

The DILETTANTE GARDENER[®]

Issue No 13..... June 2011

and incorporating

The Dilettante Cook



EARTH TO EARTH

Keen amateur gardener Rod MacLennan examines healthy tub growing Duke of York potatoes at Seacrest. Rod was unlucky enough to be gifted a trailer load of the Dow Chemical Herbicide *Forefront* contaminated dung in the spring of 2010.

Luckily Rod heeded given advice and did not use any of the Aminopyralid soaked manure on his ground but instead 'put it (the infected dung) to the test'.

According to the Dow Chemical bump, if infected dung is left in a midden to out-winter the toxicity of the manure is greatly reduced.

As an experiment this spring, Rod used some of the dung from the midden on one short drill of early potatoes. Within weeks the tatties had that grotesque twisted look about them, (this was illustrated in earlier editions of the *Dilettante Gardener & Cook*.) Rod left the contaminated spuds in the ground for a month more before digging them up. In addition he cleared out all the soil and dung residue from the drill site. Whilst doing this he was struck by the total lack of earthworms where he was working. Next he turned over

several forkfuls of dung in the midden, worms? None!

Whilst the aminopyralid manufacturers claim to take great care over preserving the bee and insect population in the countryside, one must ask if they gave the same consideration to the preservation of the humble but essential, earthworm?



Earthworms are the world's unsung heroes. They loosen and mix up the soil, break down and recycle decaying plant matter and fertilise the soil by bringing nutrients closer to the surface, and birds often rely upon

worms as a primary source of food. Because earthworms breathe through their skin, they have to come to the surface when it rains or risk drowning.

So do they (the worms) breathe the toxic Aminopyralid through their skins in contaminated ground? If they do, then are all farmer's pastures treated with *Forefront* being deprived of the beneficial burrower's free labours, and are our feathered friends, especially at nesting time, being starved of their natural diet? This needs redressing pronto. Ed.

GATHERING THE 'TATTIES'

Gathering the 'tatties' was, when I was just a loon, one of two opportunities we in our rural environs to earn a few extra shillings. Local farmers would provide drivers with tractors towing trailers to convey gatherers to the various farms, all some miles away.

No such thing in those days as Health and Safety, nor minimum wages etc. however there were very few accidents and few complaints, other than towards the gaffers for 'hashing' the pickers with extra long stages and oft times two diggers working the drills. Times have changed and now the only gath-



4 3/4 Lb D.o.Y. Early Potatoes

ering we have is a few spuds, when they are ready, from our plastic tubs.

Such is our intent today. Morag and I will be keeping our fingers crossed that the first two tubs planted on the 15th of February will prove to be rewards, both in content and flavour.

Its an apprehensive time until the first shaws are pulled and finally the tub is emptied on a plastic sheet, or similar. This afternoon we upturned the first of our six tubs and harvested a nett weight of 4 3/4 pounds of largely clean Duke of York 'earlies.'

MORE GARDENERS QUESTION *FOREFRONT*

Reports from amateur gardeners have been aired on a number of web sites about failed crops, especially strawberries. Most have attributed the blame to contaminated dung or straw. Apparently the materials were secured from different sources and at different locations throughout mainland England. Then applied to vegetable and fruit beds.

Here at Seacrest Morag and I transplanted 12 hanging baskets with strawberries that were raised last summer, before we became aware of the devastating effect that Dow Chemicals *Forefront*, containing Aminopyralid, had on a huge number of plants and bushes. We believed that if we washed out the new plant roots and bedded them in fresh top quality compost the plants would be safe. What a hope, that crap seems to be active in the plants and soil for an extended period.

The end result we achieved was only two plants produced any fruit and then of poor quality.

In addition we, along with several gardening friends, have experienced complete failure of germination amongst a variety of flower seeds sown in trays, for summer bedding. One lady asked was it possible the seed suppliers were using contaminated dung to nurture the mother plants? I cannot answer.

What a pity the majority SNP Government of Scotland, aided by the recently elected SNP MSP Rab Gibson, is not taking a closer look at what may be happening to our countryside, right under their noses. What will it take to make people realise that the continued use of the Dow herbicide could prove to be a damning legacy?

The Dilettante Cook

(With a vision towards self-sufficiency)

RABBIT STEW....For Two

As a 78 year old pensioner I find myself 'living in the past' more often than not. There are times when I dwell in thought at least, as far back as the late 1930s and like many other ancients I say, "Ah, those were the days."

