

# Potatoes out of his ears

8/28/09

In the early spring months when there was talk that our recession could turn into another Great Depression, I thought it might be a good idea to expand the garden. Freezing and canning vegetables seemed like a wise — albeit small — insurance policy.

For whatever reason, I've always been able to grow green beans like there's no tomorrow in this Jefferson Township soil, so I allotted rows and rows to those. And I had some good luck with tomatoes over the years, so I carved out a good amount of earth for them. Historically my corn always looked pathetic, but I figured I'd give that one more try. And finally, I left room for every kind of pepper imaginable.

It was a mid-April day when I went to see the always-helpful folks at the Saxonburg Agway. I came in for my quarterly purchase of a box of pig ears for our dog, Thunder.

As I went up to the counter with my box, I noticed a brown bag marked "Seed Potatoes." To tell you the truth, I had no idea what a seed potato was.

I grew up primarily in the city and suburbs, where gardening was just a nice little hobby. A seed potato could have been the size of a mustard seed, for all I knew.

But I thought of Dick Wise, the farmer who sells us hay and grows potatoes just a stone's throw from our yard.

"Hmmm," I thought. "Maybe I should take a shot."

I politely said to the guy at the cash register, "You'll think I'm a dummy, but when and how do you plant seed potatoes?"

He told me now was the time



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and explained how to plant them.

Since I had nothing to lose, I decided to make planting a fun project for our 5-year-old son, who doesn't like vegetables.

"We're growing french fries, son. You'll like these," I declared.

I didn't want to waste garden space on these in case they didn't work out, so I halfheartedly dug a trench at the very end of our yard. Trevor then enthusiastically put down his "french fries" in a typically haphazard way for a kid his age, but he did the best he could.

I covered them up and then concentrated on our real garden.

Much to my surprise, in late May I noticed I had little hearty flowering plants at the end of the yard. "Well, I'll be darned," I said to myself.

As June and early July rolled along, our real garden got pretty weedy. But, as I tell my wife, I

don't care what it looks like as long as it produces.

And produce it did. We had so many green beans our entire family was snapping and freezing for days. The tomato plants looked like bushes and the peppers were going strong.

But then one late July day, I noticed that two of my tomato plants were turning black. I thought it was just a freakish anomaly.

The day after, I noticed all of my tomato plants were turning black. That's when I learned our tomatoes were being ruined by the tomato blight.

As soon as I read that the blight was actually the same thing that caused the Irish potato famine in the 1840s, I raced out with Trevor to the end of our yard and started digging for potatoes. Much to our surprise, we actually had real potatoes.

I had no idea a single plant would yield three or four half-decent potatoes. When my dad used to tell me as a kid I had potatoes coming out of my ears, I had no idea he was a prophet.

I promptly found myself a french fry cutter and discovered you had to be able to bench press 250 pounds to get those things through. But soon we had real french fries — not quite McDonald's, but not bad.

Thanks to the Saxonburg Agway, I'm stocked up for the winter with plenty to share with our extended family — quite a bang for the buck. Potatoes will forevermore be part of our real garden.

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