By: Jim Langham

The year I grew succotash

Although I usually think of succotash as some type of blend of corn and lima beans, I will never forget about the spring when I grew a varied form of the delightful dish in our Michigan garden.

It was 1983, a year in which winter had been quite sparse, similar to what we've had this year. At the time, I was a "young man" of 35 and filled with energy in anticipation of planting garden. When the mild weather continued into early March, I exercised my zeal by planting several rows of potatoes in the first week of March.

Many around me were skeptical of that early planting; in fact, that skepticism was fed well two weeks later when we had the biggest snowstorm of the entire winter and temperatures dropped back to zero for several mornings. Then followed a cold and wet spring and the potatoes were nowhere to be found.

By early May, I was convinced that they weren't going to sprout, so I decided to do it all over again with sweet corn. I tore up the ground, re-tilled the spot where the potatoes had been planted and replanted with my favorite sweet corn flavor of the time, Illini Chief Extra Sweet.

A few weeks later, the natural warming of the spring season set in and the soil began to warm for germination. One day when I was checking the garden for results, I noticed that the corn was sprouting and early plants were starting to shoot through the soil. But something else strange

was happening – the potatoes had also sprouted. There before my eyes was a unique blend of corn and potatoes plants growing together in the same patch, a unique lesson of the fact that germination occurs only when conditions are correct.

For the next two days, I transplanted potato plants into another part of the garden where they survived and did well under the summer sun.

At the time, I recall applying that experience to life's tendencies, especially those of impatience and impulsiveness when we want things to happen right now. I thought of how, especially when we are younger, we sow seeds of ideas, dreams and goals and expect them to come true immediately. Then, when things don't unfold the way that we would like, we take life into our own hands and end up with something like that potato patch in the midst of our sweet corn.

These days, with just a little more yardage on my lifespan and a bit more patience in my thinking, I have come to realize the importance of understand that time is not as important as waiting, that things work best if we allow them to happen when they are supposed to.

Just a few days ago, I was talking with an individual about how life's perspective tends to make some major changes as we reach our 50s, 60s and beyond. Things that once stirred us up don't seem that big and the tendency to rush into things has become so much slower and well thought out.

I can remember some of the early days right after we were married. I bought a color television just so that I could watch the Cincinnati Reds in the World Series. Within a day, I closed the day on a deal to purchase a new car.

I recall a time when I was a boy that my dad was trying to start the lawn mower and it wouldn't respond. Each time he pulled the rope he became more impatient. Finally, as a young man himself, he kicked the mower, gave it a few choice words and walked away.

Many years later, he was standing by his son who was about the same age he had been at the time that incident occurred. I pulled and yanked and it wouldn't start. Finally, I gave it a kick, let

out a few choice words and walked away.

At the time, my father, in his 60s, said, “Jim, it’s only a machine; it’s not worth being that upset.”

I quickly reminded him of the time a similar thing happened to him when he was my age, to which he humorously responded, “Yes, but that was then and this is now and I look at things a lot different now.”’

Somehow, the incident of that day and the matter of seeds sown that sprout later all came together in my train of thought. It’s almost like that old expression we used to say when things baffled us, “Oh, succotash.” It will happen when it is supposed to.