

If you are curious about how the English first used the potato, try these recipes. It is interesting to learn that the sweet potato was well-known in Gerard's time and called the "common" kind while the white potato was a comparative rarity.

*THE HERBALL or Generall Historie of Plantes. Gathered by John Gerarde of London Master of Chirurgerie. Imprinted at London by Iohn Norton, 1597.*

*Potatoes. Chap. 334*

*Sisarum Periuuianum, siue Batata Hispanorum.* Potatus or Potatoes.

*\* The description*

This plant which is called of some *Sisarum Periuuianum*, or Skyrrits of Peru, is generally of vs called Potatus or Potatoes. It hath long rough flexible branches trailing vpon the ground, like vnto Pompions; whereupon are set rough hairie leaues, very like vnto those of the wilde Cucumber. There is not any that hath written of this plant, or saide any thing of the flowers, therefore I refer the description thereto vnto those that shall heereafter haue further knowledge of the same; yet haue I had in my garden diuers roots that haue florished vnto the first approach of winter, & haue growen vnto a great length of branches, but they brought not fourth any flowers at all; whether bicause the winter caused them to perish before their time of flowering, or that they be of nature barren of flowers, I am not certaine. The rootes are many, thicke, and knobbe, like vnto the rootes of Peonies, or rather of the white Asphodill, ioned together at the top into one head, in manner of the Skyrrit, which being diuided into diuers parts and planted, do make a great increase, especially if the greatest rootes be cut into diuers gobbets, and planted in good and fertill ground.

*\* The place*

The Potatoes grow in India, Barbarie, Spaine, and other hotte regions, of which I planted diuers rootes (that I bought at the exchange in London) in my garden, where they flourished vntill winter, at which time they perished and rotted.

*\* The time*

It flourished vnto the end of September: at a first approach of great frosts, the leaues together with the rootes and stalkes do perish.

*\* The names*

*Clusius* calleth it *Batatta*, *Camotes*, *Amotes*, and *Ignanes*: in English Potatoes, Potatus, and Potades.



JOHN GERARD

*\* The nature*

The leaues of Potatoes are hot and drie, as may euidently appeere by the taste. The rootes are of a temperate qualitie.

*\* The vertues*

A The Potatoe rootes are among the Spaniards, Italians, Indians, and many other nations common and ordinarie meate, which no doubt are of mightie nourishing parts, and do strengthen and comfort nature, whose nutriment is as it were a meane betweene flesh and fruit, though somewhat windie; but being rosted in the embers, they do lose much of their windinesse, especially being eaten sopped in wine.

B Of these rootes may be made conserues, no lesse toothsome, wholesome, and daintie, than of the flesh of Quinces. And likewise these comfortable and delicate meates, called in shops *Morselli*, *Placentulae* and diuers other suchlike.

C These rootes may serue as a ground or foundation, whereon the cunning confectioner or Sugar baker may worke and frame many comfortable delicate conserues, and restorative sweete meates.

They are vsed to be eaten rosted in the ashes; some when they be so rosted, infuse them, and sop them in wine: and others to giue them the greater grace in eating, do boile them with prunes, and so eate them. And likewise others dresse them (being first rosted) with oile, vinegar and salt, euery man according to his owne taste and liking: notwithstanding howsoeuer they be dressed, they comfort, nourish, and strengthen the bodie, procure bodily lust, and that with greedinesse.

*Of Potatoes of Virginia.*

*Chap. 335*

*Battata Virginiana siue Virginianorum, & Pappus.* Potatoes of Virginia.

