

DIG THIS By Peg Tillery (for 8-28-02) , ©2005

At the Kitsap County Fair I had the extreme pleasure of conversing with many of our great Kitsap gardeners.

Richard Yerk of Suquamish said, "Peg, you led me astray in your column." Yikes, I thought. He explained that Ciscoe's potatoes in a garbage can didn't work for him last year. Richard and his buddy Jack Adams even had a bet going during the last gardening season. Richard was sure Ciscoe's method would work and Jack said, "It will never work."

Yerk planted the potatoes and as the stems grew up he kept covering them with a sand and compost mixture. Dreams of many potatoes danced in his head. Well, the final harvest was only a piddling amount of golfball-sized spuds. Richard said, "Senior Potato Analyst Jack Adams was right." Jack's theory is the weight of the soil was too heavy and the potatoes couldn't grow very large. Richard said, "I told my wife I was going to jump off the Agate Pass Bridge, I was so disappointed." Mary Yerk added, "I told him not yet. There were more vegetables to grow."

Richard is undaunted and tried the potatoes in a can again this year using sawdust, shredded leaves and more compost. He's confident he'll succeed. Richard or his "Senior Potato Analyst" will let me know about this year's crop in September or October.

George Bahr from Roadhouse Nursery was close by and he said, "Jan and I grow potatoes in our compost pile every year." Master Gardeners Allen McKibben and Bob Webb had even more to say on the subject.

Allen uses tires to grow his potatoes. He starts with one tire and fills it with compost and the potatoes. As the plants grow he adds a second tire and compost then finishes up with a third tire and more compost. He says, "You can leave the potatoes in the ground until frost." Allen and Bob agreed that potatoes will germinate even from the peels (as long as they had a bit of an eye left). Both men also said "Even grocery store potatoes can be planted for crops."

Allen and Bob say, "When the potato blossoms die it's the official harvest time continuing through frost. New potatoes are harvested when the blooms die back and mature potatoes when the green plants start fading back." They've also tried Ciscoe's method and say it works using straw and potting soil. Bob has used straw to cover up the potato plants instead of soil and compost.

Master Gardener Heidi Hottinger was also close by and shared stories about growing vegetables and fruit trees in the very few sunny spots in her garden. She was determined to grow corn this year. She only planted a few plants rather than the recommended four or more rows for cross-pollination. One plant went in the dahlia bed, one in the strawberry bed and two in the vegetable bed. Heidi then proceeded to hand pollinate her

corn. The strawberry bed plant is only two feet tall but has several ears. Valley Nursery has a tallest corn stalk contest and Heidi is wondering if they'll make a new category for shortest most fruitful plant.

Over in President's Hall Donna Alber and her crew of Master Gardener volunteers worked for months getting ready for the Fair and then spent hours checking in entries and each day helping answer horticulture questions. Co-Chair Nikki Goodwin and her husband John made the three wooden patriotic figures decorating the display area and the big red barn on the wall showing photos of gardeners and their gardens. Nikki even decorates her ears for the fair. She has earrings with: ears of corn, grapes, peas, carrots, and two halves of a pig (a head for one ear and a tail for the other). Nikki and Donna were also bedecked with patriotic cowboy hats. Thank you Donna, Nikki and all your helpers for your efforts to make the horticulture part of the Fair such a success.

Young Timmy Crabtree (who is missing his top teeth) grew vegetables in a ten by twenty foot plot at the Raab Park P-Patch. Tim entered green beans, potatoes (both brown and red) and squash in the Fair and won ribbons plus the coveted "Green Thumb Ribbon" for his efforts. Tim has also been donating the produce he grows to Fishline in Poulsbo. He's been an inspiration to gardeners at Raab Park this year. Way to go, Tim.

Literally thousands of Kitsap County residents participate as volunteers for the Fair each year. I wish I could put all their names in this column. Thank you all for making our Fair an enjoyable community event.

Contact Peg with questions or comments at gardenmentor@yahoo.com or in care of this paper.