

Seed Potatoes

You can grow potatoes in the ground, in stacks of straw or mulch, in black plastic bags, in garage cans. Potatoes can be a fun and easy crop to grow!

Always use nursery-selected seed potatoes which are certified to be disease free. Often potatoes purchased in the grocery store have been treated to prevent sprouting.

Soil Preparation

Potatoes prefer a loose, rich, slightly acidic soil. Work organic matter (compost, manure, peat moss etc.) and a low nitrogen fertilizer into the soil below the potato seed, where it will feed the roots, but not contact the newly forming potatoes. Avoid using fresh manure or lime in the soil where potatoes are to be grown, as it tends to cause scab on the potatoes.

How to Plant

1. Plant when soil temperatures are 55°-70°F. A week or two before your planned potato planting date, set your seed potatoes in a protected area exposed to some warmth and lots of light. This will induce them to begin sprouting.
2. Cut potatoes into 1 1/2 inch pieces, making sure there are at least two good eyes per piece. Allow cut pieces to dry for 24-48 hours before planting - this allows cut surfaces to heal slightly, reducing the chance of rotting. Small potatoes can be planted whole.
3. Mounding or hilling: Dig a shallow trench about 4" wide and 6-8" deep. For most household uses, you will want to plant your potato seeds 12" apart in this trench. Place the potato pieces into the trench (cut side down) and then cover them with a couple of inches of soil. (Do not fill the trench in completely!) When the plants are about 7" high, gently mound the soil halfway up around the growing plants. Repeat this mounding every 2-3 weeks when the plants are about 7" high, covering with a couple of inches of soil, until the plant blooms.
4. Container: Use a cage, barrel or any container with drainage, at least 1 1/2 ft x 2 1/2 ft. Follow the same steps for mounding, covering about half the plant each time.

Watering

Keep your potato vines well watered throughout the summer, but especially during the period when they are in flower, and immediately thereafter. This is the time when the plant is creating the new tubers, and water is critical. As a guideline, water potatoes (thoroughly) weekly during warmer summer weather, allowing the soil to go slightly dry between watering.

Water early in the day so that the foliage has time to dry completely before evening. (*Wet foliage can make your plants more susceptible to several potato diseases.*) Irregular watering causes irregular shaped or knobby potatoes.

When foliage turns yellow and dies back, discontinue watering to allow the tubers to "mature" for a week or two before harvesting.

Fertilizing

Until blooming ends, foliar spray with fish emulsion/liquid seaweed extract. Spray in the morning while it's still cool. No need to fertilize once the vines are in full bloom.

Harvesting

You may begin harvesting some of the *small or new potatoes* as soon as the tops of the plants begin to flower. Gently pull away the soil and remove some of the small potatoes. Be sure to cover the remaining potatoes and allow them to mature.

For *full size tubers*, wait until the vines have turned yellow and died back. Potatoes harvested for storage should be allowed to dry out or "cure" for a few days; some people leave them in the hill for several days to allow skins to "set". Store potatoes in a cool (40° F), well-ventilated, dark location - not in the refrigerator!

Don't grow potatoes in the same soil more than once in three years. Many diseases and insect pests will survive and remain in this area, in spite of your best eradication efforts!