

Spring Into Action

Written by Gabby Cook
Tuesday, April 2, 2013

I have onions on my mind, with potatoes close behind. Three boxes of Copra, and one each of Candy and Patterson, get sorted first. About 20% are too small for the field, so they go into a bed to get bigger before transplanting. The rest are awaiting proper field conditions. A box of leeks also wants to get planted.

In our rotations, onions follow potatoes. Two fields get chisel plowed as soon as soil can be worked in the spring. On the first pass I run lengthwise, and then soon afterwards it gets cross plowed. A field for the other spring vegetables gets the same treatment.

The chisel plow needs new points. A wire brush cleans the bolt threads to make their removal easier. The lower one comes off first because it's more worn. I position myself and have to use my legs to break it loose. Oil helps.

When the bolt spins, a crowbar is used to pry the shoe tight. Plow bolts have no head to hold, so pressure is kept on their square shoulders inside the shoe. I wish I had a third hand. Eventually new shoes relieve the dull shoe blues.

Now I can really plow deeply. I am watering the crop this summer by opening up the soil now so that the spring rains soak into the humus. Soil surface management will follow to keep that moisture available for later. This is the key to farming without irrigations.

The potato field was composted and rough plowed last fall, I level the land by chisel plowing lengthwise. More compost will be put on this virgin field before I cross plow it deeply.

A light drizzle threatened to halt progress, but then stopped for just enough time to let me finish. Despite great odds, things do get done on the farm. I stir up some horn manure and barrel compost and fling it on the freshly worked soil to help enliven the microbial activity which will later supply nutrients to the crops.

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Rain comes that evening, so planting is delayed. This gives me time to make sure the farmall cranks up. I also noticed a tree fell and took down the fence, so maybe that will get mended before the cows notice it. They are paying close attention to their nine new calves and the last of the hay rolls. Their messy feeding spot will soon be piled to make next year's compost.

It's mid-March and nothing is planted. But the train has started to roll. Most of the gardens are busy growing cover crops of wheat or crimson clovers and are best left alone until the end of April. Cold frames are being prepared for an early April sowing of tomato, pepper and eggplant seeds, and a sweet potato bed will soon be created.

Spring is in the air. Daffodils, also called buttercups, have been blooming since January, and dryland fish are considering jumping above the forest floor. We are patiently preparing ourselves and our land to spring into action.