

Tuber Experiments

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Image: Potatoes, carrots, and sunchokes harvested from our garden today.

Traditionally, we usually harvest our root vegetables in the fall and store them in a root cellar over the winter. However, with our high water table in the winter, a root cellar just isn't feasible. Last year, I harvested my tubers and tried storing them in tubs of sand above ground. This was a resounding failure – I ended up freezing most of my crop. This year, it was time for a new experiment.

Last spring, when I was turning the soil to plant the garden, I noticed that a few left over potatoes had survived the winter, and were still edible. So, I thought, why not try storing the tubers in the ground and use them as needed, rather than harvesting them all at once? I know this isn't possible in colder climates, but I wondered if I could get away with it in our moderate coastal environment?

So, last fall, I harvested half of our tuber crop, and left the remainder in the ground. We were just starting to run out this past month, so I thought now would be the time to test the results of my

experiment.

Success! Only a few tubers which had been washed to the surface by the winter rains had frozen. I had covered the beds with a layer of leaves and a net to keep the leaves from being blown away, so there was some insulation, but not lots. Even tubers that were only covered by an inch of soil remained unfrozen. And that was with exposure to three cold spells this winter, with temperatures as low as -7 °C! I'm impressed.

For those who are interested – the photo shows four varieties of drought resistant potatoes (**Colomba** – thin white skinned, yellow fleshed, early season; **Goldrush** – russet, white fleshed, mid season; **Carolina** – red skinned, white fleshed early season; **Russian Blue** – dark purple skinned, blue fleshed, late season) and one variety of fingerling potato (AmaRosa – pink skinned and fleshed, late season). On the right side are a mixture of carrots (**Scarlet Nantes** and **Cosmic Purple**) and some sunchoke roots.