

## POTATOES

*Solanum tuberosum*. Solanaceae

As a staple food of the people of Ireland, it is not surprising that potato cultivars have been raised and named here. I have *not* attempted a complete listing of these, only noting those that have come to my attention. Modern breeding has concentrated on producing potatoes capable of resisting the fungus *Phytophthora infestans* which causes late blight, and many of these newer cultivar may not be included in the following lists.

There are five sorts of *potatoes* known to us; the white flat Kidney *potato*, the round White, the Yellow, the round Red, and the Black *potato*. (Rye, *Considerations on agriculture* (1730))

In the *Irish farmers' & gardeners' magazine* 3 (1836) the following potatoes cultivars are mentioned.

'Ash-leaf Kidney'  
'Bangor'  
'Cork Red'  
'English Red'  
'Foleys'  
'Hidalgos'  
'Pink-eyes'  
'Red Nosed'  
'Stagger The Beggars'  
'The Apple'  
'The Black'  
'The Early Frame'  
'The Seedling Lords'

None of these is of Irish origin as far as can be ascertained. Indeed the first potato with an indubitable Irish origin is 'Skerry Blue'



### Antique cultivars

#### 'Ard-Cairn Beauty'

syn: 'Ardcairn Beauty'

'Named by the workers lifting the crop of 18cwt from a planting of *Two Stone*'.

**Origin:** from William Baylor Hartland, Ard-Cairn, Cork; he did not state which cultivar was planted!

Davidson (1935) suggested that 'Ardcairn Beauty' was 'a re-named 'Beauty of Bute' [see below], adding that it 'came into prominence for a few years'. He did not explain this further.

Hartland also marketed 'The Claddagh'.

**refs:** Hartland, *Multum-in-parvo* book 1898; Davidson, 'History of potato varieties', *Journ. Dept. Agriculture (Ireland)* 33 (1935): 78.

#### 'Beauty of Bute'

No description traced.

**Origin:** an old Irish potato, according to Wilson (1993), but Davidson (1935) noted that it came from Scotland.

**refs:** Wilson, *The story of the potato through illustrated varieties* (1993), 110; Davidson, 'History of potato varieties', *Journ. Dept. Agriculture (Ireland)* 33 (1935): 78.

#### 'Black Skerry'

syn: 'Skerry Blue' (*vide* Davidson 1935)

Maincrop potato, tuber with deep eyes, floury when cooked; 'flesh white and of excellent quality when cooked.'

**Origin:** Hogg & Robertson sold this in the early 1900s, commenting that it was 'a great improvement on the old 'Skerry Blue'. Wilson also noted it in 1906. On the other hand, Davidson commented that in 1906 'Black Skerries'

and 'Skerry Blues' appeared, coupled together, in the statistics published by the Department of Agriculture in Ireland. In 1907 only Black Skerries were noted.

How the name came to be changed in the official statistics has never been explained. The name 'Black Skerry' first appeared in the Department's *Journal* volume 1, when it was stated to be a new variety. There was nothing new about it, however, except the name.

**refs:** Davidson, 'History of potato varieties', *Journ. Dept. Agriculture (Ireland)* 33 (1935): 72; Wilson, 'Potatoes: a comparison of English and Irish types', *Ir. gardening* 1 (1906): 10-11; Hogg & Robertson *catalogue of seed potatoes* 1904, 24.

#### 'Champion II'

syn: 'Clifden Seedling', and others

'Its shape, colour, cooking qualities, and general appearance, very much resemble its famous parent, from which it differs in having a rough skin'.\*

**Origin:** Salaman stated that this was raised Mr Robertson, La Mancha, Malahide, County Dublin, that it was possibly a seedling from 'Sutton's Flourball'. He described it as a smooth-skinned tuber most of which information is contradicted by the Hogg & Robertson catalogue entry. (Salaman's description included the following characters: flourball potato, maturing late, resistant to *Phytophthora*, tuber smooth, round, white-skinned, with very pale yellow flesh; flower buds purple, opening white; foliage light grey-green).

From another source\* we know that James Robertson lived at La Mancha; it was situated 'about half a mile from Malahide railway station and from the sea, its name being made famous by the heard of Kerry cattle from which so many prize winners have emanated.' Robertson also grew more than five acres of daffodils at La Mancha.

