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Growing Irish Potatoes Profitably in Florida

Interesting Bulletin by Professor A. P. Spencer of the Florida Experimental Station

The Irish potato is sometimes called the white potato to distinguish it from the sweet potato. It has been grown in Florida for nearly forty years in some sections. Until recently it has not been considered a profitable crop for Florida except in very limited areas, and then only on soils that were peculiarly suited to it. Unquestionably some soils are better adapted to this crop than others, nevertheless it is certain that a large area of Florida, much of which until recently was considered unsuitable, is in fact suited to the growing of Irish potatoes. Irish potatoes grow best in soils well filled with humus, where there is ample moisture, and where the surface water can be controlled.

The Irish potato growing sections of Florida are chiefly on flat-woods soils. Most of these soils are underlaid with hardpan, which in places lies close to the surface, and in other places is at a varying depth. Where this hardpan lies close to the surface it is advisable to break it up by subsoiling, or by the use of dynamite; but when it lies from three and a half to five feet below the surface, it is a decided advantage by holding close to the plant much irrigation water that would otherwise drain away.

Many of these soils have little humus when first broken, but by the system of rotation usually practiced, large amounts of vegetable matter are turned under each year. This rapidly increases the humus content of the soil, until a first-class potato growing soil results. It is important that flat-woods soils should have good drainage.

Low hammock land also makes a good soil for Irish potatoes, because of the amount of humus and its capacity to hold water. The drainage in such lands does not usually interfere with the crop, but in times of continued drought irrigation may be necessary.

preparation. Depth of soil is most important because of the moisture requirements of the crop. The soil must be thoroughly pulverized, and made open and loamy. Frequent cultivation before the crop is planted is necessary to secure a full stand and an abundant setting of tubers. Soils of a close and compact nature should be improved by turning under a green crop and allowing it to decay before the land is plowed. While the Irish potato does best on a moist soil, it is not possible to get an even stand or a good crop where the water stands for a week or ten days after heavy rains. New lands that have not been cultivated or planted before will be improved by planting with sweet potatoes the first year, with velvet beans or cowpeas plowed under the second year, and with Irish potatoes the third year. These two crops should prepare the soil well for the Irish potatoes, providing it is naturally suitable.

The Irish potato requires a complete fertilizer on most Florida soils. In the flat-woods section growers get good results from a formula analyzing approximately 4 per cent of ammonia, 7 per cent of phosphoric acid, and 8 per cent of potash. The material necessary for a ton may be made as follows:

- 1,055 pounds cottonseed meal.
- 655 pounds 16 per cent acid phosphate.
- 290 pounds sulphate of potash, or
- 800 pounds blood and bone.
- 900 pounds 16 per cent acid phosphate,
- 300 pounds sulphate of potash.

This mixture would be suitable for hammock lands, but for high pine lands where the humus is deficient the ammonia should be increased to 5 or 6 per cent. The amount to be applied will depend upon the conditions of the soil. Where the soil has a large supply of humus and is in good

potatoes, but when applied at the rate of five to ten tons per acre it will give good results. All vegetable growth or stable manure should be plowed under one month or more before the date of planting. Commercial fertilizer may be applied immediately before the seed potatoes are placed in the ground. Most growers prefer to apply this broadcast. Just before planting the soil should be thoroughly pulverized with a disc harrow, and the fertilizer applied and mixed thoroughly with the soil. Then the beds in which to plant to seed are made.

On flat-woods lands, when the seed-bed is prepared, the land should be ridged fifteen or eighteen inches high, or sufficiently to give drainage to the beds. On high hammock or high pine land the cultivation may be almost flat, although most growers prefer to plant the seed potatoes on a low ridge about eight inches high. The rows may be set three feet apart, and one seed dropped every fifteen or eighteen inches. If the land is not in the best state of cultivation it will be better to have the rows four feet apart. The seed should be covered four to six inches deep.

The greatest acreage of Irish potatoes in Florida is winter planted. From Tampa southward, planting should be done between December 15th and January 15th; between Gainesville and Tampa, from January 15th to February 20th; and in sections north and west of Gainesville from February 1st to March 10th. The Irish potato plant will withstand a light frost but not a freezing temperature, so that it is well to avoid too early planting for the spring crop in the northern parts of Florida because of the freezing temperature that may occur up to March 1st. It requires about eighty days from planting to mature the tuber to a marketable size. If the vines are well grown, a freeze will destroy the crop; but if they are just putting out their first leaves and getting most of their nourishment from the tuber, they will sprout up again in case they are frozen off, and the injury will be slight.

