

New Discovery in Potato Growing

A Missouri Man Claims a Production of 42 Bushels on a Plot Only Eight Feet Square

[By H. M. George, for six years editor of The American Homestead, a national farm monthly.]

Forty-two bushels of potatoes in the season of 1916 from a plot of ground only eight feet square, or an equivalent of over 28,000 bushels to the acre of ground space used, was the astonishing feat of R. E. Hendricks, a resident of Kansas City, Missouri.

This sensational achievement was made possible by the use of an entirely new and original method which, when generally introduced, promises not only to revolutionize the potato growing industry throughout the world but to solve the problem of an unfailing source of cheap food supply for the nations of the earth.

The story of Mr. Hendricks' successful experiments in potato growing, covering a period of three years, sounds more like a fairy tale than a recital of facts, yet it is so unique and interesting that it once compels attention. Expert gardeners and farmers who have looked into the plan carefully pronounce it not only practical but call the originator the greatest plant wizard of the age, and declare that he has anything in plant culture and intensive agriculture beaten by a wide margin.

Like all great discoveries, Mr. Hendricks' method of raising potatoes is founded on such simple elemental principles that one wonders "why someone didn't think of it before." He had often watched the potato pile in the cellar bin, which every spring sent out its shoots through every possible crack and crevice. Sometimes these sprouts would crawl out along the floor a distance of seven feet in order to reach the light. From this beginning he conceived the idea that if this pile was removed out into the open and given soil and fertilizer, with proper conditions of light and moisture, that the potatoes would grow and reproduce their kind.

Discovers a New Method

Three years ago he built what he called a "potato pen," which was nothing more or less than a huge potato hill, the sides of which were supported by a loosely constructed enclosure, built after the fashion of an old rail fence. Within this enclosure, only 8 by 8 feet in size, he planted his potatoes in thin layers of dirt and manure, piling one layer on another until the pen was eight feet high. The "potato pen" became a mound of green. He had found that his potatoes not only grew better than they did in the cellar but that at digging time he was able to harvest 40 bushels of as fine potatoes as are grown anywhere. The following year he secured 32 bushels in the same size pen, and last year the astonishing total of 42 bushels.

Up to this time Mr. Hendricks has conducted his experiments unknown to but a few of his most intimate associates, but owing to the present food shortage, and the nation-wide campaign to speed up food production, he decided to give up his discovery for the free use of people everywhere.

The details of the construction and management of these "potato pens," as described by Mr. Hendricks, outline a plan by which anyone having access to a plot of ground

no larger than a flower-bed can raise all the potatoes needed for an average family for a whole year. The potato pens may be built eight feet

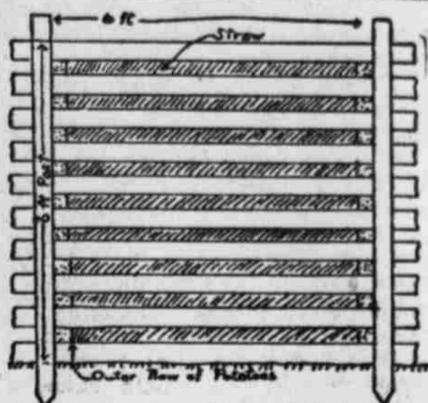


FIGURE 1—END ELEVATION

wide by any length, just so they are built strong enough to keep the sides from spreading. Most any kind of good stout material can be used. If light lumber or boards are used the pen may be braced through the center with wires. Rich earth and well rotted manure must be on hand in sufficient quantities to fill the pen to the top.

How Pen is Built

The potato pen, as illustrated, is built 6 feet by 8 feet, inside measurement, and is 6 feet high.

Figure 1 shows the end elevation of a completed pen. Figure 2 shows the plan of planting. The pen is built as each layer is placed and planted. You can use 1x6 inch boards for the ends and sides, leaving a 2 1/2-inch space between the boards for the potato sprouts to come through. Start the pen with a six inch layer of dirt. Then mark off the plat a foot apart each way, allowing six inches of space for dirt all around between the outer row of potatoes and the inside of the pen. Plant a potato seed at every cross line or intersection of the plat, 48 hills to the layer of dirt. Each large dot as shown in Figure 2 represents a potato seed. Then put an inch or two of well rotted manure over the potatoes and sprinkle good with water. Then lay six inches more of dirt, mark off as before, plant, manure and water again. Repeat this operation with enough layers to fill the pen to the top. To keep the dirt from falling out of the pen as the layers are placed, draw up old straw or hay against the cracks or crevices.