Hogg & Robertson's 1904 catalogue included this statement about its origin:

This new Seedling Potato is the result of a cross between the *Champion* and another seedling still in the hands of the grower. We have grown it in the past season, and can personally speak of its merits. ... We can thoroughly recommend this potato, and we shall be disappointed if it does not supersede all other Main Crop varieties.

While introduced by Messrs Hogg & Robertson, Dublin, 'Champion II' was also hailed as resistant to late blight:

We believe this is the first potato raised that has not shown any tendency to disease; and the blight in the past trying seasons failed to make the least impression on foliage or tuber, its extraordinary cropping is due to this fact.

1890  
According to Salaman, it was Dr G. Pethybridge who noticed that 'Champion II' was highly resistant to late blight; 'he found it growing in 1909 under the name of 'Clifden Seedling'.'

'Champion', the one released in 1876, was raised by John Nicol of Ochterloney, Scotland.

**refs:** Salaman, *Potato varieties* (1926), 233; Hogg & Robertson *catalogue of seed potatoes* 1904, 24; \*Moore, 'Bulb farming in Ireland', *Ir. gardening* 7 (1912): 182,

#### 'Crom-a-boo'

No description traced.

**Origin:** raised an introduced by William Baylor Hartland, Ard Cairn, Cork; 'this is my own introduction and is now well-known; must be planted closely'.

ref: Hartland, *Multum-in-parvo book* (1898), 20.

#### 'Flourball'

syn: 'The Sutton Flourball' – but not to be confused with 'Sutton's Flourball' of 1870.

Red, round tubers, with white flesh sometimes veined red, floury when cooked with a pleasant strong flavour, keeps very well; flower buds white, opening white, flowers on long stems which curve gracefully downwards; foliage light grey-green.

**Origin:** raised by Miss King, Mountmellick, County Offaly, but its origin is not recorded. Introduced commercially by Messrs Sutton & Sons, but now only found in specialized potato collections.

ref: Salaman, *Potato varieties* (1926), 256-257, 360.

#### 'Hartland's Thanist'

'An immense cropper.'

**Origin:** probably raised by William Baylor Hartland at Ard-Cairn, Cork, but given the possibility that it was a renamed potato, I cannot be certain that this was a Hartland cultivar. He claimed, with his usual hyperbole, that 'some friends that have given this a trial don't forget it.'

ref: Hartland, *Multum-in-parvo book* 1898.

#### 'Irish Apple'

Tuber round, white with pale red around the eyes; a good keeper; very crumbly and dry when cooked.

**Origin:** perhaps of Irish origin, but its history before 1770, when it was mentioned by John Wynn Baker, is not recorded. Widely planted, but it perished (according to Davidson) in the late 1840s, although before that 'too much could not [have been] said in praise of this wonderful potato.'

ref: Davidson, 'History of potato varieties', *Journ. Dept. Agriculture (Ireland)* 33 (1935): 60-61.

#### 'Irish Chieftain'

Late maturing potato, with smooth, white, oval to cylindrical tubers, flesh white with mild flavour; blue-heliotrope flowers with white tips to petals; foliage dark grey-green usually mottled due to chronic infection with mosaic virus.

**Origin:** reputed to be a hybrid raised from 'Beauty of Hebron' ('a very fine early kidney, heavy cropper, good cooker') crossed with *Solanum commersonii*, but Salaman commented that a more probable origin was a cross between 'Up-to-date' and 'Champion'. Introduced by Mr McKenna, Manorhamilton, County Leitrim.

refs: Salaman, *Potato varieties* (1926), 267-268; *Journ. Roy. Hort. Soc.* 43 (1918): 138.

#### 'Irish Queen'

syn: Seedling No. 7

'It is of uniform shape, round, with deep eyes like Champion; haulm very strong, and ripe a little before Champion; in wet, cold land it thrives better than any other kind that I have grown. Furthermore it does best in wide drills with fairly close planting, requires little manure, and grows very rapidly.'

**Origin:** raised by Isaac Bell, Banbridge, County Down; also available from Wesley Forbes, 'The Irish seed and bulb grower and potato specialist', Gilnahirk, Belfast, who advertised it as 'the most popular in Ireland today' (January 1909).

ref: *Ir. gardening* 3 (1908): 15.

