

HOME-GROWN POTATOES

Potatoes are a cool season crop, hence can be started when soil temperature is 40° F. In general, a 100' row of potatoes should yield 1-2 bushels of potatoes. (50-10 lbs. of potatoes). Buy your seed potatoes at the garden center. The traditional method of growing potatoes is described below. Read up on other methods to grow organic potatoes, such as potato tubs, bins and raised beds.

Soil Preparation: Potatoes require a well-drained, loose loam soil. Incorporating decomposed cow manure/compost or peat moss will improve the soil's aeration and drainage. Potatoes appreciate a acid soil of pH 5-5.4. Adjust the soil pH with the addition of acidic organic fertilizers such as cottonseed meal or with mineral sulfur. Fertilize using organic fertilizers after planting or incorporate when preparing rows. Or use synthetic fertilizers with a 5-10-10 analysis in bands on either side of potato rows below the seed potato plantings at 6-8 lbs./100'. Alternatively, fertilize after planting when potato plants are 4-6" tall. Apply at 2-3 lbs./ 100' of row.

Planting and Cultivation: Potatoes are a cool season crop, so plan on planting your seed pieces 2 weeks before the last frost. Plant pieces 3-4" deep in shallow trenches and cover with 2" of soil. Space them 12" apart in rows 3' apart.

When the plants are 6-8" tall, soil should be moved toward the row to form a ridge or hill. When the plants are 15-18" tall, the ridge should be 6 inches high. This mounding process is important to the development of the potato. Any potato exposed to the air turns green and toxic. Mounding can be helped by piling compost much or leaves over them also. Keep the row free of weeds, but avoid deep cultivation which can cut and destroy potato roots.

Numerous insects attack potatoes. Flea beetles and Colorado potato beetles are common foliage chewers. Regular dusting of Rotenone or Sevin insecticides and help control these pests. Early blight and late blight are common potato diseases, which can be prevented by fungicide sprays. Rotate crops so resident populations of problems do not hang around.

Harvest: Two weeks after the vines have completely died, the potatoes can be dug with a spading fork or shovel. Avoid bruising or cutting the tubers as much as possible. Quickly place the potatoes in a dark cool (65° F) place to avoid greening or rot.

Store potatoes for an extended time by curing in a dark place at 60°F and a humidity of 90% for 10-14 days. After curing, select the best tubers (free of cuts, bruises, or soft spots) and store in a cool 40°F dark place with moderate humidity.

There is great additional information online at many organic gardening websites.