



# Potato Planting and Care Guide

## Preparation

1. Use a clean knife and cutting board to cut the seed potatoes into smaller pieces.
  - Each piece should have at least 1-2 “eyes” (small indentations which sprout)
  - Aim for pieces about 1oz - 1.5oz or 1-2 inches. (This isn’t a hard and fast rule - you’re trying to maximize the number of plants you can grow and their chances of success. If the potato is this size already, no need to cut it.)
  - If an eye has a sprout growing already, be careful not to remove it.
2. Leave the pieces on a tray at room temperature for a couple of days, so the cut surfaces can form a tough, protective layer.

## Planting

1. Choose the best site:
  - Sun: Full sun
  - Soil: Well-drained, sandy soil.
  - Spacing: plant 12 inches apart, in rows about 3 ft apart
2. Dig a shallow trench (about 5-6 inches deep) along your row.
3. Place potato pieces cut side down about 1 ft apart in the trench.
4. Fill in the trench, covering the plants with about 4 inches of soil or compost. You will need more soil to hill the plants in a few weeks.

## Care

1. Water: Potatoes like about 1in of rainfall per week. To achieve that without rainfall, water once per week, making sure to thoroughly soak the soil. Use a trowel to check how deep the soil is wet and keep watering if the wetness is only 1-2 in deep. You might need to water twice a week if you have very sandy soil.
2. Hilling: Once the plant stems are 1ft tall, start hilling soil up along the plants so a few more inches of stem are below the soil line. This encourages the plant to grow further underground and prevents potatoes from being exposed to light. (Potatoes exposed to light turn green - cut out green portions of potatoes before eating.) Do this 1-2 more times as the plants grow. By the end of the growing season you should have hilled about 6-8in of soil around each plant.
3. Weeding: Weed regularly so your potato plants don’t have to compete for sunlight and nutrients (they like both *a lot*). After you weed, make sure any potatoes are still fully covered by soil.
4. Pests: Watch out for orange patches (like tiny orange fish eggs) on the top or underside of leaves - these are Colorado potato beetle eggs which will grow into

larvae that will rapidly defoliate the potato plant before spreading. Squish the eggs and wipe them off the leaves. Or vice versa. If you find larvae (usually brown/red to salmon colored), remove them too.

- Another common pest is a cutworm, which chews off potato stems at the soil line.
- If you need help identifying and treating a problem, the University of Minnesota Extension has a diagnostics site called "[What's Wrong With My Plant?](#)" [click site name for link]

### Harvest

1. Harvest new potatoes 6-7 weeks after planting. New potatoes have a thin skin that makes them easy and delicious to eat with the skin on.
2. Harvest mature potatoes after the plants have died back and dried out.
3. Choose a dry, warm day. From 6-10 inches to the side of the plant's stem, dig down about a foot, sliding your shovel under the plant to pop it out of the ground. Pull it up and pick potatoes!
  - Don't forget to check the dirt around the new hole for more potatoes.
4. Try not to cut the potatoes as you dig. Sort out any that were cut or damaged before storing.
  - Optional: harvest both new AND mature potatoes from the same plant: Dig beside the plant, moving the dirt around to find and pick some new potatoes. Leave the rest to keep growing. Make sure not to damage the plant, to completely refill the hole, and to make sure any potatoes still in the ground are fully covered by soil.

### Storage

1. Brush off excess soil but don't wash your potatoes.
2. Set aside any potatoes cut during harvest. Eat them soon - don't try to store.
3. Place your potatoes in a warm (55-65°F), well-ventilated area. Keep them there under cover or in the dark to cure for 10-14 days - this allows the skins to thicken and any scrapes to heal.
4. After curing, remove any soft, shriveled potatoes to eat soon.
5. Potatoes are best stored in cool (32-40°F or 40-45°F for frying), moist conditions.
6. Do not eat potatoes with a lot of green skin or flesh (caused by light exposure). If a potato has a small amount of green, cut out that piece before cooking. Do not eat any potato sprouts - they can be toxic.

*Adapted from our own experience and the University of Minnesota Extension "[Growing Potatoes in Home Gardens](#)"*