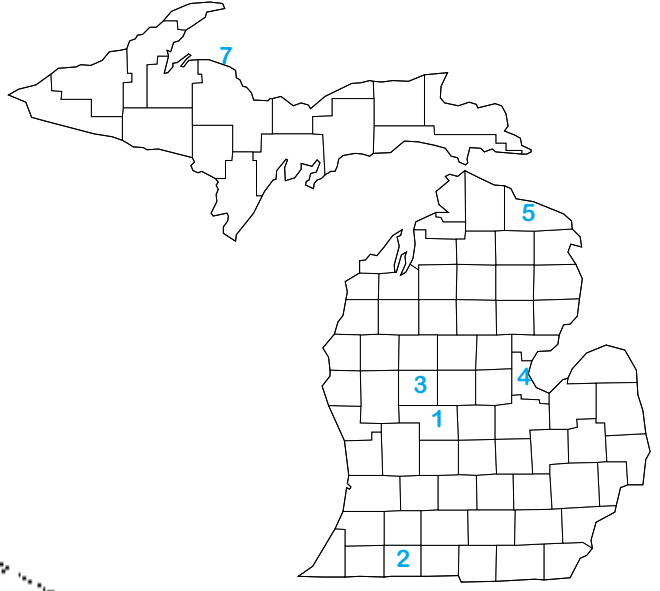
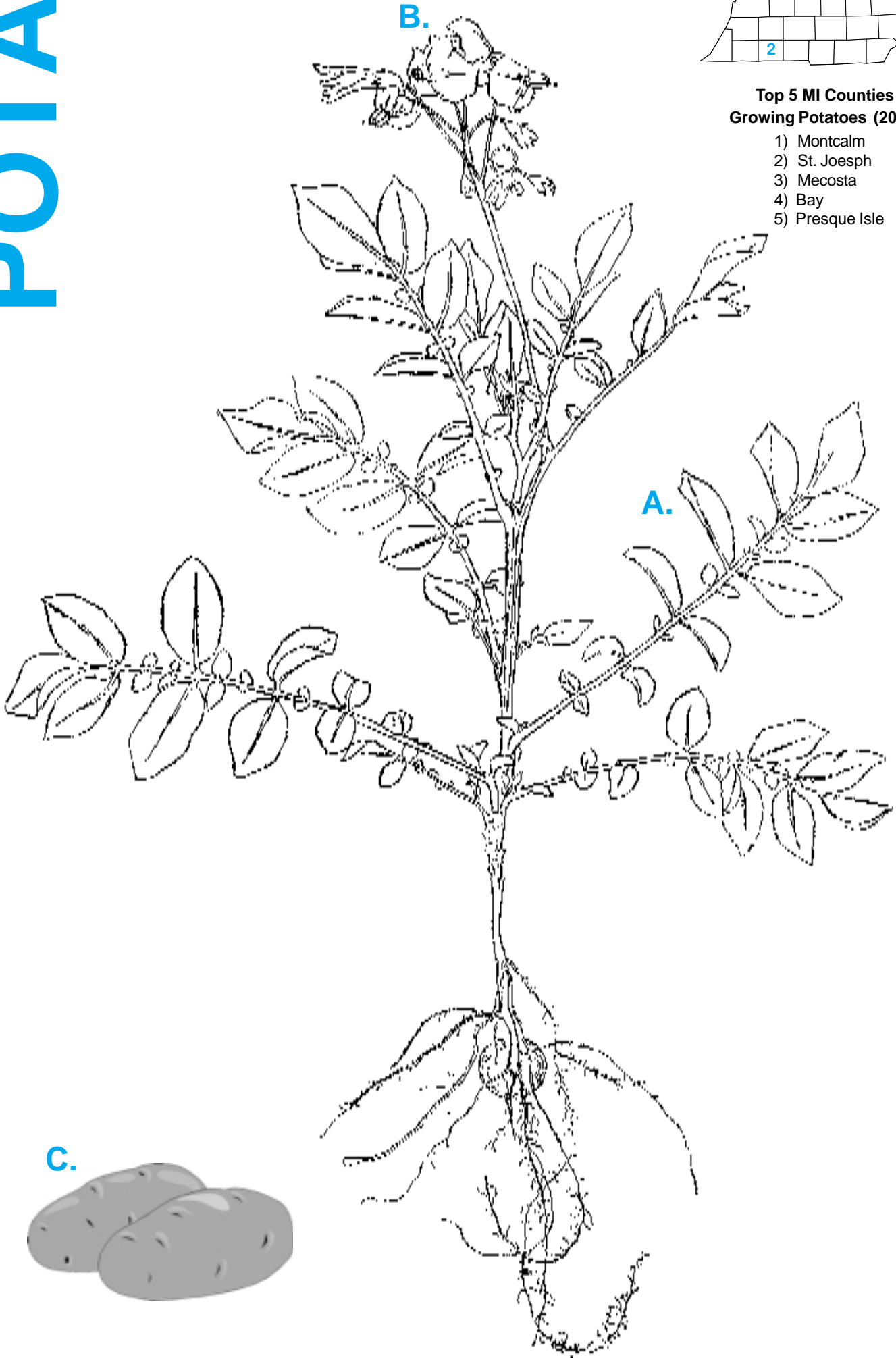


