

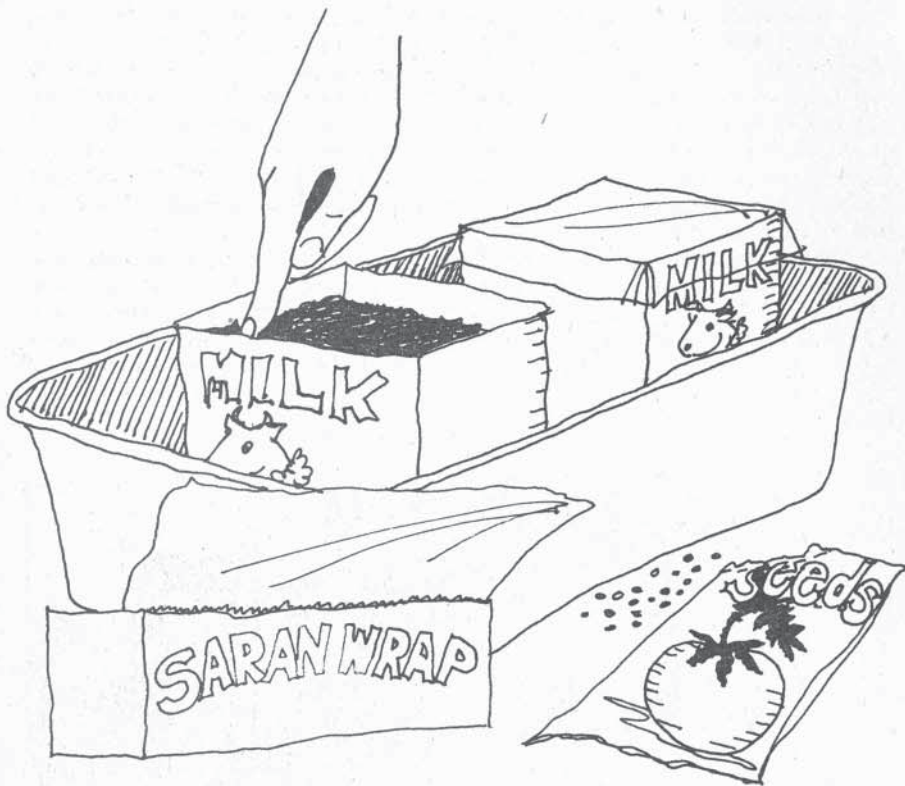
show & tell

Terry Catchpole

May is the beginning of back-to-the-earth time for most of us above the Bluegrass Line, a time when all danger of frost has passed and the earth is ready to get it on. Whether your "earth" is some land in the country or a few clay pots and window boxes, it's time to start thinking of the placid, therapeutic and instructive work to come. A few thoughts:

**Preparing the soil:* This should have been started late last fall, but if it wasn't don't give up. As soon as the

ground is dry and soft enough to be worked, get at it. I have found that the most easily-found commercial organic fertilizers are dried manure, bone meal and blood meal. This is a good selection, as each is high in one of the three essential soil nutrients—nitrogen (N), phosphorous (P) and potassium (K). Dig your soil deep, at least one foot, and mix in the fertilizers using two parts manure to one part each of bone meal and blood meal.



In the March edition of "Show and Tell" I mentioned a sharpening stone made in *Washita*, Kansas. Somewhere along the line this got changed to "*Wichita*." Duly corrected.

Not many of us liked liver and kidneys when Mom forced them down our young throats way back when, but there is no denying their superior nutritional value (especially in proteins and iron). If you still have a lingering distaste for these organ meats, try this: cut some up into smallish pieces, put these in the blender and make a nice mush; mix this in with the ground beef you are making meat loaf, hamburgers or goulash with, and then proceed with your regular recipe. Your taste buds will never know. (We haven't tried breaking down the liver or kidneys in a meat grinder, but it might work just as well if you don't have a blender.)

**Starting Seeds:* Most vegetable seeds can be planted right into the ground, but there are still some—tomatoes, peppers, cauliflower, head lettuce—that should be started indoors; also most flowers survive and flourish better if started in the house. What we use to start our seeds are gallon milk cartons cut in half and with holes poked in the bottom; any small waterproof container with a depth of 2 to 3 inches will do. We fill this with a mixture of, roughly, one-half potting soil, one-quarter vermiculite and one-quarter sphagnum moss, ingredients that can be found even in Woolworth's. Fill the container to a depth of two inches, soak the mixture, place the container in a tray (bread pans are ideal for quart milk cartons, or you can buy special starting trays) and let it sit for a couple of hours. Sow the seed liberally in rows on top of the mixture, press them down lightly and cover with a sprinkling of moss. Cover the containers with Saran Wrap or glass. The seedlings should get between 7 and 10 hours of sunlight every day and should not be left in temperatures below 55°. You can also place them under 200 watts of light for the same length of time, and then watch your electricity bill trip out.

