

✧ Renee's Garden ✧

Seed Potato Growing Guide

Planting

In spring, when the soil is workable and no longer soggy (about several weeks before the last frost) prepare a deeply worked bed in a sunny spot that is as free of weeds and soil clumps as possible. Potatoes appreciate fertile soil, so work in a generous amount of good compost or well-composted manure before planting. Green cover crops turned under before the planting season begins are an ideal way to increase the fertility of potato beds. Don't use fresh manure, as this can cause potato scab.

If you have seed potatoes that are larger than 2¼ inches, cut them into golf ball-sized pieces (about 1 oz.) with several eyes on each piece. Before planting it's a good idea to let any cut pieces dry out for a day or two in a location with excellent air circulation. This allows them to callous over and reduce the possibility of rot.

Dig your rows 4 inches deep, 3 inches wide at the bottom and 12-18 inches apart. Space the potato starts 9 inches apart - for cut pieces make sure the "eyes" face up. Cover them immediately with two inches of soil.

IF YOU MUST DELAY PLANTING:

Do: keep the bags of seed potatoes in a cool (45-50°F, 7-13°C) 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) or in a warm dark place as they will make long pale shoots that weaken the plants.

Growing Notes

While actively growing, Potatoes need at least 1 inch of water per week. Aim for a consistent moisture level, neither dried out or soggy. Fertilize occasionally with fish emulsions or seaweed fertilizer to improve yields.

When the potato plants are 6-8 inches tall, gently mound soil up against the plants, leaving several inches of stem exposed. Potatoes will form along the buried stems (a.k.a. stolens). Mulch can be applied after this initial hilling to help retain moisture and protect the tubers from the sun.

As plants grow, continue mounding soil, mulch, or compost up around the base of the plants, making sure not to bury any leaves. Watch for insects. Identify your pests and use appropriate controls if necessary.

Harvesting “New” Potatoes

Early varieties such as Yukon Gold or Dark Red Norland can be harvested and enjoyed as new potatoes. After about 60-65 days, gently probe around the base of the plant for developing tubers. Gingerly harvest only enough baby-sized potatoes for one or two days use as they are fragile and taste best if eaten right away. While it's a treat to harvest some of your crop as new potatoes, plan to leave the rest of the crop well covered to mature in size for later harvest and storage.

Harvesting and Storing

Allow growth until vines naturally wither and die back or until potatoes have reached the desired size. If tubers are fully formed but continue to have vigorous top-growth, simply break the tops at ground level to terminate development. Wait at least two weeks after die-back or pinch-back before harvesting. This provides time for skins to “set” which increases storage quality.

Using a fork to avoid damaging skins, dig deeply starting up to 18 inches from the plant. Don't let any potatoes remain in the soil to eliminate

potential sources of scab and virus for future potato production. Any injured tubers should be cooked and enjoyed right away.

Ideally, store potatoes off the floor in a moist dark environment with good circulation and a temperature of about 35-40°F (2-4°C). If stored in the presence of light, potatoes will turn green and bitter. While burlap or mesh bags allow good air circulation, they will not keep light out. If possible, avoid storing your potatoes in a refrigerator as they tend to dry out. However, if you have no other alternative, try putting a pan of water on the refrigerator shelf below the potatoes to add humidity.

Next Year's Crop

We repeat for emphasis: don't allow any potatoes to remain in the ground and resist the natural urge to leave volunteer sprouting potatoes. Also, if possible, rotate the location of your potato beds each season to help reduce the likelihood of pests and diseases.

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