

Bumper harvest!

The main crop potato (variety Desiree) yielded exceptionally high yields this year. I was able to fill two large buckets, one of which was brought to school and stood in a corner for pupils to take a "potato bag home". We ended up with over 400 pounds of potatoes for just 4 square meter of land, that's the equivalent of 50 tons per hectare, the absolute top yield for British soil, and all this without pesticides and mineral fertiliser. It has to be said that the soil was rested, the allotment hadn't been used for a while and the soil was full of goodness. If we would keep growing crops on the same spot without fertilisers, the yields will go down very quickly. Also, we had a very nice summer with a bit of rain on a regular basis. Potatoes need plenty of water, and a wet summer is ideal for them (not too wet, though).



Few people realise how productive potato crops can be. When they were introduced to Europe, it led to an immediate knock-on effect on population growth, because they provided more calories than cabbage, turnips, parsnips, barley, wheat and oats together. Regretfully, this dependence on potatoes also led to disasters when the crop failed on a large scale due to poor experience with crop pests, and this led to the big Irish escape to the new world.

In developed countries with temperate climate, yields in excess of 50 tons per hectare during just 5 months growth can be achieved, and high starch varieties can contain up to 35% of starch per fresh-weight. Due to the short growing period, potatoes are excellent for standard crop rotation practices, which is essential for sustainable production. However, on a worldwide scale, potato production plays only a minor role in human nutrition. People prefer to eat rice, corn, and wheat-derived products (bread, pasta, pizza). But if we need more food, potatoes can become more important again. Very few crops get anywhere near the yield of a well-maintained potato field.



This year was an excellent start to the allotment project. I hope we will have the same amount of dedication and enthusiasm during the next year. How do you like the looks of these beans? I have a whole collection with different colours. They can be started off in the class room, hardened in the play ground, and then planted on the allotment.

Best wishes,

Jurgen