

# The Way Potatoes Go

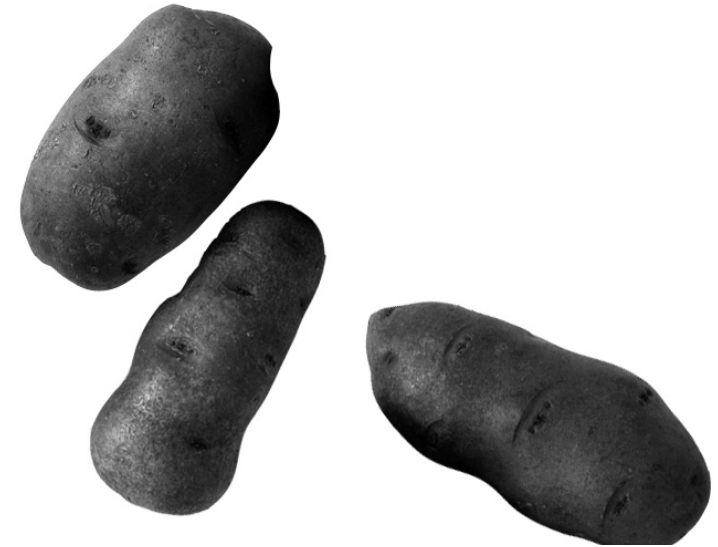
A potato-perspective on an American Matter

By Åsa Sonjasdotter

By Åsa Sonjasdotter  
For EATLACMA  
Curated by Fallen Fruit  
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For information on related potato-perspectives: [www.potatoperspective.org](http://www.potatoperspective.org), [www.kenoshapotato.com](http://www.kenoshapotato.com), [www.andes.org](http://www.andes.org),  
[www.seedsavers.org](http://www.seedsavers.org) and [www.eatlacma.org](http://www.eatlacma.org).



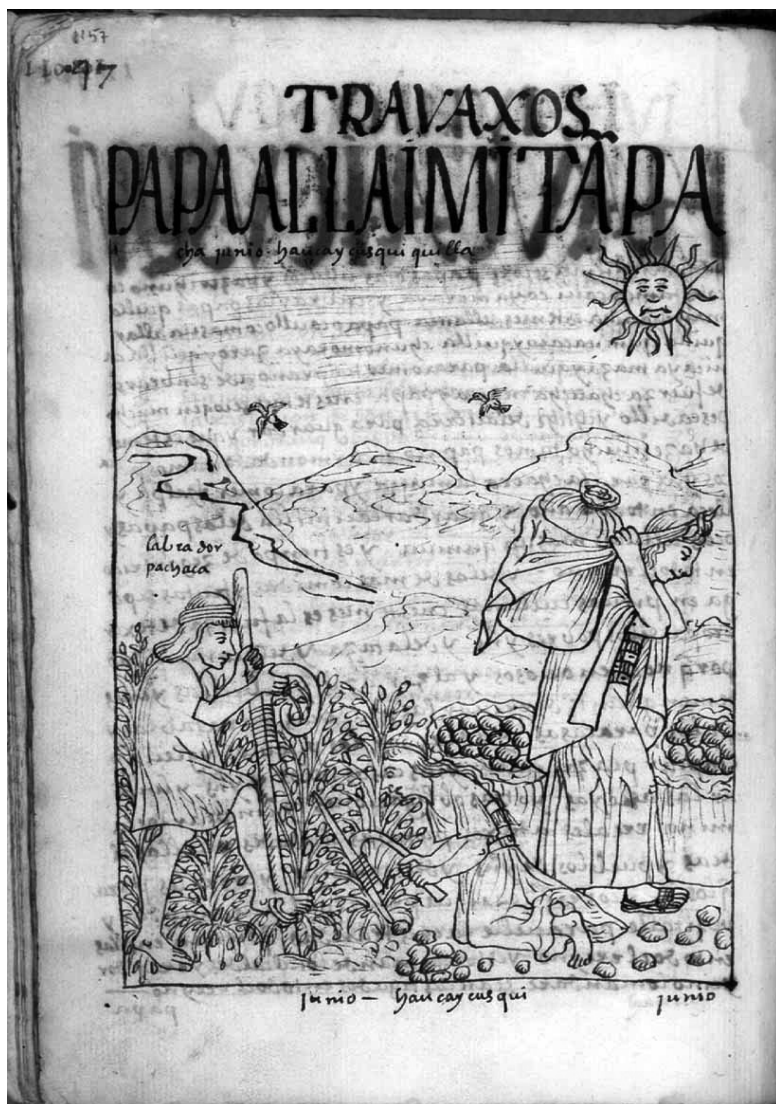
## All Blue

Origin or earliest documented:  
Bolivia, South America

Legal Status:  
South American traditional heirloom variety.  
Bred before the notion of commodification of plants was  
conceived. Belongs to The Cultural Common.