On these pages, my wee publication is supposed to dwell on cooking, so reminiscing about my childhood may have to wait. However even after 78 years have passed on I can still imagine I can smell mother's rabbit stew. As already published my father trapped wild rabbits for his livelihood, so rabbits cooked in one form or another was the staple diet when things were tight. (And they often were.)

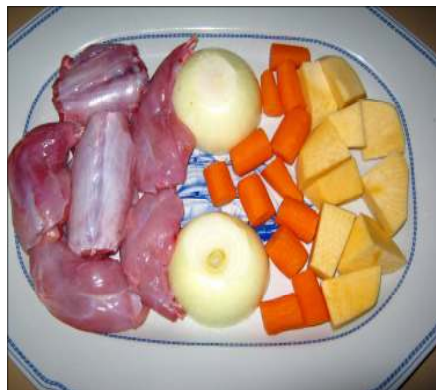
In the early 50s myxomatosis decimated the rabbit population in the UK and the state of the animal's suffering put many people off eating them. I was not one of them and I really do enjoy rabbit cooked in almost any fashion.

Luckily Morag and I have a friend, Bob Davidson, who lives in Aberdeen-shire and has access to rabbit, game and fish, when in season. Two Saturdays ago he telephoned to say he had a dozen fresh rabbits 'in the skin' for me. We met up at Nairn the following day and swapped various

items of food. When I got back to Seacrest I found there was a 'baker's dozen' of rabbits in the hamper which I duly skinned. All but one were this year's progeny.



The recipe is one handed down from my late mother is the one she used when I was a toddler.



First catch your rabbit (or buy it) normally bought rabbit will be quartered. Next pop a heavy pan on the heat and add a drop of oil or a daub or two of lard or dripping, heat to 'smoking' then roll the rabbit cuts in flour and toss in the pan until sealed. Add an onion plus swede and carrot, splash in some hot water and season. Don't waste the flour residue, mix it with a little cold water and add it to the pan's content. It makes the finished stew nice and thick. (By the way there are choice cuts from 2 rabbits in the illustration.) The balance has been used for another rabbit based dish featured on the next page. Perhaps I will be allowed to say just how much Morag and I enjoyed the rabbit stew, the meat was tender and tasty and along



with the vegetables very satisfying. For readers who may wonder how we can eat such cute bunnies, we are country bred and in no way squeamish.

The Dilettante Cook

(With a vision towards self-sufficiency)

GRANNY ROSS' POTTED RABBIT

Along with rabbit stew mother was very adept at inventing different ways to cook the humble Coney. Now I am not suggesting that she was responsible for discovering the potted rabbit dish but she did make a good job of it.

Usually the forequarters of the animals were utilised for the end result. Lets not forget that as far as the Highland cottar was concerned, domestic refrigeration was not invented, so dishes were made to last as long as possible and still be edible days thereafter. One of the ways employed was to make sure plenty of salt was used in each dish.

So the method was simple, place the off-cuts in a pan of cold water, add onions to taste plus salt and pepper. A good Hough bone or similar was essential to ensure that the finished product 'set.'

Boil the whole lot up for the best part of two hours, then test whether the meat will 'fall of the bones', if so take the meat off the heat and allow to cool sufficiently to handle. Lift



out the carcase and thoroughly bone, set the meat aside. Strain the bree into a bowl and set aside. Separate the onion from any residue, then mince the meat along with the onion before placing it back in the pan and just cover it with part of the bree. Stir and pour it into a pie dish or similar to set firmly. The potted meat can be served either with vegetables or spread on toast, bread or rolls. Traditionally potted rabbit was both salty and peppery.

I am afraid that under today's restrictions Hough bones may be hard to obtain. There are however alternatives, you can use gelatine, but if you do you must be careful to add the gelatine after the mixture has come off the boil, or you can use vege gel. It is safe to add when you put the final mix back into the pan to heat up.

This simple recipe can be applied to all meats, although beef and/or mutton needs to be pretty lean to be palatable when eaten cold.

Before I forget, if you boil a turkey leg with the rabbit it makes a good setting jelly mix and blends very well as both meats are

Published by Scottfab Osprey Publishing, 'Seacrest', Barbaraville, Ross-shire, Scotland.

Editor Euilleam Ross © waived unless stated otherwise. Copying Encouraged
Scottfab-Osprey Publications is a Voluntary Non Profit Making Scottish Organisation