



POTATOES

Potatoes have to be one of the easiest crops to grow. In warm climates like Auckland north they can be grown year round. However as potatoes are frost tender it is better to wait until the threat of frost has past or provide some protection from the frost if you know it is coming.

Potatoes can be grown in containers, tyres and even planter bags as potatoes grow downwards. They don't need particularly rich soil but a little bit of sulphate of potash or just potash is helpful. If you have a chance sprout the potatoes (let the eyes grow) to about 1 cm before planting. Dig trenches about 10 cm deep and plant with the sprouts facing up and cover with soil.

When you see growth breaking the soil mound up with dirt. Continue to mound until the plants have reached about a foot (around 30cm in height). Early potatoes will be ready to harvest in a certain number of days - second early and main potatoes are ready when the plant flowers and dies.

Early potatoes are not suitable for storing in the ground as their skins are too thin and they become susceptible to scab. Once dug the potatoes will need to be kept in a dark cool place; they can be kept from sprouting by the application of propham powder. Main crop varieties can be left in the ground and dug when required.

GROWING TIPS FOR SUPERSPUDS:

Potatoes are easy to grow but to get a really good crop there are a few things you need to know. Ensure your potato seed has sprouts of about 3-4cm. If not stand them in egg cartons with the eyes facing up. Leave them somewhere with good light but not direct sunlight.

Plant the potatoes in trenches 20 cm apart about 15-20cm deep. Mound up the soil around the plants as soon as shoots start to emerge. Continue to do this as the plants grow mounding more soil every time the plant emerges until you reach a height of approx 30cm.

New potatoes are ready when the flowers die off and maincrop potatoes are ready when the tops die down.

Prepare your soil by adding plenty of compost and fertiliser (sheep pellets are good).

Don't add lime unless the soil is very acidic. Lime encourages potato scab - brown corky spots on the skin. Potatoes don't require a lot of water but they do need to drink (a good water once a week).

Don't cut the potatoes half when planting- the exposed flesh leaves them open to disease.

If you want to store your potatoes for use later on you will need to grow 'maincrop' varieties such as Rua, Agria and Ilam Hardy. Maincrop varieties develop in 100 to 150 days and have a firm protective skin. Early varieties such as Swift, Cliff Kidney and Jersey Benne have a fragile skin and won't keep.