

## Sweet Potato Patch

Wednesday, October 15, 2008

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The rain came. I breath a deep sigh of relief, as do the little lettuces. Much of the fall garden hasn't seen a drop since it was planted, but now you can hear the greens growing. We were hoping to get sweet potatoes dug before the rain and with a little help form our friends, we did.

Sweet potatoes like dry weather. Planted in late May, they didn't get much water this year. We lovingly dug up the first three plants in each row with the garden fork, and picked up the beauties. This allows me to stick in the potato without slicing the first few. They did great despite the drought.

Many hands and half as many backs pitched in on the big harvest. A small machete and a curved potato fork pull all of the vines from one side of the row over to the other. Then I slowly plow a few inches from the center of the row on the cleared side. This brings up the clumps of roots still attached to the vine. A helper walks behind the tractor and plow, pulling the vines out and keeping them from clogging up around the plow.

We shake the sweet potatoes off of the vines and let them dry out for a few hours before putting them in baskets. Only the perfect ones are picked up on the first pass and these go straight up into the attic.

On the second pass we harvest the seconds. These are simply the smaller potatoes and the damaged ones. They are every bit as good as the firsts, but I don't want to try and store them. We will send these off to the farm supporters in the next few weeks, and save the number ones for later.

Sweet potatoes do not like to be moved. They keep the best when taken off the truck and stored away. We used the spare bedroom upstairs, which fortunately is large. 120 bushel baskets full of sweets are up there now.

I'm often asked the name of our variety, but I don't know it. I got the seed, and storage instructions, from Coin Hire. He lived in the Haysville Community and said his grandfather grew these same ones since the early 1900's. This variety has been grown in Macon County every year for over 100 years.

Like all farm products, they are free. We replant the potatoes in the spring to make the slips that

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are set out in the field. The fertilizer is just compost we make on the farm. You don't count your labor on a farm, so it's more manna from heaven.

A light sprinkle blew around as we unearthed the last few rows. This kept us hopping. We got them all out of the field and into the house just as the rain came. The hallway of the barn is full of the seconds, if you want any.

We have a huge fall garden with several acres of lettuce plants, oriental greens, turnips and radishes. Wet soil would have made the sweet potato harvest much more difficult.

I didn't think I could be any happier with the potatoes up and the fall garden saved from the drought. But then I baked a few sweet potatoes, and had a dinner of fresh salad and a hot, buttered, heavenly manna while listening to the gentle rain bringing the farm back to life. And just got happier as the evening progressed.