

VARMINTS FROM THE GARDEN

(Please – FAR, FAR from!)

2015 September potato harvest

Something has been burrowing underground and eating the potatoes. They don't even have the decency to finish off one spud before chewing into all its neighbors! Major loss of crop. Even one of those ground-vibrators didn't discourage them. Even the farm dogs coming into the garden and actively hunting them didn't make much difference. Maybe we should build a comfy cat house, and take in some barn cats?

At least, this year, we didn't lose potatoes to grass rhizomes like we did last year...

2014 – 2015 Winter Feast:

We planted kale, broccoli and chard in the high tunnel for a winter-over crop. Before we could close the ends up, bunnies had eaten all the broccoli. We zipped the ends closed, but the kale still disappeared – evidently, bunnies were crawling under the sides! Nothing bothered the chard except slugs.

Late June 2013 Double-Header:

The Crow That Came to Dinner and the Bunny with the Expanding Waist Line.

THE CROW: Something was nipping the tops off our young pole beans. They were barely four inches high, and some of them were reduced to straight sticks. We at first suspected bunnies, although the usual bunny targets - green peas and cabbages - were untouched. And we couldn't find any bunny holes under the Rabbit Proof Fence. Then, as I approached the garden one day, a crow flew out of the bean area! Strange, but possible – so we stretched Remay cloth over the beans, put out the plastic owl, hoisted the osprey kite. And the crows were very vocal about it! And the bean predation stopped. BUT NOT THE END OF THE STORY – what were crows doing there, anyway? We had ravens nesting nearby, and that usually keeps the crows away. A few days later, as I was checking the strawberries at the other end of the garden, out hops another crow! Full grown, but unable to fly, and very thin and weak. I caught him, packed him off to [West Sound Wildlife Shelter](#), the other crows deserted the garden region, and we took down the Remay. We still have some of the beans, anyway. And it was enlightening that the other crows stayed so long in a danger area, waiting for one of their own. THE FATE OF THE CROW: the crow was diagnosed with soft tissue damage in the shoulder. At the time I am writing, he is still being fed anti-inflammatories. If he can eventually re-learn how to fly, he will be released. Otherwise, they will try to find a position with a licensed animal educator. Failing either of those, he would be euthanized.

THE BUNNY: Patti & Kinley came to harvest, and spooked a bunny out of the strawberries – INSIDE the Rabbit Proof Fence! We had let the grass grow unchecked in one corner of the

garden, underneath the Carolinas Poplar, where the spare field wire was stacked. (We use it for trellising.) Kinley came back the next Saturday with his brush cutter, excavated the wire rolls out onto sawhorses, cut down the faux-jungle grass, and blocked up some obvious crawl-spots along the bottom of the fence. FAST FORWARD TO SATURDAY AFTERNOON – I approached the garden from the strawberry side. A half-grown bunny ran in panic, bashing into the fence, and struggled and twisted (with much shaking of the fence) until he finally forced his little body thru the squares of the wire. I bet, just a few days earlier in his growth, he was fitting through there with ease! But now, he was inside the garden! I went in after him. He dashed and plunged back and forth along the fence where Kinley had blocked off the crawl-spots. One terrified little bunny! I finally cornered him, but as I reached down, hoping not to be nipped, the bunny hysterically scrambled vertically UP the Rabbit Proof Fence until it reached a square it could fit thru, and plunged out of the garden and into the brush! QUESTION: was he scared enough to leave the garden alone? When he's heavier – in a couple of days – will that end the threat of him climbing up the wire again? Would he even TRY climbing the wire, if not in a panic?

Mid-June 2013: the Wilting Pepper Plants, and why EVERYONE loves worm castings!

Laura raised some BEAUTIFUL hot and bell pepper starts for the Giving Garden, and after they were transplanted, they seemed to take hold beautifully. When we emptied out one half of the worm box, we put some of the castings around them. Ideal pepper growing conditions, right? Then two plants in the middle began to wilt. MAJOR wiltage! I thought they might need to be watered in better. But in the process of hydrating them thoroughly, the earth around them started collapsing! Seems that the red worms that remained in the worm castings had burrowed down into the ground, and presented an irresistible feast for the burrowing varmints! So now I saturate and collapse the tunnels about every other day, and the peppers are recovering...

Mid-winter 2012: Vanishing Carrots!

We fostered along a lovely block of carrots in late Summer, including them in one of the small hoop houses for further maturing.



But through the fall and winter, peering down the length of plastic at them, I thought they were looking a bit wilted. Maybe it was too cool for them? Too dry? Then it came time to harvest. Carrot tops! Everything below the ground was eaten off by some small tunneling varmint. Moles? Voles? Mice? Zero carrot crop!

Remembering back to the previous winter, we lost a block of spinach when something burrowed so persistently underneath them, that the plants were rooted in maybe two inches of soil, with another two inches of void below that, running virtually the entire area of the bed! Varmints seem to like hoop houses in winter! Warm, dry...

IDEAS FOR GETTING RID OF VOLES AND MOLES

- Kinley & Patti of Thimbleberry Farm - try a sonic mole chaser.
- Betsey of [Laughing Crow Farm](#)
"Castor oil is suppose to repel them. They sell castor oil based organic repellents at Bainbridge Gardens."
- Harley of [Bow Hill Blueberries](#)
"we use an organic approved method by baiting PVC pipe bait stations with very thin baggies of a mixture (50:50) Plaster of Paris and Corn Meal. This will kill voles and not hurt any predator species that find them as there is not enough of the material to hurt and neither are toxic chemicals. It is not as effective as poisons but much safer. Some say to use white corn meal as it is less likely that smart rodents will pick out the yellow corn meal."
- Florence Garetson -
"Paws has a wonderful Barn cat program.
<http://www.pawsbainbridge.org/programs/barn.html>"