

Increase the Yield by Selecting the Seed—By Samuel Larcombe

The old story that like begets like is truer in potatoes than perhaps any other root or vegetable. My experience covering 30 years, and growing perhaps some 50 varieties, has shown very clearly that we rarely get quality and quantity combined unless we breed up and select.

Some thirty years ago I grew, among other kinds, the Beauty of Hebron and used them largely for myself because I had nothing that could compare with them for quality. In yield, however, I had varieties that would out-yield them three to one. About 25 years ago I started growing for sale and some of the customers got Beauty of Hebron and finding them mealy and altogether different in flavor from any other, the demand grew for this variety and no other. The trouble with me was that I had varieties I could afford to sell for about half the price I could sell the Beauty of Hebron, and perhaps this, more than anything else, forced me to the study of potatoes and their growth.

Unlike many others that have grown potatoes in fairly large quantities I always dig by hand with an ordinary potato fork, otherwise I may never have gotten so close to the individual potato stalk, and this is what we get

Suppose one has 1,000 stalks of potatoes (the same rule will apply to any quantity), out of 1,000 stalks you can select 20 or perhaps 30 that will out-yield the average by at least two to one, or to put it in another way, suppose the average 1,000 has yielded five pounds to the stalk, then you can find in the 1,000, 20 stalks that will have yielded 10 pounds per stalk. This will apply to any variety. Put this 20 or 30 stalks away for seed the following year and follow the same method the next year and the next, and in this way the yield of any variety can be doubled in six years.

Going back again to the Beauty of Hebron, the yield from them the first five years of growth would be from 180 to 220 bushels in an average year. This potato will now yield 450 bushels per acre, and any other can be improved the same way.

As I have already stated I use a fork for digging and every stalk that is outstanding in yield I stand the potatoes on end and gather them separately for the next year's seed. If dug any other way than with the fork you have no chance of so selecting, so that where they are grown in so large a quantity as to make it impossible to dig in this manner, enough should be raised this way for seed purposes.

Another very important thing of course, is the eye. The habit of all potatoes is to have a bunch of eyes at one end, but in digging you may find one in a hundred, or perhaps more, that have eyes fairly evenly dis-

tributed all over the potato. These should also be picked out for seed purposes and by degrees you will be growing potatoes that have the eyes more evenly distributed. I like them this way for cutting. A potato from 10 to 14 ounces should be cut in three; from 14 to 18 ounces should be cut in four, and if the eyes are fairly evenly distributed each piece will have two or more eyes. As to whole or cut potatoes I prefer cut potatoes from the sizes mentioned, but if I have a couple of bushels of potatoes that will average more than a pound each, I cut these into three or four pieces and small potatoes from these will make good seed. I never grow small seed from small seed planted the previous year, but small potatoes from large cut potatoes will give good results. I have known people to even plant peelings. As well plant bran and expect good wheat.

As to soil, it should be good rich soil, kept up with rotten manure. I plant in rows, three feet apart and from 24 to 28 inches apart in the row. Some varieties may do closer than this, but I like lots of room for good results.

As to varieties to grow there are a number of good ones, but some will do better in wet seasons, while some prefer it fairly dry, and will give good results. I believe in finding a good potato for general use of good quality, and breeding it up in the way I have suggested. Whilst the last two years have not been favorable for heavy crops, still I think we have been neglecting correct methods of production. Anything that looked like a potato was considered good enough for seed and the result has been largely a failure. No better place in the world can be found for potato growing than the West, and if it is claimed that the growing of potatoes is not a profitable crop, it is largely because no attention has been given to proper methods in cultivation.

A sandy loam soil with clay sub-soil makes a good garden soil; it is easily worked and produces smoother root crops. A heavy soil is more difficult to handle, but because of its moisture-retaining capacity, is most satisfactory for vegetables that require a large amount of moisture during the late summer and early autumn and for all vegetables in a dry year. A heavy soil can be made more mellow and the water retaining capacity of light soils can be increased by the addition of manure.

The following vegetables can be planted as soon as the ground is in condition. Beets, cabbage, carrots, lettuce, onions, turnips, parsley, parsnips, peas, radishes, rutabagas, salsify and spinach, but the following are frost tender and should not be planted before danger of frost is past: Beans, cauliflower, Swiss chard, cucumber, tomatoes, squash, musk melons and sweet corn.

Gardens will be extremely popular this year. Never have we heard so much about them as this year.

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