



# Potatoes



When planting your garden you need to use certified seed potatoes. Certification means the potatoes are free of insect and disease problems and have not been treated with growth retardant.

## CUTTING POTATOES

If the seed potatoes are small to medium (the size of an egg) then plant the whole potato. If they are large cut them in half, or quarter them. Each section should have 2 or 3 growth eyes, and a large piece of potato. The potato piece helps sustain the potato plant until it develops its foliage. After cutting, let the cut surface callus over before planting them, usually a day. You can apply Sulfur Powder or Captan to your cut potatoes. Sulfur Powder is a natural protectant. Put seed potatoes in a paper bag add a tablespoon or two of Sulfur Powder, shake bag. Powder will stick to the potato pieces, and protect them from rot organisms in the ground.

## SPROUTING (Optional)

Sprouting is done before seed potatoes are cut up. You can hurry the harvest along by forcing the eyes of your potato seeds to sprout a few weeks before planting. By planting potato pieces that have already sprouted, you shorten the time it takes a plant to come out of the ground and develop the leaves that will eventually provide the energy to grow more potatoes.

To sprout, seed potatoes 2 or 3 weeks before planting spread them out in a single layer in an enclosed porch or in a warm room where they will get some sun and temperatures stay about 60°F or warmer. They will produce short green sprouts. When planting, handle with care so you do not break off the sprouts. At this point, you will need to cut them. See Cutting Potatoes section for more information.

## PLANTING

We recommend G&B Soil Building Conditioner, G&B Harvest Supreme and Espoma Tomato Tone. Till or spade the soil to a depth of 10 to 12 inches. Work in Soil Building Compost, Harvest Supreme & Fertilizer into the soil where you are going to plant your potato seeds. The first crop of early maturing potatoes can be planted in mid-March usually 6 to 8 weeks before the last frost. Soil temperatures need to be above 40°F. They say when the dandelions are blooming freely in the open it is time to plant your potatoes. Potatoes like a pH from 5.2-6.8

**Row Planting:** Dig a trench about 6 to 8 inches deep. Space seed potatoes 12 inches apart. Then cover with about 3 to 4 inches of soil. Pull in additional soil as the plants develop. Always make certain the potato tuber is covered.

**Hilling or Mounding:** Hilling or mounding is another method of planting potato seeds. Sprouts will emerge in about

2 weeks, depending on soil temperature. When the stems are about 8 inches high, gently hill the vines with soil from both sides of the row. Leave about four inches of vine exposed. Hilling puts the root system deeper where the soil is cooler, and creates a light fluffy medium for the tubers to develop in. Another hilling will be needed in another 2 to 3 weeks, and yet another as well. On

subsequent hilling, add only an inch or two of soil to the hill. Be sure to keep enough soil on top of the forming potatoes so that they don't push out of the hill and get exposed to light.

#### • Container Planting

You can plant potatoes in containers. Use half potting soil (such as Eden Valley) with half B&B Harvest Supreme. The container should be taller than its width. For most potatoes, a 20-inch diameter plastic container is ideal. Fill the container about 5 inches deep with soil mixture. Evenly space about 5 potato seeds. Cover with about 2 inches of soil & water. As the potatoes sprout and the stems grow add more soil around them, leaving some eaves exposed. Your potato crop will eventually develop along the stem. So the more stem that will be underground the better. Continue to add soil and water until the soil is 1 to 2 inches below container edge.

## WATERING

Black or hollow centers on potatoes are often caused by over-wintering, irregular watering causes irregular shaped or knobby potatoes. Water weekly during the warm summer weather, depending soil type.

## FERTILIZING

If you didn't add fertilizer when you planted, use Espoma Tomato Tone after the leaves emerge. Once the vines are in full bloom, stop fertilizing.

## HARVESTING

Normally 7 to 8 weeks after planting the earliest varieties of potatoes are blossoming. It is possible to find "new potatoes" in the hill. For full-sized potatoes, harvest when the vines turn yellow or have died back. Leave the tubers in the ground for two weeks to "cure", while the skins toughen. If hand digging place the fork outside the hill at first and lift the hill from the outside so as to avoid stabbing a potato. If the soil is wet, let them air dry on the surface for a few hours before gathering them. Separate and discard or set aside to eat immediately any blemished, scabby, misshapen or injured tubers. Do not put cut or damaged tubers in with the good potatoes, as they will rot and rot other potatoes with them.

## STORAGE

Keep them in the dark - in temperatures about 36 to 40°F, with enough humidity so they don't dry out, and given enough air circulation so they can respire. Humidity should be high (80-90%). Potatoes lose moisture when respiring, and low humidity can cause shriveling. We suggest partially heated garages, sheds, closets on outside walls, porches, or unheated back rooms are all cool, dark sites that are good for keeping potatoes, but protect them from freezing.

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