

# Potatoes Ahoy!

By Hannelore Volpe

Behold the lowly spud. It brings delight to the eye, not to mention the tummy.

It's been sung about by Stompin' Tom Connors and figures prominently in Vincent Van Gogh's painting *The Potato Eaters*.

But those potato eaters probably have nothing on the Volpe family.

For a lot of years, a 50 lb. bag of potatoes leaning against the counter was a mainstay in our kitchen. I think it gave my husband Tony a sense of security. He's originally from Monteleone in Italy, where the people were called "mangia patate" - the potato eaters. Before immigrating to Canada, the family had to be reassured that, yes, there are potatoes in Canada!

Those 50 lb. bags, bought from Simpson Produce on Hwy. 48 in Ballantrae, were pretty neat. As well as the bags of perfect potatoes and other produce, we looked forward to buying potatoes that weren't considered perfect. Some bags had such a variety: white, red, and yellow potatoes, some with such interesting shapes heart-shaped or with several protuberances. Maybe slightly slower to peel, but I thought these were the most fun.

Of course, we plant our own potatoes, too. It's one of the joys of life. Before you know it, a few months later, you get to head out to the vegetable patch and start to dig. You can dig out enough potatoes from just one plant for your dinner that evening. Each potato that you unearth is like a little treasure you can hold in your hand.

When my mother-in-law Vincenza was

planting the potatoes at our place, she made the rows straight as an arrow with her zappa (hoe). I often got enlisted to place the potatoes in the rows and then she would gently hill them up, covering them with just enough soil to "senti le campane". That is, to be close enough to the surface so they could hear the nearby church bells!

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In the summers, potatoes of another sort lure us north, ever north - well, 15 minutes north. That's how long it takes us to reach the Rose Family Farm not far from

Ninth Line and Davis Drive. Our destination: their spanking-new chip truck. No plastic bags of pre-packaged skinny potato shapes for this farming family! You'll often see Wilfred or Norma Rose hauling a big pail of their farm-grown potatoes to the truck. The spuds are sliced and fried up right there. You get to sit in a variety of comfortable gazebos and picnic areas while overlooking the fields of potatoes and other crops such as strawberries and raspberries.

**Escaping poverty and poor living conditions and then, from 1845 to 1849, the Irish Potato Famine, one-third of all immigrants to the New World were Irish.**

Sixth-generation farmer Trevor Rose began his career some years ago, at age 16, growing potatoes on one acre. Now he farms 100 acres - and he's got some wheels. If you think your Alfa Romeo is hot, you should get a look at what Trevor drives: a big, shiny, green Lockwood harvester.

When it's really revved up, it can speed along - at four miles per hour! And if you're lucky, you get to see him drive by with the tractor and wagon holding 40,000 lbs. of newly-harvested potatoes as you're enjoying your French fries.

The Rose family has been farming in the area since 1840, when their Pennsylvania Dutch ancestors settled here. This was right around



## Splash of Red



This beautiful Cardinal provides a stunning jolt of colour to a snowy Stouffville backyard. Kate Gilderdale photo

the time, from 1820 to 1860, when thousands of families came to Canada from Ireland. Escaping poverty and poor living conditions and then, from 1845 to 1849, the Irish Potato Famine, one-third of all immigrants to the New World were Irish. (Norma is the one in the family who has an Irish connection.)

They brought with them their traditions (who isn't Irish on St. Patrick's Day?), their humour, their music and their love of potatoes.

This history-changing vegetable, originally from the South American Andes, is now on many dinner plates, baked, boiled, mashed or sliced into those ubiquitous skinny shapes. If the potato, or worse, the French fry, were ever abolished, I think people everywhere would be staring at the bare, white section of their plate where the potato used to be.

In case you have a hankering for local potatoes, carrots, onions and other vegetables, Simpson Produce is at 15152

Hwy. 48 in Ballantrae. Call 905-640-2657. Rose Family Farm is at 17569 Centre St. in Mount Albert. They've got various vegetables for sale, as well as strawberries and raspberries in season, along with meat, honey and baking. Call 905-473-3574. They're open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. from Monday to Saturday in the winter. And mark your calendars: the chip wagon opens again on the May 24 weekend.

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