

# Gardening

## Sawdust makes the task easier

By Pat Leuchtman  
leisure Columnist

Tom Luck saved me from a slimy disaster just in time.

We were sipping our after dinner tea and I was holding forth at some length about our plans for the garden. I started to explain that I was going to try growing potatoes in mulch this year. Growing potatoes in Maine had been easy because of the sandy soil, but I was concerned about the chance for success here in Heath where the soil is so heavy.

I hadn't gotten any further than that when Tom interrupted and said it was a good system as long as I didn't use a hay mulch. Well, of course, that's just what I had planned. I have a barn full of hay that isn't good for anything but mulch.

"Old sawdust," said Tom. "That's what you should use. You'll avoid slug damage, but if you use hay, you're just inviting trouble. The sawdust is dense and the slugs won't be able to penetrate the mulch the way they can with hay."

Putting aside my disappointment at not having another splendid use for my old hay, I had to admit that Tom's idea made a lot of sense. I have used hay mulch and I have had some slug problems. My problem now was where to get old sawdust. I live near Warriner's sawmill and I could get new sawdust — and I will, storing it for use next year — but that doesn't help this year.

Fortunately, my barn is filled with more treasure than I thought. While searching for a good place to build a pig pen, I found a crib of clean old shavings so I was ready to try out Tom's plan this year.

In preparing to plant my potatoes there were some things I did not do. Potatoes prefer an acid soil, between 5.0 and 6.0 PH, so I did not lime the soil. A too sweet soil will tend to cause scab. Neither did I manure the soil. Even when rotted manure is added, it ought to be done in the fall, otherwise it may burn the potatoes and the harvest will not be as abundant.

Early this spring I did dump my wood ashes on the garden and they have since been plowed in along with a sprinkling of rock phosphate. This is important to potatoes because the potash will insure that they have a good texture.

I cut my seed potatoes (bought at Agway, not the supermarket) into small pieces, each with at least two

eyes and let them dry for 24 hours. Then I was ready to get to work.

I cajoled my college son to dig trenches about 6-8 inches deep. Then I placed my seed potatoes, cut side down, on the soil and covered them with a mulch made of old sawdust and shavings, peat moss and a little blood meal to make up for nitrogen loss caused by the still decaying sawdust.

Potatoes do not require a lot of nitrogen, but I wanted to avoid a real deficiency. It is because fresh sawdust uses so much nitrogen in decomposition that it is not usually recommended as a mulch in the vegetable garden, unless you do add an extra helping of manure or other nitrogenous fertilizer. Also it tends to acidify the soil which is great for blueberries, but not for most vegetables.

Tom Luck's suggestion launched me on this experiment. From what I know about potato culture it should be successful. The sawdust mulch will provide the potatoes with a moist, acid environment in which to grow and it should keep out the slugs. The bonus of growing in mulch will be an easy harvest. The potatoes won't have to be dug, merely pulled.

...

A word about mulches. Mulching probably appeals to me so much because of my inherent laziness. Cultivating and weeding are not my most favorite pastimes. However, there are real advantages to the garden.

As I plant my garden, I mulch the paths with a six inch layer of old hay. This marks the paths clearly

and I feel it may help prevent compaction of the soil.

When the seedlings emerge and start to grow the mulch will be pulled close around the young plants. This will help keep down the weeds, conserve moisture, and moderate soil temperature fluctuations. I know from experience that I am not going to eliminate all weeds, but when I weed, the weeds themselves will just be added to the mulch.

The bottom layer of mulch will be constantly decomposing, adding fertility to the soil. My lazy heart enjoys knowing that once I have laid down my mulch I have supplied the

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# Gardening/Continued

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garden with a kind of time release fertilizer that will be working throughout the garden season.

A variety of materials can be used as mulch, grass clippings, salt hay, straw, chopped leaves, whatever organic material you can get your hands on. If keeping down weeds is your only goal in mulching, you can use black plastic or thick layers of newspapers. I will use black plastic myself around my tomatoes, eggplants and peppers because their roots require a lot of warmth to be most productive.

Another experiment. This year



for the first time, I am growing sweet corn and I am going to try out a "living mulch." Around the edges of my corn patch I am planting my winter squash and I plan to train the vines to grow into the corn. Corn and squash are mutually beneficial when grown together and I hope the sprawling squash vines will help keep down weeds and keep the ground from drying out so much. I will also be growing two crops in the same space. As Mr. B. used to say, "Never do one thing at a time when you can do three."

In a garden there is always something new to learn, something new to try. Keep posted for progress reports. □

# Bridge/Continued

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for the E-W diamonds to split no worse than 4-2.

Even down one at 4H was worth seven out of 11 matchpoints. In fact, N-S has to bid 4H to hope to get a better score than -140 would be for letting E-W make 3S.

## WEEKLY CALENDAR

FRIDAY: Greenfield BC, Methodist Church, 7:30.

THIS WEEKEND: WMBA summer sectional, Springfield Civic Center.

Friday: Unmixed Pairs (men must partner with men and women with women), 2 p.m.; Masters Pairs (20 masterpoints or more), and Non-Masters Pairs (0-20), 8.

Saturday: Open Pairs, 1:30 and 7:30, with new pairs allowed to enter the 7:30 consolation game.

Sunday: Swiss team-of-four, two sessions, noon and 6 p.m.

MONDAY: Northampton DBC, novice duplicate, Florence Civic Center, 7:30.

