

## **Enjoy the taste of freshly harvested potatoes**

If you have never tasted a freshly dug, homegrown potato, plant some this year. They are so easy to grow everyone can enjoy their superior taste.

Potatoes are cool-season vegetables that relish spring temperatures. They thrive in rich, well-drained soil amended with compost. Their tubers form easily in light soil, but may grow malformed in heavy, compacted clay soil. Potatoes grow best in a location basking in sunlight. If potatoes have been grown in the same area within the last three years, find a new spot to reduce the chance of insect or disease complications.

Purchase seed potatoes from your local garden center. If they are large, they can be cut into pieces, making sure each section has at least two eyes, a day or two before planting. Let freshly exposed surfaces dry before planting. Small seed potatoes are planted whole.

Dig a trench in the garden six to eight inches deep. Plant each piece of potato, with eyes pointing upwards, a foot apart in the trench. Refill the trench with just four inches of soil, filling in more soil as plants grow. Or dig a trench four inches deep, plant potatoes, refill with soil to the top of the trench, and mound soil higher over plants as they grow.

If you don't have garden space for potatoes, plant them in containers. Fill a pot with about six inches of light, soilless potting mix, add organic fertilizer, and place seed potatoes with eyes facing up. Cover them with a few more inches of potting mix. Continue adding potting mix as plants grow.

Adding soil over foliage as it grows is called hilling. The purpose of hilling is to prevent sunlight from reaching potatoes. Exposure to sunlight causes potatoes to turn green. When foliage reaches six to eight inches tall, cover the bottom half of stems with soil. Hilling should be done every two to three weeks.

Potatoes prefer consistent moisture. It is especially important to be sure potatoes don't suffer from drought stress when they are flowering and immediately after because tubers are forming. An inch or two of water per week is sufficient. If enough isn't provided through rainfall, supplemental water is a must.

If you prefer new potatoes, harvest them two to three weeks after plants finish flowering, typically about ten weeks after planting. Gently loosen soil around plants and remove the number of new potatoes desired. Leave the rest to continue growing.

When the leaves turn yellow and start to die back, stop watering. Dry soil will help potatoes begin curing for harvest.

A week or so after the foliage of plants dies back and the soil is dry, it's time to harvest the rest. Beginning from the outside of the plant, gently lift soil to avoid damaging potatoes. Brush the soil from potatoes planned for dinner in the next couple weeks and store in a dark place.

Spuds destined for winter dining need curing. After brushing soil from potatoes, allow them to dry in a protected area for a few days, and then choose firm potatoes, free from soft spots, for storing in a very cool, dry place. Protect potatoes from light to prevent them from turning green.

Examine potatoes in storage from time to time. Remove sprouts as they form. Save washing potatoes until just before use.

Once you have tasted newly-harvested potatoes, you will want to grow even more next year.

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