Characteristics:  
Round or oval tubers. Skin and flesh is dark blue/mauve. The  
potato has high dry matter and fries and mashes well but does  
not boil well because it is fluffy and disintegrates. It is sen-  
sitive to scurf and needs quite a lot of water when growing.

Other: Blaue Schweden, Congo are other names for this variety.

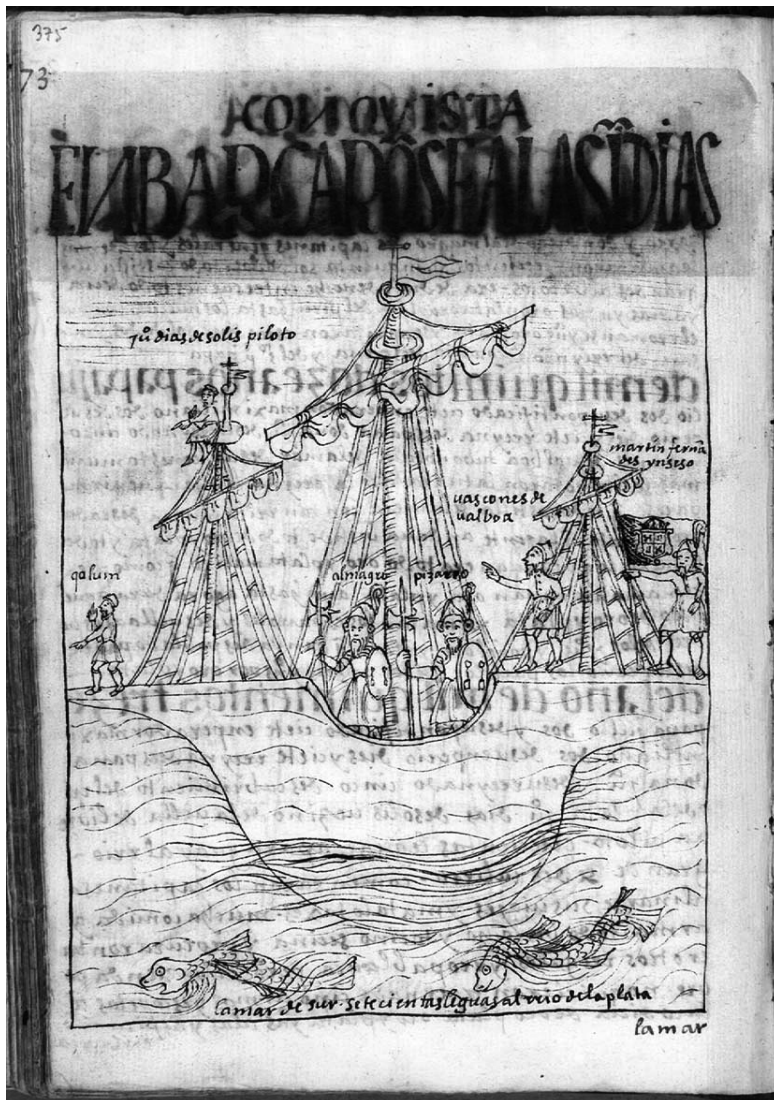


Potato harvesting with foot-plough and hoe, June, Nueva Coronica y Buen Gobierno, Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala 1600 - 1615, Peru.



Conquista Milagro del Santiago, Nueva Coronica y Buen Gobierno, Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala 1600 - 1615, Peru.





The voyages of New World discovery and conquest: Christopher Columbus, Juan Díaz de Solís, Diego de Almagro, Francisco Pizarro, Vasco Núñez de Balboa and Martín Fernández de Enciso, *Nueva Cronica y Buen Gobierno*, Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala 1600 - 1615, Peru.



## Ozette

Origin or earliest documented:

Obtained by Makah Indians of the Neah Bay Tribe from Spanish explorers from South America in 1791.

Legal status:

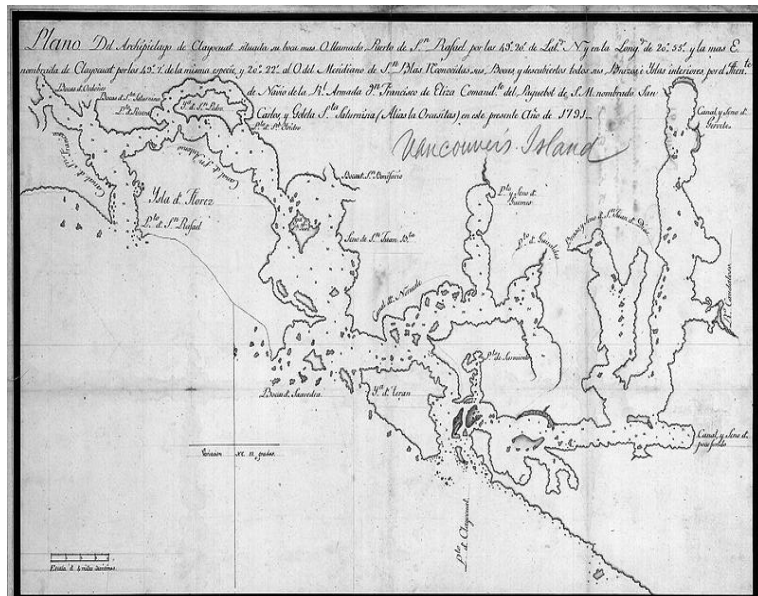
South American traditional heirloom variety. Bred before the notion of commodification of plants was conceived. Belongs to The Cultural Common.

