

Last year I made the raccoon families happy. This year our club of 200 families rejoices instead. Four stands of electrified wire encircle the entire sweet corn patch within a foot of the ground. Baited with a dab of peanut butter in aluminum foil hanging on the wire, the fence was a shock to the annual 'coon corn convention.

Crimson clover followed the buckwheat, which had followed last year's potato crop. 20 loads of compost were spread on this acre in spring, after bushhogging the clover. Three passes with the rebreaker, in different directions a few days apart, created a seedbed ready for corn.

We dropped the seed in early May and covered it up. I harrowed the field three days later to check sprouting weeds, and began cultivation when the corn had three or four leaves. Talking about hoeing it didn't kill one weed, and other chores took priority. I put the hillers on for the final pass, throwing up a ridge along the base of the plants.

A fifth wire went up about a cow's nose height, and just in time. Two days later the herd escaped but couldn't get in there. Small footprints and small damage worried me, but I think I simply fenced in a groundhog, and he's not eating too much.

Ambrosia was our early bicolor, soon followed by yellow Incredible. G-90 is the favorite late corn. Incredibly sized, thorny pigweed made harvesting anything but ambrosial; it was a jungle in there and we though we heard pigmies. Over 400 dozen ears made the trip to Nashville. Silver Queen is in another, later patch.

I don't usually driver the food into town, but I went in to meet the members. We lay the produce out under big shade trees and the folks happily wonder through and take all they need for the week. This delivery consisted of sweet corn, peppers, tomatoes, potatoes, summer squashes (4 varieties), cucumbers, carrots, beets, Swiss chard, celery, onions, rhubarb, parsley, sweet basil, dill, and three kinds of flowers. All of it was unwashed, unsorted and freshly harvested.

A local club member mentioned she wasn't using her freezer. A few days later I called her, and now it's full of un-shucked corn. To save space, it is often blanched, cut of the cob, and put into bags. But this was so easy just to set them in their un-shucked.

As soon as the last ear was harvested, the fence was taken down and rolled up on a wire

tomato cage. Then I bushhogged the green stalks and worked them into the soil. I pondered putting the cows or pigs in there, but decided instead to feed the sweet green stalks to the soil bacteria. We have to continually build up our soils, and corn's immense amount of organic matter and sugars are real soil builders.

But we don't stop there. Into a five gallon bucket I pour in four gallons of buckwheat, and then mix in two double handfuls of crimson clover seed and one handful of turnip seed. I broadcast five of these over the one-acre field and harrow it. The buckwheat sprouts quickly and acts as a nurse crop for the others, but dies at the first fall frost. Turnips then cover the field, only to die in winter. The crimson clover then takes the field in spring and is mown during bloom in late April, when it's time to plow and plant again.

Wildlife varmints are the major obstacles to truck farming as we shift away from being an agricultural community. Deer make us put up eight foot tall fences, and the 'coons require an electric fence. Groundhogs amble through downtown RBS. I lost one corn patch to turkeys, who have learned from the crows how to get the kernel from a newly sprouted corn seedling. I appreciate wildlife, they supply a lot of revenue through hunting, and they certainly play their role in our ecosystem. But I don't want them to be too happy in the gardens, so we'll just keep on fencing.