

Gardener has spent a life netting gems

By FRANK PEEBLES

Free Press staff writer

You'd think those nuggets were gold. When Frank Matkowski turned over the soil in his garden last week, giant nuggets came rolling up.

It was just like the old Fraser Goldrush days only these lumps were not the colour of ore, they were more purple in hue. But they sure look good in the pan - the cooking pan.

Frank had grown buckets full of humongous potatoes.

Big two-pound clods of crunchy, nutritious, ready-for-the-stew-potatoes.

"I had about 100 hills of potatoes, but different varieties. These ones grew the best.

"They're Cabri potatoes. I've seen some big ones before, but not like this, not from this kind," says Frank, who couldn't believe his eyes although garden success has always come easy for him.

You should have seen his sweet peas this year, they towered up to the roof of his garage, and the smell...

"It's not easy to grow sweet peas, eh. You've got to really water them. It rained almost every day this summer, but I still had to water them and you've got to fertilize them. I never watered the lawn or the garden all summer long except for those sweet peas," Frank says. "You water them in the evening a little bit and about five minutes after that you get this wonderful scent. Like they're saying thank-you."

Frank has garden soil in his very being. Even his voice, touched with a warm handful of Manitoba soil from his boyhood, has a rich, organic quality to it.

Growing the big stuff is almost second nature. There is a newspaper clipping framed on his wall of himself and a 19 pound turnip he raised.

There's another on his refrigerator of a sunflower standing tall in the air, dwarfing his own



No tree would support the "apples of the earth" grown by Frank Matkowski. FRANK PEEBLES/FREE PRESS

ample frame. There's a photo on the table of Frank standing in a field of home-grown dill, eye to eye with the fra-

grant yellow blooms.

"I have a garden for the peace of mind and tranquillity," he says. "You go downtown, what're you gonna do? Watch the hookers? Here I get up in the morning and watch something grow. You're out there, you're forgetting the troubles, it's positive thinking."

Frank lives in the Vanway area with his wife Mabel.

For years he was a custodian at College Heights Secondary School and also worked in the bush and the mine industry.

Now he is retired, and enjoys getting outside to hunt or fish.

Another high-yield cash crop from his garden is fishing worms, which he sells at discount rates.

He netted over \$1,000 in the wrigglers this year, at a buck-25 a dozen.

He also sells the dill weed at a nice piece of change, especially considering his personal investment: mostly time and know-how. He knows lots of those little tricks that only time can teach you.

"Don't water too much. It's a common mistake. The roots get lazy," he says. "Carrots and root vegetables won't be encouraged to grow down if they get water all the time. And the grass on your lawn only needs about 10 minutes of water each time, or you're wasting the water."

He also had words of warning about watering from a hose, especially on a hot day.

"When it's a hot day and you put that cold water on them, it shocks the roots. It's like you're bare naked out there and someone turns the hose on you.

"I have a wooden tub and I let the water stand in there. The wood keeps it warm from the air. Also, it lets the chlorine from the city water system evaporate before it gets on the plants. It takes time, but you learn these things."

Now Frank and Mabel will have to learn how to make fries, chips, salad and all the things you can do with a potato.

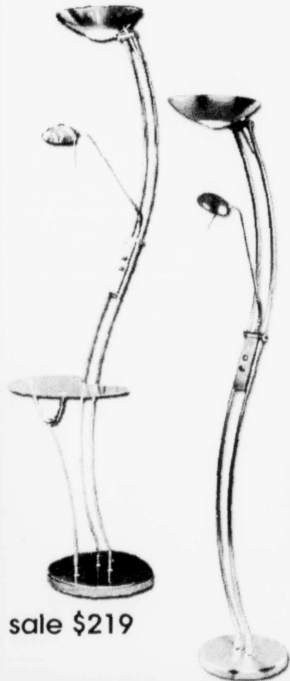
A huge potato.

Illuminated Reflections

DLHA833F Torchiere

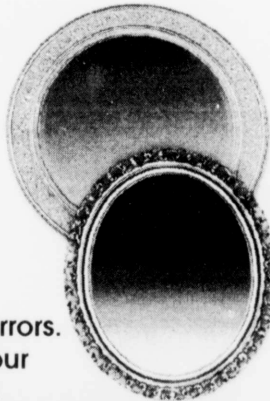
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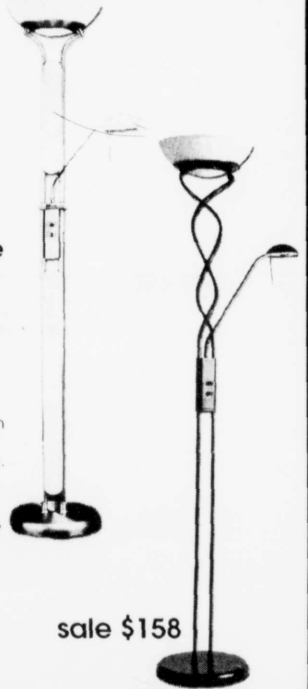
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