Characteristics:

It is considered a fingerling potato, as its size ranges from 3-7 inches in length and 0.75-1.5 inches in diameter. The potato has an earthy and nutty flavor that is similar to the taste of cooked dry beans, with a firm flesh and very creamy texture.

Other:

In 2006, a partnership between the Slow Food Seattle chapter, the Makah Nation, the Seattle chapter Chefs Collaborative, several farmers, and a laboratory that produces potato seed for the USDA was formed to increase the production and promotion of this variety.



The indirect contact with Europeans had a devastating effect on the lives of Makah people. Thousands of tribal members died from epidemics of smallpox, tuberculosis, influenza and whooping cough, thus leaving large gaps in families. The unexplained loss of their family members causes the Makah unfathomable grief, confusion and fear. Due to this, the transfer of traditional knowledge was disrupted causing many of the old ways to be lost. Successive outbreaks of smallpox reduced the southernmost villages in 1852, striking just before the signing of the Treaty of Neah Bay.

Native Peoples of the Olympic Peninsula: Who We Are, ed. Jacilee Wray. Norman, 2002. Picture: Spanish map of Clayoquot Sound. One page of an atlas, was prepared during Francisco Eliza's 1791 expedition to examine Bucareli Sound. Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division.



## Pink Fir Apple

Origin or earliest documented:  
Central Europe, 1850s

Legal status:  
Traditional land race variety.  
Bred before the notion of commodification of plants was conceived. Belongs to The Cultural Common.

Characteristics:  
Long irregularly growing tubers with pink skin and light yellow flesh. Considered a delicacy, it is excellent for salad and can preferably be eaten with the skin on. Remarkably long cultivating period with a relatively small yield. Can be stored for long a time.

Other:  
Pink Fir Apple is one of the oldest varieties bred in Europe after the plant came to the continent from South America. Its origin is unknown, but it has been cultivated in various European countries since at least 1850.

However it is prepared, this root is tasteless and starchy. One would not include it among the agreeable foods, but it does provide plentiful and sufficiently healthful nourishment for men who do not require more than sustenance. The potato is correctly held for flatulence; but what is flatulence to the vigorous digestions of peasants and workers?

*L'Encyclopédie, Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert, 1751 - 1777.*



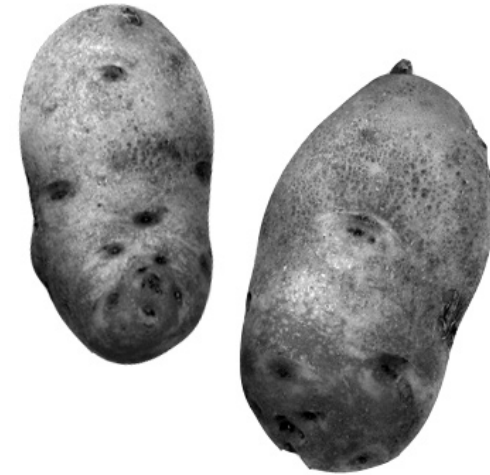
*The Potato Eaters, Vincent Van Gogh, 1885*





With the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, demand for cheap food increased sharply in Europe. Factory owners wanted an economical means of feeding their workers while retaining their workers' productivity. The potato was the perfect remedy and came into increasing demand, since it contains considerable food energy, gives a high yield and yet is very easy to cultivate.

*Collections.ic.gc.ca*



## King Edward

Origin or earliest documented:  
UK, late 1900s

### Legal status:

Breeder unknown.

Bred before the European Plant Variety Protection Act was instated. Belongs to The Cultural Common.

### Characteristics:

The tubers are oval to long oval, small, with parti-coloured red/white skin, cream flesh and shallow eyes. The skin is white with pink coloration, cream to pale yellow flesh with a floury texture. Historically popular variety with a delicious taste.

### Other:

Because of its sensitivity to diseases, commercial producers rarely cultivate it.



*Edward VII Albert Edward, King of the United Kingdom and the British Dominions and Emperor of India from 1901 to 1910.*



## Lumpers

Origin or earliest documented:  
Ireland, early 1800s

Legal status:  
Traditional land race variety.  
Bred before the notion of commodification of plants was conceived. Belongs to The Cultural Common.

