

On Being a Farm Wife
(and other hazards)
Joyce Bupp

Just in time for this year's spring planting season, we've come into some exciting, but rarely-publicized gardening tips.

It's unlikely you'll ever find any of this advice in any gardening publication we've ever seen, nor will any seed company print them in their catalogs.

Though little-known, these tips come guaranteed to assure you a most memorable gardening season.

Instead of planting your run-of-the-mill seed potato sets, first consider the primary end use of spuds in your household. If by chance that happens to be French fries, trim those seed sets to a uniform shape before putting them in the ground. The most desirable shape cut for the popular fries is about 1/2-inch by 3 to 4-inches, yielding you a harvest of dainty, pre-shaped spud fingers ready to pop into a kettle of hot cooking oil.

The look on your gardening-expert neighbor's face when you dig up a few of these specialties will more than compensate for the extra peeling time they will take before French-frying them.

Nutritionists have long told us that salads are good for us. And few things are easier to grow than lettuce. Providing you can keep the slugs away from nibbling them if it happens to be

a damp spring. And the bunnies. And the groundhogs.

To protect those baby lettuce seedlings from the early chilly weather and those maurauding pests, we suggest you wrap each plant carefully in a little suit and jacket as you plant it in the ground. While this may initially be tedious, think what a time-saver it will be later on to have all your salad already dressed.

Most of us, and especially kids, seem to get a kick out of raising those adorable little mini-tomatoes. And we should do whatever we can to encourage kids to eat their veggies. But while they're cute, those little tomatoes take up lots of space for the actual yield they give, compared to the larger versions.

Our solution? Plant an indeterminate (the kind that grow longer and longer stalks) regular-sized tomato next to a cherry tree. Train the vines up the through the fruit tree's branches for cherry tomatoes that are really worthwhile for slicing in a sandwich.

Not everyone has the space to grow corn, since you really need to plant several rows of it to properly cross-pollinate and give you any decent sort of yield. But is you have the space and want to try some different types of corn, we suggest a couple of

alternate methods. Mash each corn seed before planting for a harvest of pre-creamed corn. A bit messy to husk, but tasty.

Or toss your seeds before planting with a mixture of flour and yeast, for a handy yield of cornbread.

Or if you like succotash, that tasty blend of corn and lima beans, plant one of each seed side-by-side for a cross-pollinated ready-mix you can enjoy fresh or freeze for winter dining.

Cucumbers are very popular and easy to grow around here. And, lots of folks grow extra to make their own pickles. But making pickles is a lot of work. May we suggest this shortcut: just water the vines regularly with a room-temperature blend of one part sugar to one part vinegar (sweeter or more sour, depending on your taste). Viola! Pickles, direct from the vine without the mess.

Add dill or assorted pickling spices to your watering liquid for variety in your finished product.

If you prefer to pick a peck of pickled peppers, pour this perky and piquant plant picker-upper on your pepper patch.

And, finally, when you are finished planting your garden for these unique yields, take what-

Americans Are Frying More

Americans may give lip service to healthy eating, but when it comes to putting out the dollars, fried foods are coming out ahead.

A recent consumer study conducted by the NPD Group, a market research firm, indicates that sales of deep fryers were up 32 percent for the first half of 1999, while sales of food steamers remained flat. This occurred despite the lack of new advertising or promotional campaigns, new brands, or significant product modifications.

The Soap and Detergent Association hypothesizes that consumers no longer feel guilty

about occasional indulgences in fried foods. One out of every seven meals prepared at home contains one fried product. This is part of our national propensity for choosing the fastest method for cooking favorite foods.

The newest deep fat fryers simplify the cooking process for many foods, including tempura, fried chicken, and homemade French fries. An adjustable thermostat for oil temperature control is important for successfully frying foods that require lower temperatures, such as mushrooms. Removable non-stick bowls make clean up easier, while safety lids prevent burns and messy oil splatters. Cool-touch exteriors make the fryer's sides safe to touch, even when the temperature inside is hot.

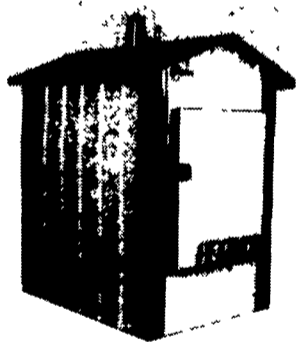
Where fat consumption is a concern, new fryer models cook food rapidly at temperatures high enough to keep the food from absorbing excess oil. If the oil is not hot enough, a surface crust will not form. Without the crust, more oil is absorbed. Removing the food promptly will also cut down on the amount of oil that enters the food.

ever veggie seeds you might have left over, dump them together in a bag and plant a row of the leftover combination. Your resulting harvest, when combined with some tasty meat and broth, should make a tasty, wholesome vegetable soup.

Take note, however. These gardening methods only have a chance to work when pursued on but a single day of the entire year.

April 1.
So, hurry.

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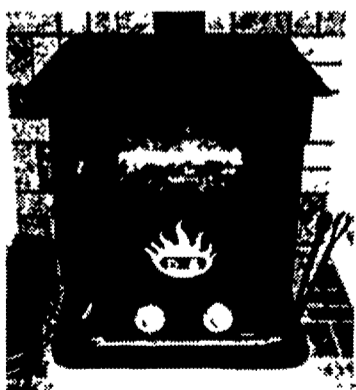
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