#### 'Leinster Wonder'

Round tubers becoming purple-stained at maturity, flesh pale yellow, a waxy, but insipid potato that keeps well, and resistant to *Phytophthora*; flowers white; foliage dark grey-green.

**Origin:** raised by Miss Williams, Killucan, County Westmeath, who took seeds from a berry produced by 'Champion', about 1905. This potato was introduced commercially in 1910 by J. F. Williamson, Summer Hill,

Mallow, County Cork.

ref: Salaman, *Potato varieties* (1926), 279.

before 1895

#### 'Lord Dufferin'

'Tubers mature early ... white, round, rough-skinned.'

**Origin:** raised by Wesley Forbes, Belfast, and introduced into general cultivation about 1900. Hogg & Robertson marketed it too, suggesting it had 'a great future before it', and likely to 'supersede the Cruille as a market potato in the district where it was raised.'

ref: *Hogg & Robertson catalogue of seed potatoes* 1904, 24.

#### 'Lumper'

syn: 'The Lumper', 'Lumpers'

Tubers extraordinary, knobbly, elongated.

**Origin:** the history of this potato is not clearly recorded, but it was in cultivation by 1808 when it was first noted by Hely Dutton. Perhaps it arose in Ireland, but no-one seems to have recorded its origins. It was a very heavy cropping variety, even on poor soil.

'Lumper' was notorious as the potato that 'caused' the Great Famine in Ireland 1846-1849. It is very susceptible to late blight and at that time it was by far the principal potato grown in Ireland by the poor, although universally denigrated: 'of a quality more fit for cattle than for man'. Nowadays 'Lumper' is only grown in specialized potato collections.

refs: Davidson, 'History of potato varieties', *Journ. Dept. Agriculture (Ireland)* 33 (1935): 64; Wilson, *The story of the potato through illustrated varieties* (1993), 113; Nelson, *The cause of the calamity. Potato blight in Ireland, 1845-1847, and the role of the National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin* (1995).

illustr: cover of Nelson (1995).

#### 'Robertson's Fusilier'

Maincrop potato, 'a white round tuber with moderately shallow eyes ... erect habit of growth with rich green foliage. It is a most prolific cropper, and the quality and flavour when cooked all that could be desired.'

**Origin:** 'raised in Ireland, a seedling from the old Scotch Champion', introduced by Hogg & Robertson. 'We feel confident [this] will supercede that well known variety.'

ref: *Hogg & Robertson catalogue of seed potatoes* 1904, 24.

#### 'Robertson's La Mancha'

'A first early Red-skin Kidney shaped variety .. An abundant cropper, of fine cooking quality, and very free from disease.'

**Origin:** raised in County Clare, according to Hogg & Robertson; included in their 1904 catalogue.

ref: *Hogg & Robertson catalogue of seed potatoes* 1904, 23. 1907

#### 'Skerry Blue'

Cultivar of 'high repute for its quality, especially during the spring months ... [with] high degree of resistance to blight and its exceptionally good cooking quality'.

**Origin:** the history of this 'valuable variety' was recorded in the *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* (1881) by the Revd James O'Laverty:

[it] was introduced by a farmer who resided near the ancient church of Skerry, named James McAlschinder (or McAlexander). Mr McAlexander planted about 1846 two potatoes found in a barrel of Dutch flax-seed, which he purchased from Mr John Russell before 1905 Broughshane: this was the origin of the Skerry Blues.

'Skerry Blue' was widely planted and was well-regarded especially because it was resistant to late blight. Now it is found only in specialized collections.

Davidson (1935) stated that 'Black Skerry' (qv) was 'nothing new', just a new name for 'Skerry Blue'.

**refs:** Davidson, 'History of potato varieties', *Journ. Dept. Agriculture (Ireland)* 33 (1935): 74; Wilson (1993), 116; McKay, *An anthology of the potato* (1961), 90.

#### 'The Claddagh'

'Lovely pink-skinned main crop russety and beautifully netted round potato.'

**Origin:** raised and introduced by William Baylor Hartland, Ard Cairn, Cork.

Mr Wm. Baylor Hartland send us sample of his seedling potato "Claddagh", asking us to cook and "try them with butter and milk in the thoroughly Irish manner". We have done so, and never tasted a nicer dish of potatoes. They are firm, floury, and of a most pleasing flavour.

