

Garden harvested despite flood

Every year, hundreds of thousands of gardeners across the nation suffer a loss in precious produce due to their living in areas subject to occasional flooding. The Rev. Daniel R. Williams, Jr. of Pennsylvania, relates his restoring of a flood damaged garden in hopes that others who might suffer similar destruction can benefit from his experience ...

"Hurricane Agnes rampaged through the Susquehanna River basin in June 1972, bringing the worst flood in 100 years. The carnage was terrible. My small organic garden, 40 by 70 feet, is located about 300 yards from the river and was under 5 feet of water for about 3 days. The slime and mud destroyed nearly every plant. Warnings against eating contaminated vegetables were issued by all public agencies

"When the flood struck, we were in Manitoba for a working vacation ... Upon hearing the flood news, we immediately rushed home.

"The garden, or what was left of it, almost made us cry. The carefully nurtured vegetables and strawberries were covered with a 6 to 12 inch coating of slime and mud. One could not walk in it for fear of slipping and falling.

"The newspapers were saying that the crops were over for this year because of the pollution in the water and residue. We kept looking at the mess and decided we could do something about it.

"We called a farmer friend and asked him to deliver a load of hay. Without removing the slime, we spread the hay over the whole garden. Now we could walk without breaking our necks or worrying about tracking contaminated soil into the house. The next step was to gather seeds and plants.

Most of the greenhouses had dumped their surplus. When we explained our plight, they usually helped find odd plants and were glad to give them to us. We found enough to get started.

"Sweet corn was out of the question because of the season; however, green and wax beans, squash, carrots and beets all had enough time to grow. We set out tomato, broccoli and green pepper plants.

"We usually spread granular limestone to sweeten the soil but it reacts rather slowly, so we substituted builder's lime. It was a lot of work because, for each plant we set in or each row we seeded, we had to pull back the thick layer of hay and break through the rapidly hardening mud to reach our good organic topsoil. We mixed the soil and limestone as well as we could, planted, and as soon as the plants were large enough, pulled the hay mulch up around them.

"It was back breaking work and knowing that our efforts might prove futile didn't make it any easier.

"We did not have time to cultivate; we simply left the garden alone. Weeds never pushed through the 6 inches of mud. About the middle of August, we picked our first broccoli. The tomatoes came in a little later. We had lots of beans by September and the peppers found their way into our salads. We had a new crop of lettuce every 3 weeks and the carrots and beets were ready in the fall. How grateful we were for the bountiful harvest.

"Much of the hay decomposed and helped to granulate the sticky mud. Breaking through the flood-deposited layer as we did must have let in oxygen because the organisms in the organic topsoil revived and worked from the bottom up to break up the clay.

"The carrots did not do as well as they should have. This was corrected on the second try by adding sand to the soil. The roots were pulled in late October and though small were tasty.

"As a result of this experience, we have used a hay mulch every year. We now have a home-built geodesic greenhouse for starting plants and store our surplus in a natural cave. Oh, by the way, we moved to a home on the slopes of a mountain. No point in tempting fate "

Fitzgerald to lead ASCS

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Secretary of Agriculture Bob Bergland last week named Ray Fitzgerald as administrator designate of Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS), U.S. Department of Agriculture.

As ASCS administrator, Fitzgerald will administer the Department's farm commodity programs; cost-sharing conservation programs; national defense programs relating to farm production, conservation, income stabilization, and the handling, storage and distribution of grains and foods; and natural disaster emergency assistance programs.

Fitzgerald, 53, a native of Plankinton, S.C., has been president of Agricultural Cooperative Development International (ACDI) here since 1975. The organization is a non-profit technical and consulting firm established by U.S. farm cooperatives to develop and maintain liaison with cooperative groups in less developed countries.

He will be returning to ASCS, having been its deputy administrator and vice president of the Commodity

Credit Corporation from 1962 to 1969, and assistant deputy administrator in 1961-62. As deputy administrator, he headed field operations, handling price support, and use, commodity storage and sale, livestock fee and defense activities through ASCS's 2,900 county and 50 state offices. Earlier he had worked with barter programs of Foreign Agricultural Service and in liaison with the U.S. Department of Defense, Agency for International Development, and the International Grains Agreement.

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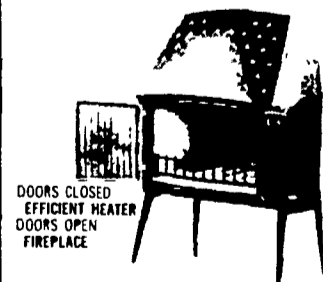
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