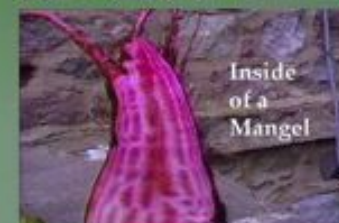


Mangels

Mangelwurzel (*Beta vulgaris*)



Mangelwurzel (*Beta vulgaris*)



Mangels are a member of the Beet Family. Through the centuries they have been used as food for livestock. Some people call them **cow beets**. They have a thick root about a foot long.

Early settlers did not have large empty fields in which to raise hay and plant grains. Stumps and rocks covered the land.

To get enough hay to feed their cows in winter, early farmers sometimes mowed native grasses along the roadways and around the stumps and also harvested marsh hay. At first, the hay was hand cut with a scythe. Joe Kuse, whose parents owned the land where Medford Senior High School and the Kuse Museum is now, was adept at using this method of mowing the meadow. Joe's parents sometimes raked the mown and dried hay onto a bed sheet and carried it to their barn in a kind of sling because it was difficult to get a horse and wagon out into the area among the stumps. The dry native grasses provided a rather limited diet for the few cows the settlers had and milk production dropped in the winter months.

Farmers whose land still had a lot of stumps left by loggers planted root crops such as rutabagas often called beggies (**Rüben**) and **mangels** (Mangelwürzel) in the soil they dug up around the stumps. Cows could be kept milking while these fresh root crops lasted during the winter and eagerly looked for a tasty additon to their dry hay diet



Early Settlements in Medford – Zeit Collection



Land With Stumps – Early Medford – Zeit Collection

There were no silos when those first cows lived here. A few farmers started building silos here around 1912 as corn production increased. Silos really made a difference in dairy farming, but prior to that time mangels were an ideal cow feed.

After land was cleared, mangels could also be sown in rows or broadcast in larger areas. Since livestock produced well when fed these root crops, mangels and rutabagas were raised in great quantities. Advertisements in the local paper tell of the prices being paid for mangels and the desire to obtain them. One ad in 1907 read, "A ton of **mangel wurzels** wanted. Who has them? Inform Star News office."

Family diaries also tell of the seeding and harvesting of various root crops. In October of 1920, Eleonore Bolz Kuse dug 16 bushels of rutabagas and 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ bushels of sugar beets. In 1938, she harvested 17 bushels of rutabagas, in 1939, 5 bushels of rutabagas and 7 bushels of mangels. Her daughter Rosa Kuse Oehlert continued to plant carrots and mangels as listed in her 1929 diary. In 1931, she had 12 bushels of mangels.

What was involved in growing these beet crops in such quantities? Ed McCarron, a well known Medford dairy farmer, Carl Rhody, who wrote about homesteading near Spirit, Wisconsin, and Amanda Janke Kuse, who grew up in

southern Wisconsin, all seemed to agree that it was tedious, back breaking work that often involved the entire family.

Although small packets of seed could be purchased, most farmers bought it in bulk packages. Eleonore Kuse ordered hers from Gurneys while the stores in town apparently obtained theirs from a firm in LaCrosse. Planting instructions suggested that thinning was necessary to allow the roots to fully develop so many competing plants had to be carefully pulled out. Some could be replanted elsewhere or they could simply be discarded. As the plant matured, parts of the root grew above the soil surface.

In 1940, Eleonore seeded and transplanted rutabagas. In 1942, she ordered mangel seeds from Gurneys. These were planted in a field with turnips.

Mangel Seeds



2007 September 13 – Mangel Seeds

October 29, 2007

Loretta picked the carrot and mangel seed.

Harvesting and Storing

Rudolf Bolz dug his in 1917 on November 7. On October 10th of 1917, Eleonore Bolz Kuse dug 3 bushels of carrots, 9 bushels of rutabagas and 3 bushels of mangels.

They were harvested after frost. They cut off tops and used them as cattle feed, too. They never threw anything away.

Mangels were stored in a root cellar, if you had one, otherwise in a cellar. A strong odor permeated everything in the house, including clothing. Carrying or hauling these heavy roots to the barns from the root cellar made back-breaking work.