Characteristics:  
Medium - large 'lumpy-shaped' tubers with white skin and white flesh.

Other:  
Is infamous for its vulnerability to blight which caused the Irish potato famine in the 1840s.





What became known as The Great Famine was one of the greatest catastrophes of the nineteenth century. It resulted in the deaths of millions of people from starvation and disease and a decline in Ireland's population through emigration. It was thought by many to be an English induced famine used by a greedy government to solve the Irish question. The potato failed from blight but the country was full of food, which was taken away from those who grew it, to be consumed by the expanding workforce of the industrial boom in England or by its army overseas.

Brian Warfield, *The Wolf Tones*. Picture: Emigrants Leave Ireland, engraving by Henry Doyle from Mary Frances Cusack's *Illustrated History of Ireland*, 1868



### Cow Horns

Origin or earliest documented:  
Norh-America, early 1800's

Legal status:  
Norh-American traditional land race variety.  
Bred before the notion of commodification of plants was conceived. Belongs to The Cultural Common.

Characteristics:  
Late-season. Fingerling tubers with pointed tips, dark-purple skin and dry, mealy, white flesh. Good storage. Excellent resistance to common scab and late blight. Maturity is mid-to-late and it is low yielding. It is a heritage variety with uncertain origins. It has been grown in New York State since before 1853.

Other:  
Cownhorn is also known by the synonyms Purple Cownhorn and Seneca Cownhorn. There is some speculation that it might be identical to La Crotte d'Ours (Bear Poop), a Canadian heritage variety, thought to have roots in Scotland.



The first potatoes in Idaho were planted by a Presbyterian missionary, Henry Harmon Spalding. Spalding established a mission at Lapwai in 1836 to bring Christianity to the Nez Perce Indians. He wanted to demonstrate that they could provide food for themselves through agriculture rather than hunting and gathering. His first crop was a failure, but the second year the crop was good. After that, the potato growing ended for a number of years because the Indians massacred the people of a nearby mission, so Spalding left the area.

*History of Potato, Linda Stradley, 2004. Picture: Nez Perce encampment, Lapwai, Idaho, July 4, ca. 1899, Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture.*



"We all camped in our wagons the first summer, but we all got homes built by winter; these houses were built in the present meetinghouse lot in a fort. I spent the summer working on ditches, canton roads, and hauling poles and wood from the canyon. I raised thirty-three bushels of potatoes, which is all that was raised in Franklin that summer except for a few onions."

This is the first recorded planting of potatoes in Idaho. In the river valleys, where water was easily diverted, and with the rich volcanic-ash soil, the settlers raised a few more potatoes than they needed and found that the extra potatoes resulted in a good cash crop. From this small beginning, Idaho's farmers set out on the conquest of the potato markets of the United States.

*William Goforth Nelson, early settler in Franklin, Idaho. [www.potatoexpo.com](http://www.potatoexpo.com)*



The discovery of gold in Idaho was of utmost importance to the growth of the potato industry. Much of the early potato production was used to feed miners and fields of potatoes were grown to accommodate the men in lead, gold and silver camps.

[www.foodreference.com](http://www.foodreference.com)



## Garnet Chile

Origin or earliest documented:

Bred by reverend Chauney E. Goodrich in New York 1853.

Legal status:

Bred before the Plant Patent Act of 1930. Belongs to The Cultural Common.

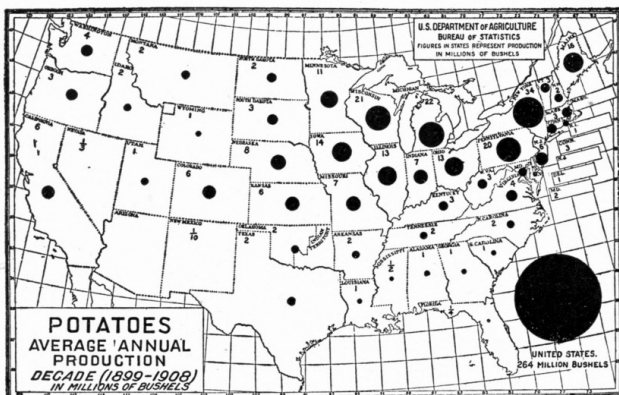
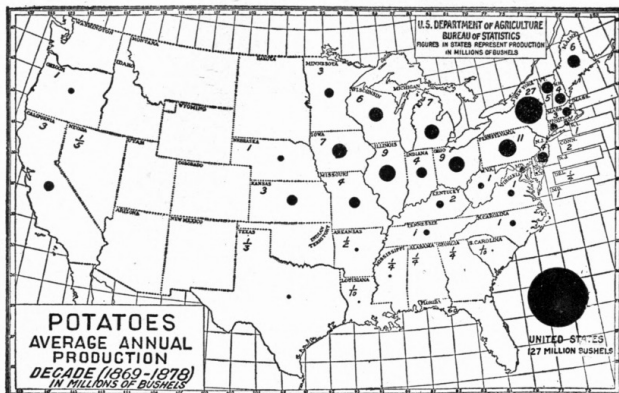
Characteristics:

Late-season. Round tubers with light-red skin and moist, firm, white flesh. Good storage. Good resistance to scab. Large, tall plants.