**refs:** *Ir. gardening* 4 (March 1909): ix; — 4 (April 1909): xiv.

#### 'The Colleen'

'Grand second-early potato.'

**Origin:** raised and introduced by J. F. Williamson, Mallow, County Cork, who advertised himself as a 'seed potato specialist'. Williamson was also responsible for introducing 'Leinster Wonder'.

**awards:** AM RHS (1907); 1<sup>st</sup> prize, RDS Winter Show 1908.

**ref:** *Ir. gardening* 4 (January 1909): xvii.

**illustr:** *Ir. gardening* 2 (1907): 228.

#### 'The Irish Apple'

No description traced.

**Origin:** from Ireland, presumably!

**ref:** Wilson, *The story of the potato through illustrated varieties* (1993), 116.



#### Modern cultivars

The following are merely a selection of cultivars raised in recent decades in Ireland; I have not attempted a comprehensive listing.

#### 'Avalanche'

Maincrop potato.

**Origin:** bred at Loughgall, County Armagh, still relatively new but not yet common.

**ref:** Wilson, *The story of the potato through illustrated varieties* (1993), 89, 110.

#### 'Avondale'

Maincrop potato, late maturing.

**Origin:** bred at Oak Park, County Carlow, and still relatively new.

**ref:** Wilson, *The story of the potato through illustrated varieties* (1993), 89, 110.

#### 'Cara'

syn: 'Oak Park Beauty'

Maincrop potato, producing round, white tuber with pink eyes, flesh pale yellow; resistant to eelworm and blight.

**Origin:** a very successful potato raised at Oak Park, County Carlow, as a result of a cross involving 'Ulster Glade', one of John Clarke's potatoes. 'Cara' is widely cultivated in Cyprus and Egypt for export back to the British Isles! Wilson (1993) comments that it is a good cultivar for the gardener and exhibitor, but is not kind about its cooking qualities being second-rate compared with 'King Edward'.

**ref:** Wilson, *The story of the potato through illustrated varieties* (1993), 90, 111.

**illustr:** Wilson, *The story of the potato through illustrated varieties* (1993), 89.

#### 'Carlingford'

First-early potato, high-yielding.

**Origin:** bred at Loughgall, County Armagh; a common potato, rapidly increasing in acreage.

**ref:** Wilson, *The story of the potato through illustrated varieties* (1993), 89, 111.

#### 'Colleen'

First early potato, flesh firm, pale yellow.

**Origin:** bred at Oak Park, County Carlow, and still relatively new.

**ref:** *Ir. garden* 7 (2) (March 1998), 32.

**illustr:** *Ir. garden* 7 (2) (March 1998), 32.

#### 'Cultra'

Tuber partly red, high-yielding maincrop potato.

**Origin:** bred at Oak Park, County Carlow; a relatively new potato.

**ref:** Wilson, *The story of the potato through illustrated varieties* (1993), 89, 111.

#### 'Dundrod'

First-early potato.

**Origin:** this potato originated from crosses made by John Clarke (see Wilson, 1993, 74), introduced from Loughgall, County Armagh. A rare potato.

**ref:** Wilson, *The story of the potato through illustrated varieties* (1993), 74, 89, 111.

1768

#### 'Dundrum'

Second-early potato.

**Origin:** like 'Dundrod' this rare potato originated from crosses made by John Clarke (see Wilson, 1993, 74) and was later introduced from Loughgall, County Armagh.

**ref:** Wilson, *The story of the potato through illustrated varieties* (1993), 89, 111.

#### 'Navan'

Maincrop potato, high-yielding.

**Origin:** bred at Loughgall, County Armagh; a relatively new, and still uncommon potato.

**ref:** Wilson, *The story of the potato through illustrated varieties* (1993), 89, 114.

1989

#### 'Stormont Dawn'

**Origin:** from Loughgall, County Armagh; one of the Stormont series of potatoes introduced between 1942 and 1968; this was the most notable, but is now found only in specialized collections.