**Transplanting:* The first leaves you see are decoys. They are seedling leaves and will eventually disappear. The next set to show up are called the first true leaves. Then you can start thinking about transplanting. Some folks take their seedlings right from the starting container into the ground, after a few days of setting them outside to get used to the real world. We prefer the extra step of transplanting the strongest seedlings to peat pots, in a mixture of garden soil, vermiculite and sphagnum moss. When the young plants are husky and strong, usually after about two-three weeks, we put them in the garden row, pot and all.

**Watering:* Neither the seed starting containers nor the peat pots should ever dry up. Water them regularly and water them as you should everything you have growing in containers: from the bottom. This is the best way to be sure the entire root system gets soaked. Place the seed or plant container in a pan of water and leave it there until the top of the soil mixture is wet. When the little plants are set out in the garden, give them a thorough-but-light watering with a mixture of fish emulsion, another

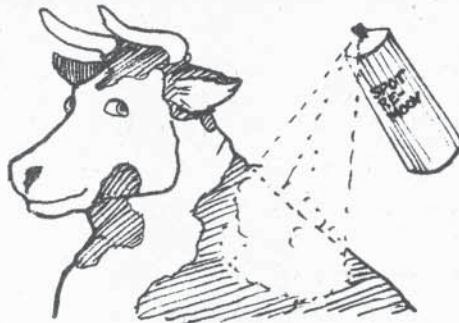
readily-available organic fertilizer.

***Protection:** When sowing seeds directly into the soil, cover them with sand, sphagnum moss or a light sifting of loam, and cover the row with saran wrap, cheesecloth or similar clear covering; when the seedlings are up, remove this. When setting out seedlings surround them with small tin cans (such as juice cans), toilet paper rolls or rolled-and-taped 3-inch by 5-inch pieces of paper, to protect them against cutworm damage.

***Non-garden planting:** If you don't have the soil, room or desire to plant a garden, try growing a couple of cherry tomato plants in clay pots. Start the seeds as suggested above, and make the final transplant into a 12-inch clay pot. This should be filled with good top soil, which can be purchased in bags at most garden stores and nurseries. The danger here is that the plant will not receive enough water and die of wilt. The plants have nowhere near the access to moisture that those in the soil would have, and must be watered once or twice a day during hot, dry weather. You can cut down the watering duties by double-potting — putting the clay pot on top of a layer of moss in a 16-inch wooden tub, and filling the side spaces with more moss. Keep the moss damp and as the soil dries out it will absorb more moisture through the clay from the moss. This cuts watering down to about two or three applications per week. Keep the tomato plant pruned to a height of fifteen inches, and stake it.

***Books:** True, books can only do so much for you, but they are a source of information and comfort when you need one or both in a hurry. If you're getting into gardening, there are two that belong front-and-center on the reference shelf: Jeanie Darlington's *Grow Your Own* (Bookworks, Berkeley, Ca. 94702; \$1.75), a beginner's book in the best, non-perjorative sense of the word; *The Encyclopedia of Organic Gardening* (Rodale Press, Emmaus, Pa. 18049; \$10.19 postpaid), the most comprehensive gardening book around, able to answer any question you might have about anything above or below ground-level.

When you begin your planting this season, start keeping a diary. Make note of when you plant what, when each little thing comes up, when the first buds appear, how it tastes, how you're feeling. Next year you'll be glad you did it.



Now that the last notes of winter's dirge have drifted away, its time to clean up your boots, shoes and suede maxi. RAGS' New York City staffer Annabel Epril writes that "for cleaning spotted leathers apply any of the following and rub in a gentle circular motion: saddle soap, Afta Chemical

Spot Remover, Feibing Salt Stain Remover. Use all products (other than saddle soap) sparingly. Dry after each application with hand hair dryer so that you don't have to wait 24 hours for skin to dry and find spot still there. As leather dries, it contracts. A gentle stretching flexes the leather and helps lighten the stain. Best results on natural or washable leathers—not tested on dyed skins."

For protecting your boots and other leather goodies from spring rains (as well as winter snows), Annabel recommends four water repellent — *not* waterproofing—products: Scotchguard (\$2.95), Esquire (\$1.59), Magic (\$1) and Tana (\$2). Spray it on and let it dry.

RAGS' Boston correspondent, Peter Beren, writes about something up there that sounds like it should be duplicated across the country. It's called the Farmers' Exchange, writes Peter, and "it grew out of Boston's Ecology Action's discovery that there are many sympathetic farmers willing to sell or rent land to young people serious about farming. In addition to bringing these two groups of people together, the Farmers' Exchange helps people who have money, equipment or simply the desire to live off the land, get together." Technical advice on farming problems is another service. For information and a copy of the group's newsletter, write: Farmers' Exchange, S. Rabbit, 188 Prospect Street, Cambridge, Mass.

Along somewhat the same line, *Organic Gardening & Farming* magazine now has in each monthly issue a classified-style listing of farms for sale, lease and rent, and farms wanted-to-buy. Strange: most of the farms offered for sale, etc. are in the Midwest or South; most of those wanting to buy are looking in the Northeast and West Coast. Oh, well, it's a damn good idea and you might find just what you've been looking for. (*OG&F*, Rodale Press, Emmaus, Pa. 18049; \$5.85 per year, 60¢ per copy.)

