

Onion Planting

Friday, April 18, 2008

Onion planting was just a warm up. We snuggled in a few thousand plants and dropped 36 pounds of sets one afternoon, yet my mind was on bigger things. They say onions make the meal, with which I concur, but onions aren't the meal. On the other hand, potatoes are.

About an acre was ready to go. It had been well composted and turned last fall, then re-broken a week ago. The crew cut up 600 pounds of Kennebees and 250 pounds of Red Pontiacs while I made a whole lot of rows. I brewed up some tea for the occasion.

Getting the rows the right distance is important. As the plants are growing, I need to cultivate them while not smashing the next row (too close) or not leaving a weedy stripe (too far). I jump off the tractor a few times and measure the distance. After all of these years I can sort of eyeball 42-45", but I still carry an appropriate stick and check it.

A friend from Georgia had dumped a few tons of granite meal here, so I loaded up a truckload of bucketfuls. Granite has potassium and trace elements, which our soils lack, so each row got a light sprinkling. Potatoes like potash, but I don't like potassium chloride (chlorine kills life) or potassium sulfate (the potatoes didn't store well when I tried it years ago). I'm going to stick with ground rocks and compost.

Down the row we go, dropping a piece of spud and stepping on it as we drop the next one about a foot away. Fortunately, I had a crew and then a few more friends showed up. Unfortunately, I hadn't bought enough potatoes. An arrowhead jumped up onto my hand, after bending over several times for simply flint rocks.

The tea didn't taste good. Well, I don't really know that, but since it was made from compost we didn't even try it. I like to aerate our best barrel compost in water, and then sprinkle the field I'm planting with it. Beneficial microbes wake up and get active, hungry and ready to work. Their work is helping crops grow because their food is produced by the growing roots of the crop. It's a symbiotic relationship where both parties help each other.

I covered the rows up, finishing with very little daylight left and wondering why I don't fix the lights on the tractor. Early the next morning, with rain threatening, 150 pounds of Yukon Golds and the same amount of Red Pontiacs were cut, dropped, stepped on and covered up. A nice shower tucked them in.

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It takes a few weeks for the potatoes to pop their little green noses out of the ground. At some point, when the soil is just right, I'll harrow the whole field. This will break up the crust, disturb germinating weed seeds, and allow the spuds to come up clean. Then I'll dutifully keep them cultivated and eventually hilled.

Farmers can eat a lot of potatoes, hash browns for breakfast, baked, boiled, mashed, dried or in soup, salad, and pie for dinner, anyway you make them we will eat them. Pie? I was surprised how good a potato pie can be. A little salt and butter is all a potato needs, but one more thing really makes the meal. Pass the onions, please.