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Growing Potatoes

Steps for Success!

V#4



#1



#2



#3



Potatoes can be grown successfully in Michigan gardens. The potato has specific soil requirements. Practices are suggested here to aid in obtaining a high yield of quality potatoes.

Soil Requirements a well-drained soil, high in organic matter is preferred. If heavy clay or clay loam soils are used, drainage problems should be corrected and organic matter content improved by growing cover crops or adding **#1 Dairy Doo Soil Amendment**. For pots use **#1 Baccto Professional Potting Mix** in a well-drained container.

Seedbed Preparation If a cover crop (rye or wheat are excellent choices) was planted the previous fall, it should be turned under before it exceeds 12 inches in height by tilling 8 to 10 inches deep, depending on the depth of the topsoil. After tilling, level the surface slightly so that furrows can be made. It is best to wait at least a week after tilling in the cover crop before planting the seed pieces.

Soil pH and Fertilizer Practices Liberal amounts of fertilizer are required for large yields of potatoes. Use **#2 Garden Tone** for container and ground beds. Ideally, the fertilizer should be placed in continuous bands two to three inches to each side and slightly below the seed piece. However, many gardeners will broadcast the fertilizer before tilling or spading. A typical rate would be three to five pounds per 50 square feet. When plants are four to six inches tall, band three to five pounds per 50 square feet of row about 6 to 10 inches from the row, if growth is not satisfactory and if foliage is yellowish-green.

Use **#3 PW Premium Continuous Release Plant Food** for supplemental feeding.

Planting Plant the seed in shallow trenches 3-1/2 to 4-1/2 inches deep and cover with an inch or two of soil. The seed pieces should be spaced 9 to 12 inches apart in rows 28 to 34 inches apart.

Cultivation and Weed Control Due to the small area involved and the variety of potentially sensitive crops grown in the garden, chemical weed control is not recommended. Control weeds by shallow and frequent cultivation. Deep cultivation may cut potato roots and slow growth. When plants are 6 to 8 inches tall, begin to mound soil around the bases of the plants to start forming a ridge or hill. By the time the plants are 15 to 18 inches tall (at last cultivation), the ridge or hill should be 4 to 5 inches high. "Hilling up" is necessary to prevent greening of shallow tubers.

Insect and Disease Control Most feed and garden stores sell approved insecticides and fungicides for use on potatoes. The spraying or dusting program should start as soon as the plants emerge and continue according to the product label until late summer or a few weeks before harvest. Flea beetles, leafhoppers, aphids and Colorado potato beetles are the major insects affecting leaves and stems. Early Blight and Late Blight are the major foliar diseases.

Harvesting and Storage For highest yields and best storage, potatoes should not be dug until two weeks after vines have naturally died down. This allows the skins to set and reduces skin peeling, bruising and rot in storage. When harvesting at temperatures above 80 degrees F, potatoes should be picked up immediately and put in a dark place. Potatoes exposed to sun and high temperatures will turn green and may rot. Most homes do not have a suitable place to store potatoes for more than four to six weeks. To store potatoes for several months, the tubers should be cured in a dark place at 60 to 65 degrees F and a humidity of 85 percent or higher for 10 days. After the tubers are cured, keep them in a cool (40 to 45 degrees F), dark place with high humidity. Under these conditions most varieties will not sprout for two to three months.