*\* The description*

Virginia Potatoes hath many hollow flexible branches, trailing vpon the ground, three square, vneuen, knotted or kneed in sundry places at certaine distances; from the which knots commeth fourth one great leafe made of diuers leaues, some smaller, & others greater, set together vpon a fat middle rib by couples; of a swart greene colour tending to redness. The whole leafe resembling those of the Parsnep, in taste at the first like grasse, but afterward sharp & nipping the toong: from the bosome of which leaues come fourth long rounde slender footstalks, whereon do grow very faire and pleasant flowers, made of one entire whole leafe, which is folded or plaited in such strange sort, that it seemeth to be a flower made of sixe sundrie small leaues, which cannot easily be perceiued, except the same be pulled open. The colour whereof it is hard to expresse. The whole flower is of a light purple color, stripped down the middle of euery folde or welt, with a light shew of yellownes, as though purple and yellow were mixed together: in the middle of the flower thrusteth fourth a thicke fat pointell, yellow as golde, with a small sharpe greene pricke or point in the midst thereof. The fruite succeedeth the flowers, round as a ball, of the bignes of a little bullesse or wilde Plum, greene at the first, and blacke when it is ripe; wherein is contained small white seede, lesser than those of Mustarde. The roote is thicke, fat, and tuberous; not much differing either in shape, colour or taste from the common Potatoes, saving that the rootes hereof are not so great nor long; some of them round as a ball, some ouall or egge fashion, some longer, and others shorter: which knobbe rootes are fastened vnto the stalkes with an infinite number of threddie strings.

*\* The place*

It groweth naturally in America where it was first discovered, as reporteth *C. Clusius*, since which time I haue receiued rootes hereof from Virginia, otherwise called Norem-bega, which growe and prosper in my garden, as (*Turn to next page*)

## Potatoes—Continued

in their owne native countrie.

### \* The time

The leaues thrust foorth of the grounde in the beginning of May; the flowers bud foorth in August. The fruit is ripe in September.

### \* The names

The Indians do call this plant *Papus* (meaning the rootes) by which name also the common Potatoes are called in those Indian countries. We haue the name proper vnto it, mentioned in the title. Because it hath not onely the shape and proportion of Potatoes, but also the pleasant taste and vertues of the same, we may call it in English Potatoes of America, or Virginia.

### \* The temperature and vertues

The temperature & vertues are referred vnto the common Potatoe; being likewise a foode, as also a meate for pleasure, equall in goodness & wholesomnesse vnto the same, being either rosted in the embers, or boiled & eaten with oile, vinegar & pepper, or dressed any other way by the hand of some cunning in cookerie.

**John Gerard** (1545-1612) practiced his profession of surgery, and carried on gardening as a super-hobby at the same time. At the age of 50 he was elected a member of the famous court of barber-surgeons. The next year he published a catalog of the more than a thousand plants in his London garden. This was followed by the *Herball*, which aimed at listing all the known plants. Some of the material in it was borrowed from similar Continental books, but the *Herball* seems to have been a unique and much-needed work in the English language.

*Science News-Letter, December 7, 1929*

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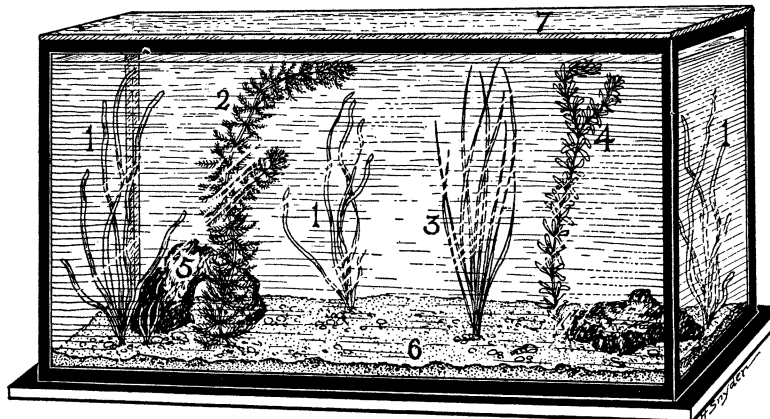


Diagram to show proper planting of a 9-gallon aquarium tank

- |                 |                         |
|-----------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Sagittaria   | 5. Rock                 |
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| 4. Elodea       |                         |

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