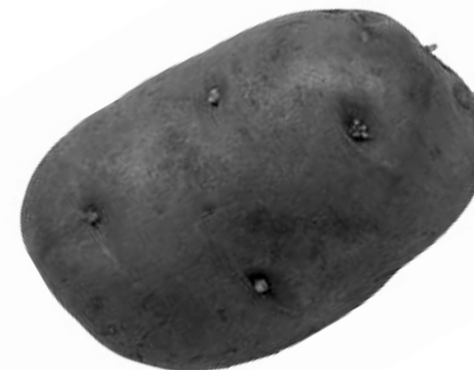
Other:

Perhaps the most influential variety in North American potato growing. Garnet Chile is a seedling of the Rough Purple Chile procured by Goodrich from South America in 1851, in an attempt to stave off the then on-going problem of potato degeneration. Off-spring of the Garnet Chili subsequently produced a vast percentage of the most successful potato varieties of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries such as Early Rose and Russet Burbank.





Graphic map showing production of potatoes in the United States



## Early Rose

Origin or earliest documented:  
Bred by Albert Bresee in New York 1857.

Legal status:  
Bred before the Plant Patent Act of 1930. Belongs to The Cultural Common.

Characteristics:  
Tubers are flattened oval, rather regular, shallow to half-sunken eyes, distributed over the whole surface of the tuber, pale pink skin, white flesh, sometimes rosy vascular ring. Grows well in a variety of soil types.

Other:  
Early Rose was the first commercially produced variety in the US. Bresee got the astounding sum of 1000 dollars per pound for the true seeds of the plant from the seed company B.K Bliss. This cultivar was widely grown under a variety of names such as Antwerp, Boston Market, Chicago Market, Clark's No. 1 until the 1960s, when new, high yield cultivars were introduced.

## CHAPTER I

### IMPORTANCE OF THE POTATO

**D**URING the season of 1911-1912 the United States has imported large quantities of potatoes from Europe. The crop of 1911 was a good many million bushels short of the needs of the nation.

This situation causes the thoughtful student of the food problem to ask why we do not grow more potatoes. Have we not a sufficient area suited to the crop? or is the average production per acre too low, and if so, can it be increased?

A potato shortage is apt to result in this country any year that weather or soil conditions are unfavorable in our principal producing districts.

We can and must grow more and better potatoes. There are good undeveloped districts that can produce a large tonnage, and by better methods of propagation and cultivation the yield on areas now in the crop can be very greatly increased.

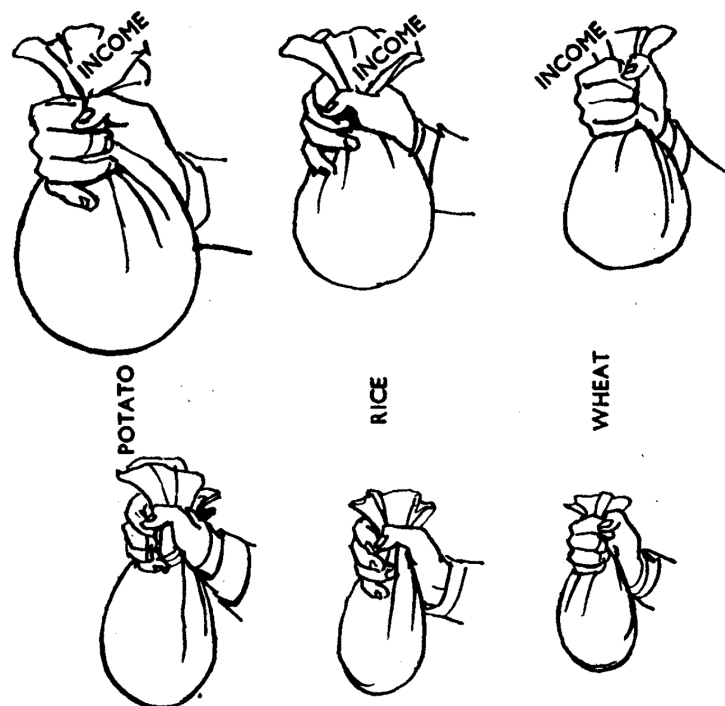
The potato comprises about 25 per cent. of the food of European and English-speaking people. Only the Oriental races exist without it. If the potato crop of Europe should fail, famine would result, as it did in Ireland between 1840 and 1850. More pounds of the potato are produced than of any other food crop in the world.



