

✧ Renee's Garden ✧

Your Garden To Table Seed Company

SEED POTATO GROWING GUIDE



If You Must Delay Planting

Do: keep the bags of seed potatoes in a cool (45-55° F) dark place. They will keep 2 to 4 weeks if necessary. The eyes on the seed potatoes may begin to form chubby little sprouts, but this just means they are ready and waiting to grow.

Don't: put them in the refrigerator; its low humidity will dehydrate them, nor in a warm dark place as they will make long pale shoots that weaken the plants.

Planting Instructions

1. In spring, when soil is workable and no longer soggy (about several weeks before last estimated frost date) prepare a deeply worked bed in a sunny spot that is as free of weeds and soil clumps as possible. Work in a generous amount of good compost or well-composted manure before planting, because potatoes appreciate fertile soil. (One caveat: don't use fresh manure, as this can cause potato scab; finished or commercial compost or well-aged manure is fine to use.) Green cover crops turned under before the planting season begins are an ideal way to increase the fertility of potato beds.
2. If you have seed potatoes that are larger than 2¼ inches, cut them in half with several eyes on each piece. Smaller potatoes can be left whole. For Fingerling varieties: if more than 3 inches long, cut in half crosswise. If convenient, let the cut pieces dry out overnight or for a day or two in a place with excellent air circulation before planting to allow them to callous over and reduce the possibility of rot.
3. Dig a shallow trench 6 to 8 inches deep (3 inches wide at the bottom.) The edge of a hoe is good for this job. Rows should be 12-18 inches apart. Put the cut potato pieces into the trench with the "eyes" up, about 9 inches apart. Using a rake, cover them immediately with 3 to 4 inches of soil after planting. Do not allow the soil to dry out.
4. When the potato plants are 10 inches tall, fill in the trench from both sides by gently pulling the soil up against the plants with a rake or hoe, leaving several inches of each leafy plant exposed. (Keep tools well away from the plants so as not to damage the roots.) Potatoes will form along the buried potato plant roots (a.k.a. stolon). Weed free mulch can be applied after this initial hilling.
5. As plants grow, mound up soil or mulch heavily around the base of the plants (compost is a good choice for this step as it enriches the soil as well does protects it), but do not bury any leaves. Mulching also helps retain moisture and protect the growing plants from hot summer sun.
6. Watch for insects. Identify your pests and use appropriate controls if insects are a problem.
7. While actively growing, potatoes need at least 1 inch of water per week. Aim for a consistent moisture level, neither dried out or soggy, and water regularly summer-dry areas or if it doesn't rain. Once plants are up and growing, foliar feeding (spraying the leaves) with fish emulsion solution or seaweed fertilizer is very beneficial and will improve yields.



Harvesting “New” Potatoes

Early varieties such as Yukon Gold or Dark Red Norland can be harvested and enjoyed as new potatoes early in the season. After about 60-65 days, plants will flower and little tubers will begin to form on underground stems called stolons (don't worry – some varieties either bloom very late or not at all – check for new potatoes after 65-75 days on plants that don't bloom).

Gently probe around the base of the plant for developing tubers on the ends of the underground stems. Dig up only enough new baby-sized potatoes for one or two days use as they are fragile and are best if eaten right after harvest for best quality and flavor. While it's a treat to harvest some of your crop as baby new potatoes, plan to leave the rest of the crop well covered to mature in size for later harvest and storage.

Harvesting and Storing Your Main Potato Crop

For your mature potato crop, allow growth until vines naturally wither and “die back” or until potatoes have reached desired size. Frost will encourage maturing. If tubers are fully formed and continue to have vigorous top growth, simply break the tops at ground level to terminate development. Allow tubers to remain in the soil at least two weeks after tops have either “died back” or have been terminated. This provides time for skins to “set” which increases storage quality.

Dig potatoes carefully with a fork so as not to bruise or damage skins. Dig deeply and at a distance of up to 18 inches from the plant to locate all tubers. Any injured tubers should be cooked and enjoyed right away.

Store potatoes in a moist dark environment: ideal storage is in wood crates, burlap or mesh bags at optimum about 35-40 degrees ° F, high humidity and good air circulation. (Adding a fan for air movement is a useful extra if you are storing a lot of potatoes) Do not store directly on a cement floor. Cooler temperatures slow down sprout development and increase storage life. Don't, however, keep storage potatoes in the refrigerator, as the atmosphere is too dry for good storage. (Note: If you have no other alternative to using a refrigerator, put a pan of water on the refrigerator shelf below the potatoes to add humidity.)

Potatoes will turn green and taste bitter if stored in the presence of light. Keep them covered with soil while in the garden by hilling or mulching and store after harvest in total darkness. While Burlap or mesh onion bags provide for good air circulation, bags alone will not keep light out.

Next Year's Crop

Scab is a common disease in potato production. This disease reduces the potato's appearance, but does not impact storage ability. Planting our “clean” certified seed potatoes in well-drained, loose soil can minimize the risk of developing scab. Moist soil is required during the development of tubers, but do not keep soil too soggy during the growing season. Avoid growing potatoes in soil with a pH range of 5.8-6.1, which tends to favor the development of scab.

Thoroughly harvest your potato crop; don't let any potatoes remain in the soil and weed out any volunteers as they emerge to eliminate potential sources of scab and virus for future potato production. ***We repeat for emphasis: resist the natural urge to leave volunteer sprouting potatoes in the ground. Rotate the location of your potato beds each season if possible so you are not growing this crop in the same spot.***

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