During the winter, they could be cut up into small pieces and fed to the cows as fresh food to go with the dry hay or fed to the chickens.

Root crops, such as carrots and beets, were stored in dry sand or in root cellars. Root crops, like **rutabagas and mangels**, were stored in a partitioned root cellar in bins of sand or dry leaves.

The Rhody root cellar was a separate building.

The root cellar was dug into the steep hillside just south of the house. It, too, was built of logs but covered with ground except for the south side which had the door. Double doors were used to keep out the cold of winter and heat of summer. A log ceiling covered with a thick layer of ground that sloped to the sides and seeded with grass made a fairly tight roof. This could keep out the cold and frost in the coldest weather if the doors were closed. In extremely cold weather to be safe, a burning /p. 17/ kerosene lantern was good insurance against frost. Shoveling snow against all the front but the door also helped. (Rhody, pp. 16-17)

Interview with Ed McCarron

Mangels were an ideal cow feed. You could grow them on almost any kind of soil. It was a tedious back-breaking job. A seed company in LaCrosse had seed. As they grew you had to thin them. You could replant the ones you pulled out or throw them away. The mangel was dark red. It didn't produce as many pounds as a beggie. All members of the family helped.

They were harvested after frost. You cut off tops and used them as cattle feed too. You never threw anything away.

They were stored in root cellar if you had one. Otherwise in a cellar. A strong odor permeated everything in house including clothing.

You cut up the mangels in a trough that was like an oversize hog trough so cows wouldn't choke on them.

Other Written Sources

Rhody described the hard work involved in clearing the land to plant the crops.

Working in the virgin timber the boys would chop down trees and cut them up to be piled and burned. This was slow, hard work.

Where the timber was open, hazel brush and other wild shrubs grew in thickets. These Mama would grub out. She would have Clara pull on the tops while she swung the grub hoe. By evening this heavy work would have her arms aching. During the night she would be awakened by cramps knotting her muscles with stabbing pain. She would wake Clara and have her rub the cramps out of her arms so she could rest.

Whatever land got cleared had to be worked up enough with a grub hoe to bring mineral soil to the surface to plant seeds in. Stones that could be lifted were piled around stumps.

Enough land had to be cleared each year to plant potatoes, **rutabagas and mangelwurzels**. The last two vegetables were for livestock feed. (Rhody p. 16)

Choppers and Cutters

Rutabagas and mangelwurzels would be sliced small enough for milk cows to bite them. There was danger of a cow choking on small round ones that could be swallowed whole. Cows could be kept milking while these fresh root crops lasted.

People also tried raising sugar beets.

Mangels were cut up with a special knife or hexel machine so the cows wouldn't choke on them.

Rübenstampfer – Mangel Cutter



Mangels were placed in a wooden trough and chopped into small pieces with a mangel cutter.

The family had a special S-shaped knife on a long handle that they used to chop them.



Hexel Machine – Taylor County Historical Society

Mangels were placed in a wooden trough and chopped into small pieces with a mangel cutter. The family had a special S-shaped knife on a long handle that they used to chop them.

In 2016, Florence Higgins Hein, on a visit to our museum, looked at the mangel cutter and told how she, in the 1940's, had to cut up rutabagas to feed to the cattle. She had wanted to buy a pair of second-hand skates and her father told her that he would give her the \$3.00 to buy them if she cut up the rutabagas. She used a big butcher knife and a board and chopped them up by hand. Later, she said they had a machine with a crank that cut up cattle feed.

We remember that on the west side of our cow barn there was a hexel bank on which things were cut up.

Mangels were fed to poultry as well as to cattle. McCarron stated that his family cut mangels into small pieces and served them on the grain fed to the hens. Amanda Kuse speared up a whole mangel on a spike driven into the wall of the chicken coop and enjoyed seeing her hens busily hollow out the entire root until only the outer shell remained. Rhody said the following about feeding the mangels to chickens.

Mangelwurzels, beet-like roots, were hung from the ceiling in the poultry house in winter. They were hung at a height where chickens had to jump a little to peck at them, keeping the birds active. Because **mangelwurzels** are highly nutritious the poultry would lay eggs as long as those roots lasted. (Rhody pp. 15-16)

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