**ref:** Wilson, *The story of the potato through illustrated varieties* (1993), 89, 116.

John Clarke of Moss-side, County Antrim, was a major independent breeder of potato cultivars, and his potatoes all have an 'Ulster' name. Only 'Ulster Sceptre' and 'Ulster Prince' are likely to be available. Mr Clarke was a self-taught farmer, who became famous for his high quality potatoes (see Wilson, *The story of the potato through illustrated varieties*: 74 (1993)).

#### 'Ulster Beacon'

'Ulster Brevet'

#### 'Ulster Chieftain'

Oval, white-skinned potato, with white flesh, matures early; very susceptible to late blight.

**Origin:** a hybrid, first early potato from 'May Queen' crossed with 'Herald'. Keen gardeners like this cultivar for growing in cold frames, and some was still grown commercially in Scotland in the 1990s. It was still available commercially in 1997-1998.

**ref:** Wilson, *The story of the potato through illustrated*

varieties(1993), 75, 116.

**illust:** Wilson, *The story of the potato through illustrated varieties*(1993), 75.

'Ulster Classic'

Available commercially in 1997-1998

'Ulster Commerce'

'Ulster Concord'

'Ulster Cromlech'

#### 'Ulster Dale'

Tubers thick, kidney-shaped to oval, with white skin; flesh white.

**Origin:** This was a high-yielding potato, raised from 'Ulster Earl' crossed with another of John Clarke's own seedlings (no. 650). It was prone to attack by *Phytophthora* and was not regarded as a good cooker.

**ref:** Wilson, *The story of the potato through illustrated varieties*(1993), 78, 117.

'Ulster Earl'

'Ulster Emblem'

#### 'Ulster Ensign'

Tuber oval, skin white with pink tinge, flesh white.

**Origin:** the parentage of this potato is not known. It did not store well and was regarded as having poor cooking qualities.

**ref:** Wilson, *The story of the potato through illustrated varieties*(1993), 76, 117.

**illust:** Wilson, *The story of the potato through illustrated varieties*(1993), 76.

'Ulster Glade'

'Ulster Glen'

'Ulster Gozo'

'Ulster Grove'

'Ulster Knight'

'Ulster Lancer'

'Ulster Leader'

'Ulster Magnet'

'Ulster Malta'

'Ulster Monarch'

#### 'Ulster Premier'

Small, long, white-skinned tuber, tinted pink at rose end, flesh creamy white, a good mealy potato.

**Origin:** John Clarke raised this from 'Gladstone. It was a popular potato in the 1950s.

**ref:** Wilson, *The story of the potato through illustrated varieties*(1993), 75, 117.

**illust:** Wilson, *The story of the potato through illustrated varieties*(1993), 75.

#### 'Ulster Prince'

Kidney shaped tuber with white skin and white flesh.

**Origin:** John Clarke raised this first early potato by crossing 'Ulster Earl' (one of his own cultivars) with 'Herald' x 'Arran Cairn'. It is susceptible to frost, but tolerant of drought, and is still available commercially (1997-1998).

**ref:** Wilson, *The story of the potato through illustrated varieties*(1993), 77, 117.

**illust:** Wilson, *The story of the potato through illustrated varieties*(1993), 77.

'Ulster Ranger'

#### 'Ulster Sceptre'

A first-early potato with an oval tuber, yellow-skinned, with yellow flesh, waxy texture when cooked.

**Origin:** a cross between 'Pentland Ace' and 'Ulster Prince', raised by John Clarke. It is no longer widely grown, but is

still available commercially (1997-1998).

**ref:** Wilson, *The story of the potato through illustrated varieties*(1993), 77, 117.

**illust:** Wilson, *The story of the potato through illustrated varieties*(1993), 77. 1967

1939

'Ulster Sovereign' 1968

Available commercially in 1997-1998. 1934

#### 'Ulster Supreme' 1950

Maincrop potato with large, flat, oval white-skinned tubers; flesh white.

**Origin:** John Clarke crossed 'Dunbar Standard' and 'Katahdin' to get this maincrop potato, which was high-yielding, but because of the large tubers it was difficult to harvest with machinery.

**ref:** Wilson, *The story of the potato through illustrated varieties*(1993), 78, 117.

'Ulster Tarn'

'Ulster Torch' 1943

'Ulster Viscount' 1948

1946

1962

1958

1954

1959

1953

1972

1947

1960

1955

1936

1945

1947

1958

1964