TUESDAY: Northampton DBC, open duplicate, Florence Civic Center, 7:30. □

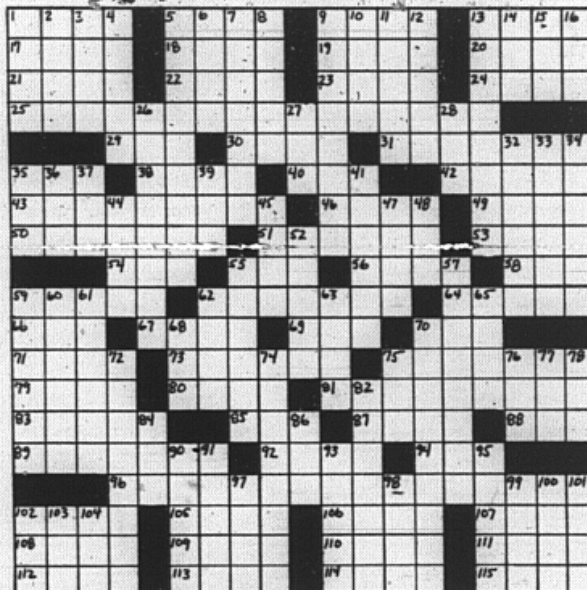
# leisure crossword puzzle

By Chet Currier  
Photo finish

- ACROSS**
- Unfriendly
  - Milpa
  - Singer Ed
  - Dumfround
  - Site of the Himalayas
  - Prefix for resin or graph
  - Sloping way
  - Smooth
  - Mountain valley
  - Arctic explorer
  - Musical group
  - Peddle
  - Relative of "See what I mean?"
  - Lanka
  - Votes in favor
  - Brilliant
  - Outside prefix
  - Resting on
  - Hostilities
  - Dress fabric
  - Negative events?
  - Neck area
  - Addition word
  - Press out
  - Irritation
  - S. Calif. valley
  - "The hills — alive..."
  - Iniquitous
  - Writer Jolff
  - Dickson
  - Part of OJT: abbr.
  - Spectacle
  - With 96-across, impatient pho-

- tograph-er's plaint
- Frome or Allen
  - Forest god
  - Impellent
  - Abner
  - Nigerian native
  - Prefix with body or freeze
  - Porter
  - Disdained
  - Actor James
  - USSR city
  - Boarded up
  - The Iliad and the Odyssey
  - Rubicund
  - Promote
  - Top honor
  - Relevant
  - Call it
  - Cruces
  - See 62-across
  - TV's Pauley
  - Vexed
  - Put on the payroll
  - Trouncing
  - Whiff
  - Finished
  - Olympian Heiden
  - Part of A.D.
  - Gamma's predecessor
  - Farrago
  - Hotbed
  - "After great—a formal feeling comes;" Dickinson
- DOWN**
- Shrewd

- City once called Christiania
- Stead
- Mild oaths
- Moral strength
- Thanks
- Transform
- Saunter
- Craftsman
- Chagall
- Radiates
- Actor
- Improves
- Hail
- Mahayana movement
- Denouement
- Part of the puzzle-solving process
- Seat for a sermon
- Gun, as an engine
- Female demon of myth
- Smith grad
- Surrender
- Shoe width
- "Love and kisses"
- Choose
- Mine line
- Knave
- Algerian seaport
- Counterfeit
- Cavort
- Always, in poems
- Writer
- St. Johns
- Orphrey



- Debate part
- Print-shop worker
- Appetizer
- Involve
- Litigant
- Low periods
- Alternative for Hamlet
- Player for pay
- Brains
- Privately, in law
- Taken to the the
- Bench-warmer
- Bikini part
- Common Market initials
- Pres. after HST
- Out of control
- Pigpen
- Pesticide
- Site of an annual derby
- Compelled
- Pallid
- Bit of detritus
- Infuriates
- Messenger of the gods
- An O'Neill
- Actor Paul
- School founded in 1440
- Famous
- sufferer
- Drink
- Forget-me...

## Last week's solution



# Books/Continued

Continued from Page 7

rituals, who had, in fact, been singled out as a child by his elders to be a preserver of the Dakotah heritage.

With this man's guidance, Hill mastered the language; and language, she found, was the key to a spiritual understanding of her subject. In collaboration with Yuha, she translated her manuscript from modern English into the old Dakotah/Lakotah dialect, then re-translated it back into English using Webster's 1806 edition as guide (the edition appropriate to the period of the book: 1790-1835).

This long delicate and taxing process accounts for the lilt of language here; rhythms and inflections which at first seem unusual, but with a bit of patience on the reader's part soon seem natural with their lovely ebb and flow, their perfect echo of time and place and subject.

The journey with Barbara Tuchman in "A Distant Mirror," a history, goes back to troubled times, the 14th century which was ravaged by plague (not once but four times), by war, by traveling packs of brigands. The old chivalric ways were crumbling, there was a schism in the church.

New battle tactics, new weapons were changing war; corruption and debauchery and religious aberrations were everywhere. Many thought it was a doomed world, yet it was the world which produced Chaucer and Petrarch and a number of universities. Clearly there was a distance between ideal and deed.

Tuchman's achievement is not only the recreation of a life and its time, but the way she suggests the astonishing parallels between that ill-starred century and our own. As she points out, Voltaire once said, "History never repeats itself, men always do." □