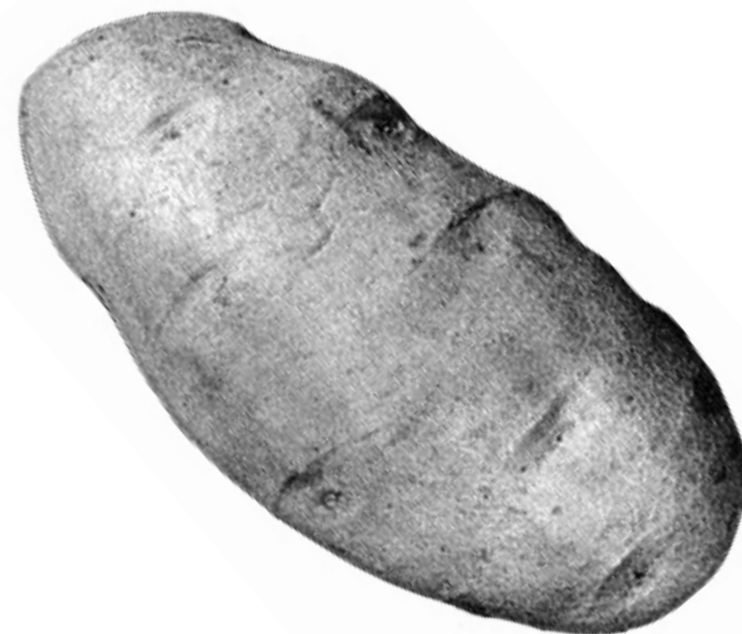
Illustration shows desirable and undesirable types of potatoes before paring



Same potatoes after paring. At the left is shown Dalmeny Challenge potato. The unpared tuber weighed 13.4 oz. and the parings 1.7 oz., or 12.6 per cent. In the centre is shown the McCormick potato. The unpared tuber weighed 13.9 oz., and the parings 3.2 oz., or 23.2 per cent. At the right is shown Red Peachblow potato. The unpared tuber weighed 9.5 oz., and the parings 1.2 oz., or 12.4 per cent.



EXPENDITURE EXPENDITURE EXPENDITURE  
 Fig—10. Relative expenditure and income per unit land  
 due to potato, rice and wheat.



### Burbank Potato

Origin or earliest documented:

Bred/found by Luther Burbank in Massachusetts between 1872 and 1874.

Legal status:

Bred before the Plant Patent Act of 1930 was legislated.  
 Belongs to The Cultural Common.

Characteristics:

High yielding, uniform, stores well, a good processing potato.

Other:

This potato launched the plant breeding career of the nation's most famous plant breeder, Luther Burbank. In May 1872, Burbank happened upon a ripening seed ball on an 'Early Rose' potato plant in his truck patch. From the berry, he grew 23 seedlings. In 1875 Burbank sold his interest in the best white potato to a seedman who did him the honor of naming the new potato 'The Burbank Potato'. By 1900, the commercial value of the Burbank potato was \$17 million annually.



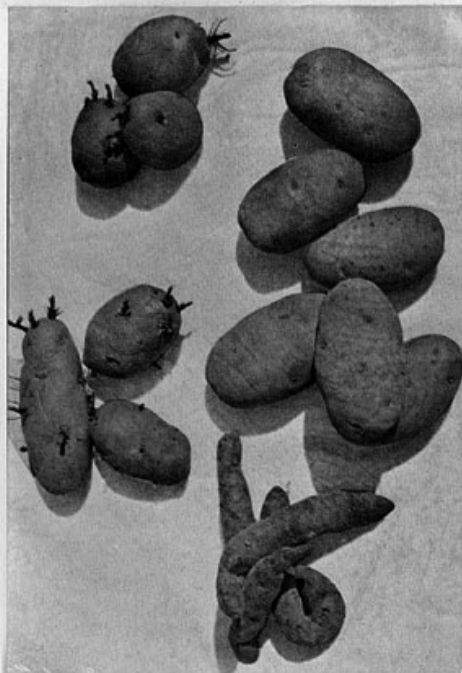
"There are without doubt some human beings in every nation, who, according to our present standards of civilization are truly civilized, but grave doubts may be entertained as to any community or any nation who could in any way measure up even to this standard scale of life, where we find more and more ~freedom~, but even man today is far from free. Slaves yet to war, crime and ignorance --- the only 'unpardonable sin.' Slaves to unnumbered ancient 'taboos,' superstitions, prejudices and fallacies, which one by one are slowly but surely weakening under the clear light of the morning of science; the savior of mankind. Science which has opened our eyes to the vastness of the universe and given us light, truth and freedom from fear where once was darkness, ignorance and superstition. There is no personal salvation, there is no national salvation, except through science."