POTATOES

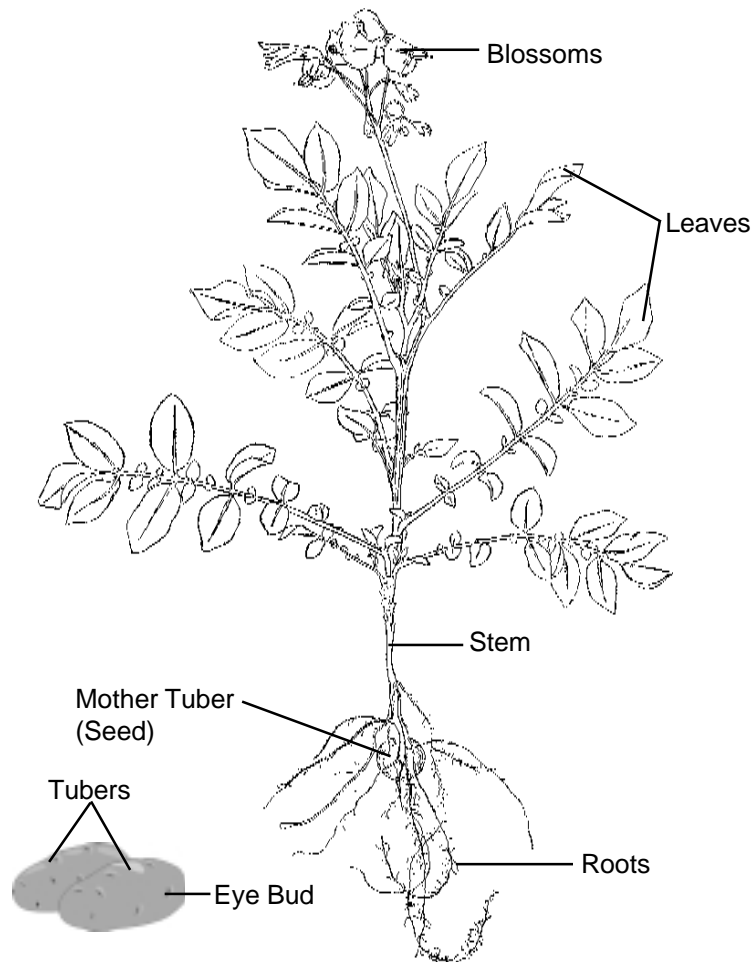


**Top 5 MI Counties
Growing Potatoes (2000)**

- 1) Montcalm
- 2) St. Joseph
- 3) Mecosta
- 4) Bay
- 5) Presque Isle



POTATOES



ON THE FRONT

A. Potato Plant

The potato plant consists of stems, which grow to a length of one to two feet. The leaves are also slightly hairy and grow to a length of 3 to 12 inches. Each leaf contains nine or more leaflets, one to three inches in length.

B. Blossoms

The blossoms come in many colors. Common colors are white, rose, blue, yellow and purple. The berries, or potato balls, form and develop after fertilization and turn yellow as they mature. Each potato ball may contain 200 or more seeds. These seeds are used by plant breeders, not for commercial production.

C. Tubers

The tubers are the portion of the plant used for food and "seed." They develop below the soil surface and come in a variety of sizes, shapes and colors. Each tuber contains several "eyes", or axillary buds. These are the small dimples in the surface of the tubers from which new plants can develop.

Potatoes

Michigan potato producers grew nearly 1.5 billion pounds of potatoes in 2000. That's 33,000 truckloads of potatoes. Michigan is now tenth in the nation in potato production. This represents \$103 million in sales for Michigan farms. Potatoes are the largest vegetable crop in the state.

Over 80 percent of Michigan's 47,500 acres of potatoes harvested in 2000 were used for processing. The balance was used for table stock and seed.

Michigan is the largest producer of potatoes for chips. The most popular varieties of Michigan potatoes are round whites, used for chips and for table. Russets and red potatoes are also grown for table use.

Potatoes are a good source of vitamins C and B6, and have nearly

as much potassium as a banana. Americans eat 126 pounds of potatoes and potato products each year, with potato chips leading in home consumption, followed by mashed and baked potatoes.

Potatoes are also grown and used for seed, starch, flakes, soups and occasionally for livestock feed.

Planting

Planting a successful potato crop begins with selecting the proper seed potatoes. Only certified seed potatoes should be planted. This ensures that the potatoes will be true to their variety and most importantly -- free from seed-borne disease. Only a very few acres are planted with whole potato seed. Most are planted with tubers which have been cut up into pieces.

Each piece of the seed potato must contain at least one eye in order for a new plant to grow. The pieces are put into the ground using a planter and they are usually placed two to three inches deep and about one foot apart in rows that are three feet apart. The fields must receive an even, moderate moisture supply and must be constantly monitored for weeds and insects. Sandy soils with irrigation produce the most uniform potatoes for the table.

Harvest

The potato harvest usually takes place about 90 days after planting. Specialized mechanical harvesters are used to extract the potatoes from underground. A lot of care must be taken not to injure the tubers. The two main types of injury that occur are the skinning or tearing of the potato skin and bruising of the tuber below the surface of the potato skin. Both of these factors reduce the amount the potatoes can be sold for and may make the potatoes more susceptible to decay.

Storage

Many potatoes are not sold immediately after they are harvested. These potatoes must be stored properly if they are to be marketed at their full potential value. There are several factors that influence proper potato storage. They should be kept in a dark place and out of direct sunlight (40 to 50°F) to prevent sprouting. The storage space should have relatively high humidity so the potatoes do not dry out, but it must also have good ventilation so the potatoes do not begin to decay.

Did you know?

- One potato contains 0 grams of fat and 0 grams of cholesterol.
- The average potato is 75 to 80 percent water.
- Close relatives to the potato plant include tomatoes, peppers and petunias.
- Potato chips were first invented at a resort in New York in 1853.

