

Selecting and Growing Potatoes

Rules for Producing Bumper Crops---How the Sweepstakes Potatoes were Grown

To make potato growing a success it is essential to fully understand the requirements of the crop. The kind of soil they are to be grown on is not so important, providing the soil is properly fitted for the seed and maintained so throughout the growing season. It should be fully understood that the tuber is a swelling, and to swell and develop into a potato of nice clean type and shape, of good size, the soil must be in a proper condition to let it do so. At no time should the soil be allowed to become hard or compacted or dry. The potato revels in a nice, moist, loamy soil. Even if selected from the bin or hill from selected stock, the best of seed when planted in a shallow, hard soil, or deep soil that becomes hard or compacted, will be disappointing when harvested. The tubers will be deformed or irregular in size and shape and contain a large number of small tubers that are not worth the trouble of picking up.

The seed should be given first consideration in order to secure the best results. It should be selected at the time the crop is dug or harvested. The best results are gained when the hills are dug by hand, so that the product of each hill may be compared. When this is done the best hills may be determined. The important part for the beginner is to be able to determine what constitutes the best hill.

Selecting for Uniform Size and Shape

Selection should be made not particularly for the largest tubers or the largest number of tubers per hill, but from hills that yield the most uniform potatoes in size and shape—hills that contain six or eight or ten clean, shapely tubers of good marketable size, besides the few small ones. True to type is another consideration. Those that come nearest to the point should be selected for seed. Six or eight tubers should be selected from each hill, or sufficient to plant eight hills the following season, these being planted in a single row. This row is therefore the product of a single plant or hill. As many as desired may be chosen, probably about 30 hills will be sufficient, making 30 rows. These may be used as a seed plot for future foundation stock. This work should be carried on each season. At the time these hills are selected they may be either kept separate or all the seed mixed together and planted in rows with eight hills to the row.

With respect to variety, one can not recommend any particular variety, but one suitable to the locality of either early or late sorts. Some varieties are round in shape, others long, some round oval, others flat oval, others of type between these. Personally, I favor the clean, full, round and slightly oval type, there being less waste in peeling and cooking. They handle better in shipment than the long and flat types.

In the selection of type or variety, one should determine which is the best. Each variety has characteristics that must be taken into consideration. For an example I might refer to two different types, Early Ohio and Wee McGregor. The former is an early maturing red potato, the latter a white late sort. In making selections for type or shape it may be puzzling to some to determine which is the best to select. Early Ohio is a round type, in color ranging from dark red to light red and brown red. In shape, they range from round to a longer type; gradations of these may be found

By Seager Wheeler

in a single hill. Having had the variety under selection, I am selecting for the slightly longer than the round type, as I find them cleaner and more handsome. They do not yield as high as the late varieties, but have excellent cooking qualities, are of fine flavor and are good keepers and shippers. The tuber clings closely to the plant, making harvesting easy. In contrast, Wee McGregor is a late sort, white in color, yields heavier than the Early Ohio, but the tubers are irregular in size and shape. Some of the tubers incline to a long, flat type or oval flat type. The tubers sprawl away from the plant, making harvesting more difficult than with the Early Ohio. Otherwise they are a desirable sort. Seed selection along these lines will be found both interesting and profitable.

Treatment of Seed Before Planting

The seed before planting should be greened or hardened off. This may be done by spreading the seed thinly in some place where there is no danger of freezing in the early spring, on the floor of a shed or building. The light or sun turns them green

there is a possibility that some of the seed may have only one eye and that a blind one, which will result in a miss in the rows. It is poor economy to skip the seed. Allow two or more eyes to each piece of seed and let it be of good size. If a tuber is to be cut in two pieces, cut lengthwise down through the seed end to the stem end. This is a practice I have followed for the past 25 years of planting only good sized seed, and I have never known a crop failure or even a poor crop, even when the crop was hailed so badly as to cut and strip the plant to only a few bare stems. The crop came along afterward in good shape, simply because the plant was established with a good rooting system.

Securing Proper Soil Conditions

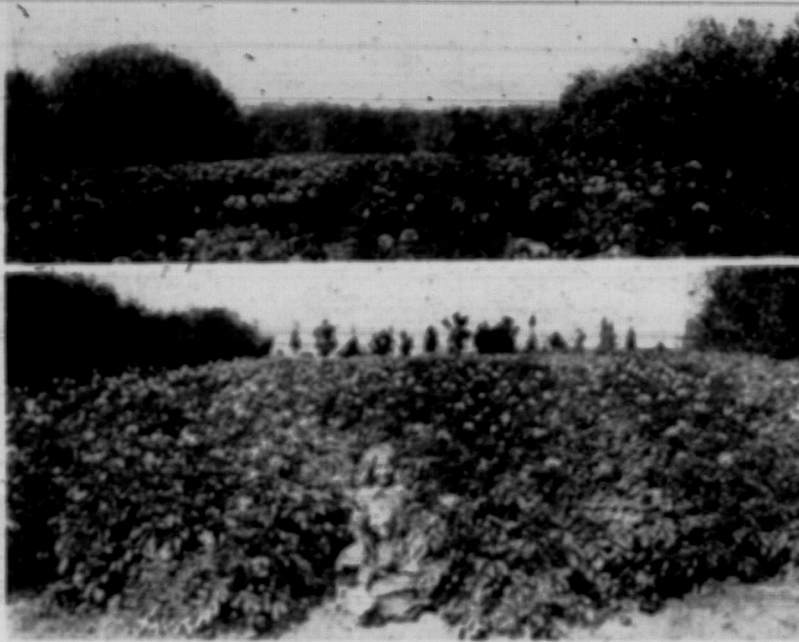
The preparation of the soil for the seed and the cultivation after the crop is planted is of greater importance than the seed itself. To encourage the development of clean, large, shapely tubers it is necessary to have a moist, fairly loose, deep soil. This is hardly possible when the plowing is shallow and the lower portion is hard and compact.

