

Potatoes

Selection:

Potatoes come in an assortment of sizes, shapes, and colors. Some are better for baking while others are better as baby or “new” potatoes. Select a variety that both matches your cooking needs and does well in your area.

Best varieties for our area:

Yukon Gold— A buttery-tasting yellow with a thin skin that requires no peeling

Superior— The best yielding white baker

Purple Majesty—Great all-purpose potato with a unique color

Dakota Pearl—Best for new potatoes

Always purchase seed potatoes from a reputable supplier. Supermarket potatoes can carry disease or have been treated to keep them from sprouting. Look for certified, Blue Tag potatoes.

Preparation:

Start by laying out the seed potatoes in a warm, sunny location, to force sprouting. Cut potatoes into small pieces with at least 2 “eyes” per start. If seed potatoes are small, leave whole. Lay pieces out on newspaper for 2-3 days to dry and crust over before planting to avoid rotting in damp spring soil. Potatoes need loose soil to put on tubers so prepare beds in the fall by tilling in compost and fertilizer. Do not try to till a bed in spring- it is too muddy!

Planting:

There are several ways to plant your potatoes:

Trench: Dig a trench 6-8 inches deep and plant pieces about 1 foot apart. Place pieces cut side down in trench and cover with 3-4 inches of soil. Do not fill up the trench. Once the plant has pushed through the soil add another 3-4 inches of soil. Add a third round of 3-4 inches of soil once the potato is 8 inches tall. Continue mounding up soil an inch at a time to cover the stem. Potatoes produce fruit underground along the stem so keep adding soil to increase production. Mound up the soil until hills are about a foot high.

Mound: Till up an area about 3 feet in diameter. Plant 6-10 seed potatoes and cover with 4 inches of soil or straw. Continue adding soil or straw just like you would in the trench method.

Container: Potatoes are a great crop for a container. Use a large 10-gallon bucket with holes drilled, old tires or a potato bag. Plant 3-6 pieces and add soil just like other methods. When ready to harvest just dump out your bucket to enjoy fresh potatoes.

Watering:

Potatoes, like all vegetables, need consistent watering to ensure a healthy yield. In the ground, an inch of water per week is sufficient. If growing in a container, allow the soil to dry out slightly (about 1/4-1/3 of the way down) and then water well. Potatoes can be allowed to dry out more once flowering is finished.

Harvest:

Potatoes can be harvested any time a few weeks after the flowers have faded. These early harvests produce small, “new” potatoes. If larger potatoes are desired wait until foliage starts to wither and die. If harvesting for winter storage is your goal, wait a couple weeks until after tops have died to harvest. You may harvest a few potatoes at a time allowing the others to mature. A crop planted around St. Patrick’s Day can usually be expected to produce edible tubers in July.