*Why I am an infidel, Luther Burbank,  
American Atheist Magazine, 22 December 1903.*



#### *Variable Potato Seedlings*

*While the tomato has been so thoroughly fixed in a few decades that many varieties reproduce true to seed, its cousin, the potato, as explained in Chapter II, runs into wonderful variations when its seed is planted. The potato seedlings pictured here are some which were grown from the seed in the potato seed balls shown on page 57.*



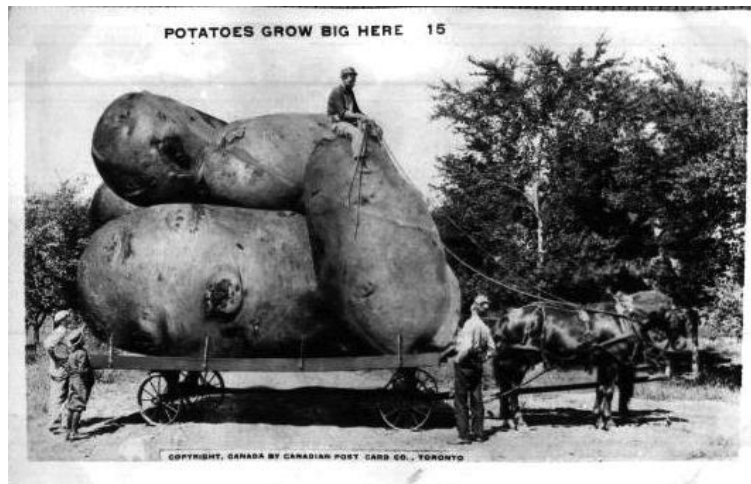
#### *Some Potato Seedlings*

A direct color photograph print of different kinds of potatoes produced from a single potato seed ball. It will be seen that while all of these potatoes are small, some are more shapely than others and at the bottom of the picture will be seen a common variation of tubers known as "snake potatoes." These forms represent different stages in the history of the potato and almost any potato seed ball will give variations as wide or wider than these.



#### *The Burbank Potato*

An improvement in one of the most important crops which, as has been stated by a member of the United States Department of Agriculture, is adding seventeen million dollars a year to the farm incomes of America alone, to say nothing of foreign countries. This potato was produced by Mr. Burbank when in his teens, and was the result of finding a seed ball on his mother's potato patch. The perfection of this potato involved no form of crossing or hybridization, but was brought about solely through utilizing the forces of environment and heredity—and by careful selection.



## Russet Burbank

### Origin or earliest documented:

Potato grower Leon Sweet, Denver, found the sport in his field 1914.

### Legal status:

Bred before the Plant Patent Act of 1930. Belongs to The Cultural Common.

### Characteristics:

Tubers are large, uniform, long and cylindrical or slightly flattened with russeted skin. Their eyes are shallow and the flesh is white. Late maturing, requires a 140 to 150 day growing season to produce maximum yields and quality. Yields are moderately high.

The 'Russet Burbank' potato is prized for processing. When used for making potato chips, it results in a dark-colored chip due to caramelization, its sugar content being higher than average. Potatoes mature in about 110 days from planting the seed pieces. It is sensitive to diseases and requires a high amount of pesticide.

Other: McDonald's buys more than 3 billion pounds of potatoes annually, most of which is Russet Burbank.





Last year, Americans chowed down about 5 billion pounds of french fries. Most of those fries came from Northwest-grown Russet Burbanks, the favorite potato of fast-food restaurants. Characterized by their oblong shape and dark-tan skin, Russet Burbanks also make good baked potatoes. Nearly all the potatoes grown in Idaho, our number one spud-producing state, are Russet Burbanks. Idaho, Washington, and Oregon together produced half of the nation's \$2 billion potato crop last year.

*Julie Corliss, Agricultural Research, April 1, 1991*

McDonald's is searching for a potato that needs fewer pesticides and less water, but whose texture and taste, when fried, pleases customers. Because McDonald's buys more than 3 billion pounds of potatoes annually around the globe, it has the power to dictate whether a variety sprouts or winds up in the less-lucrative supermarket freezer's crinkle-cut bin - or worse yet, banished to become dehydrated taters. "It's a card game, where McDonald's holds nine-tenths of the cards," said Jeanne Debons, the Potato Variety Management Institute's director.

The institute was established in 2005 by the Idaho, Oregon and Washington potato commissions to handle licensing and royalties from new potatoes developed at universities and federal research facilities in the three states. An unwritten ambition: to get new potato varieties looked at by McDonald's.

