

# JUNE'S GARDEN

## Lawn Potatoes

Have you ever heard to enrich and loosen clay soil, plant a crop of potatoes?

Someone advised my father that a crop of potatoes would help prepare the soil where he later planned to plant a lawn. We had just moved into a new house on a city lot. I remember Dad saying the soil was like cement. Mr. Ervin, our next door neighbor, who had the most perfect lawn and neatly trimmed shrubs on the block, watched Dad with skeptical eyes when Dad planted the whole front yard with a crop of potatoes. That fall Dad harvested and gave away sacks of potatoes making new friends with many families in the neighborhood, and we became respectable; especially with Mr. Ervin, when Dad planted a lawn.

The problem was potato seedlings left in the ground continued to sprout along with the new grass as long as we lived there and the cement-like soil never improved until he added other amendments, but we had a lot of potatoes. Mother wasn't an adventurous cook. The year of the potatoes Mother came up with every kind of potato dish she could think up. Dad loved to garden and most homes we lived in he would plant a few edible plants. Even when we lived in an apartment in Berkeley, California, pots of herbs lined the kitchen window sill.

I've carried on the family tradition of adding a few edible plants to my garden. Having fresh vegetables, fruit or herbs at your doorstep is rewarding for both the taste and the enjoyments of gathering your own produce, though now I am always careful to plant my potatoes in barrels.

When I started my garden here in Cannon Beach some of the first plants I planted were onions and potatoes. My reason was to have these vegetables to go along with the razor clams I'd dig, to make chowder. Clams aren't as plentiful as they used to be, but when I manage to dig my limit of clams to go with new potatoes and sweet onions my family considers Mom's chowder the best.

My garden is small, the planting area is only about 1/3 of a 50' x 100' lot. I don't have room for a separate vegetable garden, so I mix vegetables and herbs with the flowering plants. I've used swiss chard and lettuce to border the flower beds or the many root vegetables. Herbs, many of which are perennials, are scattered through the garden. Golden marjoram, low growing oregano, and thyme cascade over the bricks

that form my raised beds. Rosemary and sage grow along with different forms of cranebill (perennial geraniums), Alchemilla mollis (Lady's Mantle), dianthus, dahlias and other plants. The blue flowers of Borage, parsley and chives reseed and grow throughout the garden. Lilly Miller swiss chard, called Bright Lights, grow multi-colored stems -- rust, red, yellow, white and bronze, and with Ed Humes' Red Sail leaf lettuce add color to the garden. My favorite herb is Bronze fennel which gives both height and feathery leafed texture in the bed of dahlias. I use the foliage in salads, soups or to give flavor to fish. In the fall the tall stems develop flower heads which when ripe produce seeds. The seeds can be saved, later to be ground and used as a spice. Fennel has a liquorice flavor.

Two large artichoke plants I've planted on the south side of the wood shed are bordered in front with onion and garlic, and in the spring I scatter various annual poppy seeds, both from Shirley poppies that bloom in the spring and California poppies that bloom through out the summer. Behind the two artichoke plants some years I mix sweet peas and edible peas or beans to climb the netting that's attached to the wall of the wood shed.

A row of raspberries grow along the east side of the woodshed. The shed protects them from the wind off the ocean. In a sunny spot a large pot with side openings for plants is filled with strawberries.

On my deck many of the large pots and wall planters are filled with various herbs. In the corner of the deck in the sunniest area I plant a sweet hybrid cherry tomato in a large pot and a small pot of basil. Chopped fresh basil leaves enhance the taste of ripe tomatoes.

Vegetables as well as flowers need well prepared soil. In the garden area each spring I add compost either from my own pile or commercial mushroom compost and processed fertilizer. In the planter I add time-released fertilizer and water with diluted liquid fertilizer.

Whether you have room for a few pots of herbs or vegetables or a small garden space is not a factor. The reward of raising a few edible plants is to wander through your garden in the late afternoon to gather fresh vegetables, some herbs and fruit for your dinner. Pluck a ripe tomato, a berry or two to taste as you gather a bouquet of flavors.

As my father found out a crop of potatoes may not enrich and loosen the soil, but I still prepare small new potatoes as my mother did, cooking them with their jackets left on, basted with melted butter, seasoned with chopped fresh leaves of parsley, fresh ground pepper, and a sprinkle of salt. Out of all the recipes she tried this was our family favorite.


"Bon Appetit", as Julia Child says as she signs off her cooking program.

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The trouble with doing nothing is that you can never take any time off. Hoge Carmichael

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I'd like to be a procrastinator, but I never seem to get around to it. Chris Dundee

THE BINOCULARS I failed to bring would have made no difference, nor would have the digital camera, because I wasn't ready.

I didn't notice the great blue heron until it spread its wings and began first to glide, and then to fly, away.

It did not fear me, I felt, but simply figured that twenty feet was close enough for a dufus human who didn't even know it was there. So it casually left.

Same with those two deer with white spots at their tails. The first one looked right at me from thirty feet, and just stood there a while. I thought it was planning to stare me down.

I love how deer prance. That first one unhurriedly walked into the brambles, but the second one pranced off through the marsh grass toward the Umpqua River.

It didn't matter that I wasn't ready this time. It was my first walk under the Hwy. 101 bridge in almost-downtown Reedsport, and I'm staying here to do it again. I live a ten-minute walk from that spot. I had visited the Umpqua Discovery Center nearby, and had some idea of where I was. Just a few feet upstream, the Smith River joins the Umpqua for the three-mile trip to the Pacific Ocean, and I was looking for some way to walk along Scholfield Creek.

All this was in the Port Industrial Park. The port isn't as busy as New York Harbor, but things are going on here. There are working boats in the basin, and repairs are happening, and marine products are being manufactured. I could hear and smell grinders and sanders and furnaces in use.

Right there, in a little finger of Scholfield/Umpqua slough, was the great blue, and over there where the blackberry bramble grew out of Umpqua marsh grasses, were those two unruffled deer, and I hadn't noticed them until they moved.

Next time, I'll be quieter and try to notice more things. Maybe I'll take a digital camera, but I sure won't need binoculars for this amazing little hike.

Bill Wickland is a life-long writing person and sometime journalist who has recently moved to Reedsport on purpose.

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