This hard and compacted condition may be brought about even in a deep soil if cultivation is neglected at the right time. Heavy rains will run the soil particles together, and rapid evaporation will take place unless the surface soil is maintained in good condition. When the soil is dry enough cultivate to maintain the desired mulch.

There are several methods of planting the crop, but the general practice is to plow the seed under. When this is done the plowing should be as deep as possible, right down to 10 inches deep, the seed being planted about four inches from the surface. This may be done by following the plow and pushing the seed into the side of the furrow instead of dropping the seed. In the case of early varieties they may be planted about 15 inches apart in the row. Late varieties should be about 18 inches apart. The rows for early varieties may be about three feet apart; with late varieties about four feet apart. This allows room for each individual plant. Early varieties have a small top, late sorts a heavier top of vines. This allows the potatoes plenty of room to develop into strong vigorous plants and reduces the possibility of suffering in a period of drought. The furrows should be made straight to allow of easy cultivation between the rows.

When the seed is planted it is advisable in general not to pack the soil. It may be lightly planked down by the plank drag if necessary to pulverize any heavy lumps of new soil. The surface should be harrowed two or three times at the time the crop is in, and at intervals several times before the crop is showing well above the ground. The harrowings save considerable labor, as the harrows destroy each crop of small weeds as it germinates and make the after-cultivation easier. As soon as the rows are beginning to make some growth the horse hoe should be used between the rows, even if no weeds are showing. The first cultivation may be done deep, but after-cultivation should be shallow, as the roots soon spread across the space between the rows. If any small weeds are showing in the rows around the plant, the cultivators should be set to throw a little dirt over the weeds to smother them. At least three cultivations

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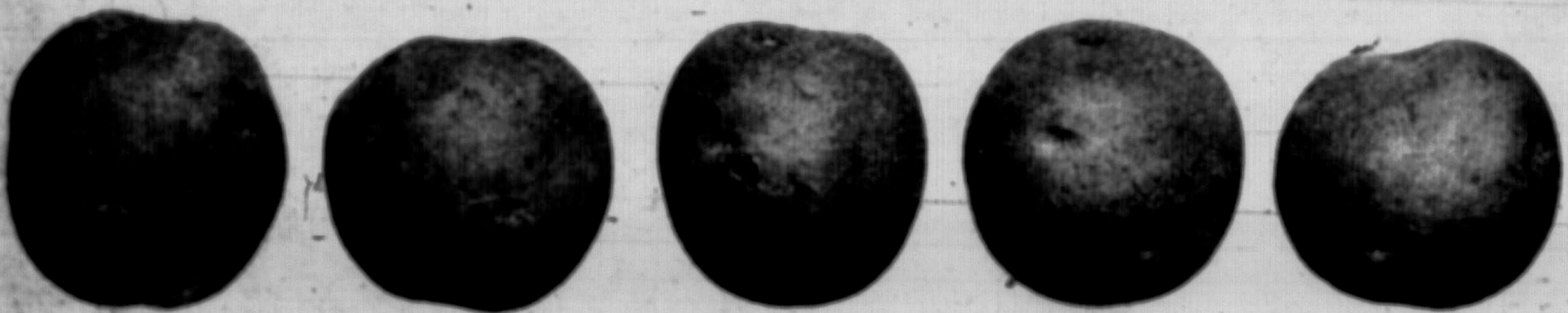


VIEWS OF SEAGER WHEELER'S 1916 POTATO PLANTINGS

The rows were planted four feet apart. The upper scene was taken before the growth of vines met between the rows. The lower scene, taken later, shows how the growth completely covered the ground.

and induces a short, solid sprout that will not break off in handling. If there is no convenient place inside to do this, the tubers may be spread on the ground outside in the south side of a building and at night covered over to protect them from frosts or rain. Seed thus treated will come through the ground more quickly after planting and is apparently more vigorous throughout the growing season. Before planting they should be treated for scab in a 1 to 30 solution of formalin, allowing the seed to remain in the solution from two hours to half a day. They should then be taken out and dried, when they may be cut up for seed or planted whole.

Plant good sized seed. Don't cut too closely. While it is true that peelings will grow, it is also true that some of the peelings may not grow. It is a practice with many to cut the seed to a single eye. This would be all right enough when the piece is large, but there are some blind eyes and



Representative Samples of Seager Wheeler's Gold Nugget Potatoes. Mr. Wheeler Produced the Variety by Selecting from the Irish Cobler for Uniformity, Quality and Shallowness of Eye.