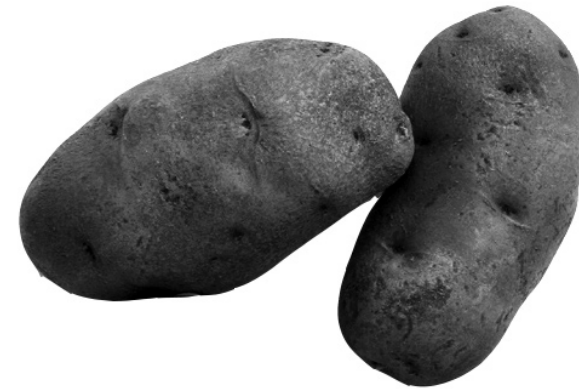
The company still relies on the Russet Burbank for many of its fries, even though this 130-year-old variety takes an eternity to mature, gulps water and falls victim to rots and other diseases, meaning farmers must douse it in chemicals. Socially conscious investors want McDonald's to help cut pesticides to protect the environment and farmworker health. Still, coming up with a spud stud is no mean feat: Russet Burbanks, with robust storage qualities, consistent texture and taste, remain Mickey D's mainstay, though this variety brought west by Massachusetts botanist Luther Burbank in 1875 is costly to produce.

*The next super spud, John Miller, Associated Press, October 3, 2009*



McCain Foods Limited is the largest French fry producer in the world, claiming a global market share of almost 33%.

[www.potatopro.com](http://www.potatopro.com)



## All Red

### Origin or earliest documented:

Bred by independent breeder Robert Lobitz, Paynesville, Minnesota and released through Seed Savers Exchange in about 1984.

### Legal status:

Robert Lobitz has made the enlightened decision of sharing his breed instead of taking royalties for it. Therefore, the variety belongs to The Cultural Common, even though it was bred after the Plant Variety Protection Act of 1970 was legislated.

### Characteristics:

Brilliant red skin and pinkish-red flesh, smooth skin and shallow eyes. Medium to large round tubers. Red inside and out. By far the best producing of the reds. A surprising basketful under each plant. Makes a very attractive potato salad and is delicious steamed or boiled. A really big midseason potato, with tall robust plants about eighteen to twenty-two inches high.

### Other:

This variety is sold by several seed companies under the name Cranberry Red.



Seed Savers Exchange was founded in 1975 by Diane Ott Whealy and Kent Whealy to honor this tradition of preserving and sharing. Today, the 890-acre Heritage Farm, Decorah, Iowa, is our home -- and Seed Savers Exchange is the largest non-governmental seed bank in the United States. We permanently maintain more than 25,000 endangered vegetable varieties, most having been brought to North America by members' ancestors who immigrated from Europe, the Middle East, Asia and other parts of the world. Unlike Fort Knox, Heritage Farm is not surrounded by security fences and guards. Our perimeter is patrolled by Bald Eagles, red-tailed hawks, deer, raccoons and other wildlife.

Seed Savers Exchange is a non-profit, member supported organization that saves and shares the heirloom seeds of our garden heritage, forming a living legacy that can be passed down through generations. Our loyal SSE members have distributed an estimated 1 million samples of rare garden seeds since our founding nearly 35 years ago. Those seeds now are widely used by seed companies, small farmers supplying local and regional markets, chefs and home gardeners and cooks, alike.

[www.seedsavers.org](http://www.seedsavers.org)



## Ajunhuirii

Origin or earliest documented:  
The Andes, South America

Legal Status:  
Not registered on a National Variety List.

Characteristics:  
Semi-wild species

Other:  
In the valley of Ajawiri Marka, Western Bolivia, abundant weedy and cultivated forms of *Solanum Ajunhuirii* grow in close association. The farming practices of Aymara subsistence cultivators facilitate recombination between wild and cultivated gene pools. Farmers maintain potato varieties and distinguish various cultivars, varying from 10 to 32 cultivars per household. In general, Altiplano farmers are disposed to experiment with new varieties, which are grown for two years and evaluated for survivability, yield and culinary quality and then either accepted or discarded.

On-going evolution of the potato on the Antiplano of Western Bolivia, Johns, Keen, 1986.





A new agreement between six indigenous communities and the International Potato Centre in Cusco, Peru, heart of the old Inca civilization in the Andes mountains of Latin America, recognizes the right of these communities over the unique potato strains that they have developed and grown.

The new agreement "means that Andean communities can unlock the potato gene bank and repatriate biological diversity to farming communities and the natural environment for local and global benefit," ANDES says in a statement. The new agreement, called the "agreement on the repatriation, restoration and monitoring of agro-biodiversity of native potatoes and associated community knowledge systems", will challenge the trend of "privatising genetic resources and indigenous knowledge which has seen seed gene banks swallowed up by unaccountable research bodies and corporations, threatening local livelihoods and cultural ways of life," ANDES says in its statement.

Potato Capital of the world offers up new recipe, *IPS*, Sanjay Suri, London, Jan 18, 2005. [Andes.org.pe](http://Andes.org.pe)