The fall planted Irish potato crop

mas, when the land may be planted to winter vegetables.

There is hardly any difference in the method of preparation and fertilization of the soil, except that the rows should be not less than four feet apart, and the seed potatoes dropped eighteen to twenty inches in the rows. The probability of less moisture in the soil during the fall because of the higher average temperature during September and October than during the growing season of the winter crop, makes it necessary to give fall plantings more distance in the rows; furthermore, soils that are naturally drier are less suitable for fall planting than for winter planting.

In extreme south Florida a considerable acreage is planted in the fall to produce "new potatoes" for mid-winter markets. The plantings are generally treated about like those intended for a fall crop.

Growers should exercise special care in the excellence and purity of strain of their seed potatoes. Aside from the possibility of introducing diseases, the nature of the seed potatoes determines to a large extent the productiveness of the crop. Seed potatoes should be secured from responsible growers or seedsmen. Seed from an inferior crop is most likely to give a low yield and produce tubers of a second grade. Florida grown seed potatoes are not generally used for winter planting. Most of the seed is purchased from Maine. For fall planting when the seed is taken from the spring grown crop it should be kept over summer spread out in a dry place. By planting only sprouted tubers a fair stand is usually obtained.

The most successful growers select their best potatoes for seed, and cut them to two well matured eyes in each piece. Where the tubers are large, and to be planted in three and one-half foot rows, about twelve bushels per acre will be required for seeding. Where the seed potatoes are of moderate size, ten bushels per acre is considered good seeding. When the seed is to be cut, it is best to have it done a few days before planting. Mix a little lime through the pile.

Lots of fellows have overlooked an opportunity simply because they were too close to it.

Don't be like the sick man who heard of the curative properties of the waters of Karlsbad and went there to take them. After he arrived he consulted a physician, who carefully diagnosed his case and then told him that his particular ailment would respond better to the waters of a certain spring in America. "Which spring?" asked the patient. "One of the springs in Sara-

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toga," replied the doctor. "That's certainly tough," said the sufferer; "I live in Albany." "If you're made of the right stuff you'll find plenty of room to create something for yourself in the job you've got; you can grow

just as big there as you can in something of your own building.

They say that opportunity knocks once at every man's door. I don't know the name of the scientist who managed to get such a

fine line on the habits of opportunity; but if opportunity does announce itself, the chances are that it misses many a door, and, in some cases, when it does knock, I presume, "there's nobody at home."

My impression is that opportunity as a rule doesn't knock at all—or very rarely. Opportunity consists of thinking, doing, having plenty of patience and perseverance, possessing the ability to size up a situation and having the nerve and willingness to take advantage of it.—John A. Sleicher in Leslie's Weekly.

High pine lands are less suitable for Irish potatoes than the flat-woods or hammock, because of the lack of humus, and frequently the lack of moisture when the crop is growing. Where high pine lands can be supplied with humus and irrigated, they can be made to produce profitable crops of Irish potatoes; especially if underlaid with clay.

Scrub oak lands are not suitable for growing Irish potatoes. Their dry, sandy character and lack of humus make them unprofitable for this.

All soils intended for Irish potato growing require deep and thorough

physical condition, 1,500 to 2,000 pounds to the acre may be economically applied; but on newer lands, where the depth of the soil is less than eight inches, from 1,000 to 1,200 pounds will be about the maximum amount that can be profitably used. The most successful potato growers in Florida have made it a regular practice to turn under large quantities of crab grass, beggarweed, and other vegetable growth. This supplies the soil with humus and improves its physical condition, and so insures a heavier yield. Stable manure is not generally used as a fertilizer for Irish

is not so important from a commercial standpoint as the winter plantings. The produce of nearly all fall planted Irish potatoes is consumed locally, hardly any being shipped to Northern markets. There is, however, usually a good local demand at a fair price in Southern markets; so that if one has a soil suitable for a fall crop of Irish potatoes it is advisable to grow them to supply the local trade.

In central and west Florida, planting should be done not later than September 1st, and in southern Florida by September 15th. This will permit the crop to come on by Christ-

The lime has a preserving effect on the cut surfaces.

The varieties that have given best results in Florida are: Spaulding's Rose 4, Bliss Triumph, Lookout Mountain and Irish Cobbler. Spaulding's Rose 4 has been the favorite on flat-woods land. It grows rapidly, is a good shipper, is well established in the markets, and is most generally recommended.

Where a stand is imperfect it is impossible to get the maximum yield even though all other conditions may be the best. There is always a heavy

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