

Chapter 18

Garden Uses of Comfrey: Growing Vegetables and Fruit with Comfrey as Fertilizer

How to fertilize Comfrey: subsection 'Fertilization of Comfrey Plant' in section 'Planting, Soil, Fertilization, Water, Disease' in Volume 2.

Growing Potatoes with Comfrey as Fertilizer

"Though growing Comfrey foliage to use as a potato fertilizer would not pay on a farm scale: farmers can make more money feeding the foliage to pigs. Comfrey grows a garden potato crop which will have a chemical fertilizer yield, but with the genuine compost-grown flavour."

-Organic Gardening by Lawrence D. Hills. Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1977, page 95.

Putting Comfrey Compost in Soil for Potatoes

"Comfrey can have a strong curing effect when it's used as compost, too. We used it for the compost we put in this bed which has potatoes growing in it, because it is good for the prevention of scab and other diseases that potatoes are susceptible to."

We don't just count on appearance to tell us that potatoes need Comfrey compost, though. We rely on the research of the 'Henry Doubleday Research Association' on Comfrey.

We use its compost on the potatoes in particular because it is a dense, almost liquid form of compost that can keep the soil pH down in the acid range far enough to prevent the occurrence of scab. We also use green manuring in the potato bed to make sure the acid level is sufficient.

But you can't quite get the full idea of what the Comfrey compost does for the potato by analyzing the soil pH and studying the admirable work of the 'Henry Doubleday Research Association' on Comfrey.

The result is more than the total achieved by the techniques involved. You come to know what those potato plants need in a very deep, personal sense that transcends anything that can be learned from books.

You know in a way that you can only learn if you watch over, nurture, and protect the potato plants throughout their life cycle. You develop a similar feeling for all the plants in the garden. It is based on classroom study, hard field work, and close detailed observation, but it can't be expressed by any other word than love."

-Enchanted Garden: Alan Chadwick's Organic Method of Gardening by Tom Cuthbertson. London, England: Rider & Company / Hutchinson & Co. Publishers Ltd, 1978, page 97.

(Potato scab is caused by bacterium *Streptomyces scabies*. It overwinters in soil and fallen leaves. The bacterium survives indefinitely in slightly alkaline soil, but is somewhat scarce in highly acid soil. It is transmitted by infected seed tubers, wind and water.)

Timing Planting of Potatoes with Comfrey Growth

"Most gardeners aim to take their first cutting of Comfrey in time to go into the ground with the early potatoes, but where the Comfrey starts slowly in a savage (very cold) spring, it pays to keep the seed tubers stacked in their sprouting trays waiting for it."

There is no time wasted as long as the potato shoots are growing strong, short, and chunky, even if they stay unplanted till May and follow spring cabbages or early broccoli.

The quick start from Russian Comfrey Bocking No. 14 makes it the most valuable variety for garden use, because most organic gardeners use the bulk of their compost on potatoes, and replacing this with Comfrey saves them more for other crops."

-Fertility Without Fertilizers: A Basic Approach to Organic Gardening by Lawrence D. Hills. New York: Universe Books, 1975.

(Russian Comfrey Bocking No. 14 is preferred over Bocking No. 4 because No. 14 has thinner stalks so is less likely to start growing into a Comfrey plant. However, all species of Comfrey are good for potatoes.)

"Potatoes are planted late April through June, and harvested June through October. Some people plant potatoes late March or early April but there is risk they will rot in cold soil."

Earliest planting is 2-3 weeks before last frost in spring.

In late April plant early/short season potatoes for harvest in June or July.

In late April or May plant mid season and late/storage potatoes for harvest August through October.

In June plant early/short season potatoes for harvest in August or September.

Early/ short season mature in 60-80 days. Mid-season mature in 80-100 days. Storage/late season mature in 100-130 days."

-Western North Carolina Farm and Garden Calendar: The Farming and Gardening Survival Book by Nancy Shirley, 2012. Good for all eastern states (United States) in hardiness zones 5, 6, 7.