



Kevin Milaeger

Milaeger's

Unusual Potatoes---Not Just for Tots Anymore!

Kevin Milaeger

I think it was last year that I reported to you my enthusiasm for a book that was recommended to me by a customer---"Eating on the Wild Side" by Jo Robinson. I think the title is somewhat misleading, for it indicates that foraging might be the main topic, which it is not. The subtitle helps clarify the subject: The Missing Link to Optimum Health. That might be an overstatement, but it is a more precise indicator of the topic, at least. If I were to title it, I might call it "How to Choose the Most Nutritious Vegetables." I like this book a lot and turn to it often, sometimes just for quick reference. I am never disappointed. (We'll have it next week in our stores, by the way.)



Purple Peruvian

Years ago, I became interested in unusual potatoes, having seen them at the huge farmer's market in Madison. When I started to research them



Mountain Rose

(especially in Robinson's book), I learned a few things about the nutritional value of the potato. In general, the most obvious indicator of a nutrient rich potato is color. The darker the color, the more nutrients. According to Robinson, a variety called 'Purple Peruvian' has 28 times more bionutrients than Russet Burbank (by far the most common variety in America), and 166 times more than a commonly grown variety called 'Kennebec White'. Now, these common varieties are

still reasonably nutritious; the problem for many folks is that they are high in sugar, as are many other common potatoes. The more colorful potatoes are often much lower in sugar.

These "other" potatoes have odd shapes and colors that we are not used to. Due to their irregularity, they don't work well for mechanical processing in large quantities. But you can grow them on your own. That's



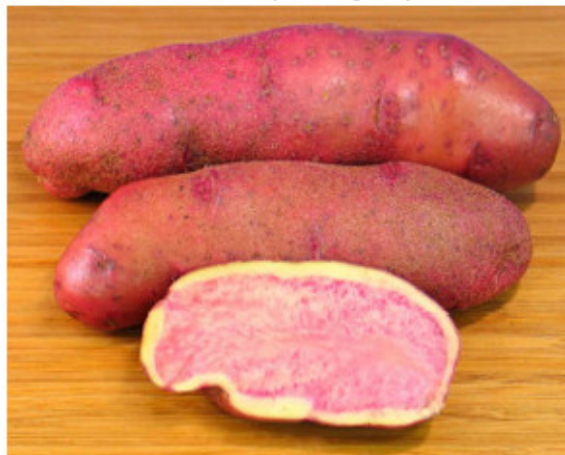
much better than buying them in the store where they might cost \$4 per pound or more. And it's more fun.

This year we will be offering some unusual potatoes, actively growing in pots. If you are planning on growing row after row of potatoes, you'd be better off buying seed potatoes by the pound. These individually potted plants are really just for those who want to try something unusual, without having to make a big production of it. Varieties we are growing this year are 'Purple Peruvian,' 'Mountain Rose,' 'Purple Majesty,' and two fingerling types called



Purple Majesty

'Blossom,' and 'French Fingerling.' [Here is a link](#) to a blog I wrote some time ago that tells you how to grow them. It's called "Taters for Tots"; it was meant to introduce kids to gardening.



Blossom

A couple of things to remember when growing potatoes. When the potatoes start to form underground (this happens when the plants are in flower), the potatoes themselves push upwards, becoming exposed to the light. When this happens you should cover them with soil or straw. You will have to do this more than once as they will continue to grow and push upwards. If you fail to do this the potatoes will have green coloring where they are exposed (most obvious on white skinned varieties), and the potatoes will be toxic. Every plant has some sort of varmint associated with it, and in this case it is the potato beetle. Since you are only growing a few plants you can manage this pest by hand, if you are diligent. Inspect the plants daily for the beetles; remove them and discard them. Look under the leaves for their eggs---little orange clusters. Remove and discard those too. What I like about doing simple chores such as these is that they force you into the garden---that's why it's called gardening---it is supposed to be an active endeavor. You aren't supposed to be sitting in a lawn chair next to your garden, at least not until sundown.



French Fingerling



Potato Beetle

Please email me (kevin@milaegers.com) if you have any questions or comments.

