

THE MYSTERY OF GARDENING AT PATRIOTS COLONY

The 2016 Winter Edition of the Patriots Press contained an article titled "FARMING VS GARDENING." As the title suggests and the article supports, they are not the same. The new garden had just been completed, the gardening committee allowed me to have a plot, and I confirmed that having been a farmer does not make you a gardener. My attempt at a fall crop of beets, beans, radishes, and particularly sweet corn just did not work well at all. But I enjoyed it. I looked forward to turning over the soil and planting in the spring. I did that – once again beets, radishes (red this time), carrots, sweet corn, and I added tomatoes and potatoes.

Results this time were mixed. The seeds seemed to take forever to sprout, but when they did, I was careful to thin them according to the directions, stake up the tomato plants, and water and fertilize regularly. I knew I would be successful, but it just did not happen. I had four potato seeds that produced excellent new potatoes. I had two tomato plants that produced delicious tomatoes, but most of them had concentric, scabby looking circles on them which detracted significantly from their appearance and being edible fruit. The sweet corn did beat last year's crop (last year was one-inch ears and one fake [*a joke*] ear) but not by too much. The ears were as big around as your thumb, about 5 to 6 inches long, and limp. Read that as nonedible. The beets were few and not much larger than a thimble or ping pong ball; some radishes were decent sized but pithy and hot; and some carrots were of decent size but not the eight-inch whoppers envisioned. The bottom line seems to be that my success at gardening this spring was better than last fall, but my plot simply did not compare with those of the many professional gardeners who hold plots in the garden.

What to do now? Give up or charge on? In September, Howard Oakley had a meeting of the plot holders and told us it was time to clean up our plots and turn over the soil in preparation for soil testing with the resultant application of supplements, and any fall planting one wanted to do. I decided to charge forward to determine if I could make my gardening experience more rewarding. I removed all the vegetation and attacked the soil turning task with great gusto. Looking back at it, perhaps a bit too much gusto as I was unable to get out of bed the next morning with my usual gusto. But this too shall pass. So, there I am with a well cultivated garden plot just waiting to be planted and produce luscious vegetables for my picking. As usual, I procrastinated on the planting task and it turned out to have been for a reason.

Upon returning to the villa, a message from Howard Oakley was on my telephone asking me if I would like two collard plants that he had no need for. How could I turn that down? Not only did Howard give me the plants but he delivered them to my villa the same day. My guess is Howard, as the Garden Chief, felt a little sorry for me and decided that perhaps I could grow something if he supplied it and told me how to do it. That he did. I was instructed on the depth and interval to plant the two collard plants and told to look at how Bob Sunell and Jack Scholz had planted their collards. Armed with desire, enthusiasm, plants and knowledge, I walked to the garden to start my fall 2017 planting experience.

[Readers need to understand that my corn growing folly became the topic of much advice from the Garden Club hierarchy of Howard, Fred Rueter and Don McConaughy. Not only did I get advice and hints from these three (and sometimes their wives as well), but on more than one occasion they helped me by voluntarily watering my plot when the soil looked too dry, applying an insecticide when appropriate, and overall just being helpful to me in all aspects of gardening.]



As I approached my plot on a dry, very warm Sunday afternoon, something looked different. The soil of about one-third of the plot was a different color than the other two-thirds, it was very dark as if some fresh soil or something had been applied. The other thing I noticed was that an opened and empty packet of radish seeds was rolled up and stuck in the side of the plot. This last find was not unusual, as my plot is near a busy water hose outlet and I have previously found things like a water bottle, a paper 7 cup, and in one case, a pair of sunglasses. Undaunted, I charged on. I did as instructed and looked at how other collard plants had been planted and then selected the location for my two plants at the dark end of the plot. I confidently went on my merry way carefully removing the plants from their container, placing them in holes of the correct depth, bunching the soil around the plant, and indenting a circle in the soil around each plant to aid in what I presume to be a water distribution system. All I knew was that was what Sunell and Scholz had done. With that accomplished, I watered well and left the garden to grow and silently resolved to follow my instructions to water every couple of days.

Two days later, I returned to water the plants and something just didn't look right, again. I noticed there was a tinge of green appearing above the surface of the soil in a few places. I thought no more about it other than to remind myself that, when I watered the next time, I would have to pick the weeds out and not let them get ahead of me. In two days, I dutifully returned and found what you see in the picture below.

You must look carefully to see the five rows of radishes that are just peeking through the ground. Tragically, the two collard plants were planted directly in line with one row, destroying those sprouting seeds. Fortunately, there was minimum disruption to the other four rows. Now that I have figured out that there has been a deliberate planting of radish seeds in my plot by some unknown well-wisher, I must put on my detective cap and find out who to thank. As of the time this story is being written, no stalwart soul at Patriots Colony has approached me wondering if I like my radishes. I can only surmise that one of the following is what happened:

1. Some unknown person saw an empty and inviting plot and decided to plant something.
2. One of the Garden Club hierarchy felt so badly about my successive failures at a vegetable garden that they took it upon themselves to make me a success by planting the radishes. They certainly do look healthy at this time.
3. I planted the radishes and forgot about it. *[Recognized as quite possible.]*

In the last paragraph of last year's article, I resolved to stick with it at least during one normal growing season – but only after receiving advice from Patriots Colony knowledgeable gardeners. The bottom line of last year has been reinforced and remains the same: FARMERS ARE NOT NECESSARILY GARDENERS. And, to make matters worse, the mystery has not been solved.

– **Bob Schweizer** –