow improvement in the soil’s phosphorus content. Buckwheat and mustard improve phosphorus levels as well as improving soil tilth and drainage by adding fiber and improving moisture and nutrient content of clay and sandy soil.

Bracken fern frees potassium for use by other plants. Bracken ferns average 25% potassium and can contain as much as 55%. Composted bracken is an excellent addition to mulch or use as a green manure.

Oak leaves are dynamic accumulators of calcium. There are high levels of calcium in oak leaves even when the soil levels of calcium are barely detectable. Lining seed flats with oak leaves and egg shells gives plants a head start. Even better is composting oak leaves with some nitrogen fertilizer and mixing the compost with soil in the seed flats or in your landscape.

- Other accumulators:
- Dandelion: sodium, silica, magnesium, calcium, potassium, phosphorus, iron, and copper.
 - Eastern bracken: potassium, phosphorus, manganese, iron, copper, and cobalt.
 - Flax: calcium.
 - Marigolds add phosphorus.
 - Chicory adds calcium and potassium.
 - Comfrey adds six compounds.
 - The weed spurge adds boron.
 - Sarsaparilla adds iodine.
 - Vetches add cobalt and copper.
 - Mustard can add sulfur, while mullein accumulates sulfur, iron, magnesium and potassium.
 - Watercress fixes sodium, fluorine, sulphur and five others.

There is a huge chart of these accumulators, all of which improve the soil.

If you have garden questions or comments, please write to greengardencolumn@yahoo.com. Thanks for reading!

Sri Lankan Cuisine An Intriguing Cross Between Indian, Thai Food



Gretchen McKay/Pittsburgh Post-Gazette-TNS

A cross between Thai and Indian food, Sri Lankan beef and potato curry is flavored with fresh curry leaves, ginger, cardamom and a spicy Sri Lankan curry powder.

TROPICAL TASTES

By Gretchen McKay
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Mary Anne Mohanraj missed a lot of things when she went off to college, but the thing she was most homesick for was her mother’s cooking.

When her parents immigrated to Connecticut from Colombo, Sri Lanka, in 1973, they brought with them their fiery curries, coconut sambols and countless rice dishes.

Many of the recipes were adapted to accommodate American ingredients. Her

mother, Jacintha, for instance, used ketchup instead of tomatoes because coconut milk was hard to find. But even adulterated, the foods offered a comforting and familiar taste of their Tamil culture.

Mohanraj remembers sitting in her dorm room at the University of Chicago, so desperately hungry for her mother’s beef and potato curry, that she begged for the recipe over the phone. Once in hand, “I made it over and over again,” she recalls, because that was the only way she could get to eat one.

Back in the 1990s, Sri Lankan restaurants were nonexistent even in ethnically diverse cities like Chicago because the small number of Sri Lankans who started arriving in the United States in the mid-1950s tended to be professionals. “There weren’t a lot of cooks coming in to set up restaurants,” Mohanraj notes. Also, the doctors and lawyers who made a new home here usually pushed their kids to go to college.

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La Grande’s ghost signs — a scavenger hunt

By Ginny Mammen

Over the past few months I have shared with you some of the history of early La Grande and its people as it was revealed to me by the ghost signs appearing throughout town. It has been a fun meaningful journey for me and I plan to continue even though I won’t have any friendly ghosts to guide me.

While sharing this information I have provided you a map of sorts for a scavenger hunt. During one

of these summer evenings I invite you to take a walk or a drive to look at the ghost signs up close and personal. It would be exciting if one that had eluded me would choose to reveal itself to you.

So you won’t have to scramble through a stack of old newspapers or put you memory to a test I will give you a guide to follow. For about half of this hunt I would suggest a nice walk around historic downtown. Then for the other half perhaps a drive would be better.

Walking directions

Start at the corner of Washington and Fourth with the Mary Foley Building (1101-03 Washington). Walk along Fourth to the alley and turn right where you will see on the back wall of that building a portion of the old Montgomery Ward sign.

From the alley go onto the City Hall parking lot to get a good look at the Sweet’s Chocolate and Conoco Oil sign on the side of the Liberty Theatre (1010 Adams).

Walk through the parking lot to Adams and cross over to Max Square and look up to the top left of the five-story Foley Building (corner of Adams and Chestnut) to see the Rainier Beer and the Eddy’s Bread sign. To see the “local business” sign on the Foley Building, you will need to continue on Fourth to Jefferson, turn right to Chestnut and look at the top of the alley side of the Foley Building.

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