As the pen rises, place on the fourth layer of dirt in the center of one side, about two feet above the ground, a "moist tester," as shown in Figure 2. This is made of any piece of timber about the size of the arm, a piece of 4x4-in. by 3 feet long, placed so it will protrude from the pen about a foot. After the potatoes have been planted three weeks loosen the tester, pull out and run your hand in to determine the moisture. By so doing you will know how much water to use on the pen. After the tester has been once removed this can be repeated once or twice a week. Watch the tester and keep the dirt in proper condition.

Moisture Conditions Controlled

The pen should be near a water supply so that it can be well watered during dry weather. It should be

watered from the top about twice a week unless rainfall is sufficient. The "moist tester" will always enable the grower to determine the proper moisture conditions. The top layer of dirt should be sloped gently toward the center so the ground will absorb and not shed rain, but care should be taken that mud be prevented from forming on top and baking to a crust. When the earth is dry the mound should be sprinkled on the top and sides.

The potato vines will grow to the top and sides of the pen, (the nearest way to the light), emerging through the crevices and concealing the timbers with a coat of green. When the potatoes are matured the pen may be taken down, the potatoes rolled out of the thin covering with a rake, and the material, dirt and manure saved and used again and again.

Potato pens may be started as early and as late as possible, giving potatoes ninety days to mature, except the early ones. The usual time of planting potatoes in the north is

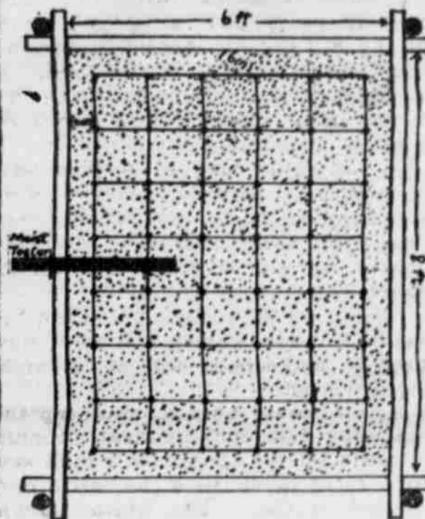


FIGURE 2—LAYER PLAN

Showing plat as laid on top of dirt, with "moist tester" in position. Large dots on cross lines indicate how potato seed is placed.

from March to June, but under this method the potatoes may be planted much later than is possible under open field conditions, where the factor of hot, dry weather must always be taken into consideration. With irrigation and every possible condition of good potato growing—moisture, ventilation and drainage—always under his control, the grower is practically certain of his crop. In his experiments Mr. Hendricks used the Red River Early Ohio for seed, cutting two eyes to a good-sized piece. This year he is experimenting with other adaptations of his plan and expects to have some interesting announcements to make by next November. Mr. Hendricks is backed in his work by a good wife, and his neighbors of twenty years' standing vouch for his honesty and integrity.

Amazing Possibilities

The possibilities of this new method of raising potatoes, in the saving of labor and of land, are amazing to contemplate. When outside conditions are unfavorable the production can be carried on successfully under glass and shipping from warmer climes made unnecessary. With such a cheap source of food supply within reach of all the people of the earth the spectre of famine and the day of high-priced foods will become a thing of the past.

FOR BILLY SUNDAY

"The devil of booze is a frightfully active agent and we are all with Billy Sunday in his hotshot firing at the saloons. Three-quarters of the Catholic children who stay away from mass on Sunday during the winter months, give as a reason that they have no shoes. In the majority of these cases, the price of the shoes has been handed over the bar by bibulous fathers who in the end make their children pay the drink bill in suffering and neglect of school and mass."—Brooklyn Tablet and Catholic Citizen.

IN WYOMING

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