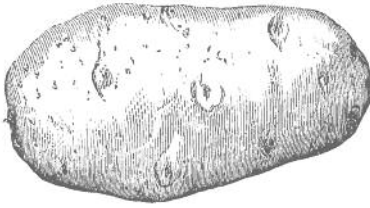


# Growing Potatoes



The practice of greening and pre-sprouting the seed potatoes before planting them out encourages early growth and hastens the development of marketable tubers.

The method is simple:

spread the seed tubers in open-top crates or flats, one layer deep with the "seed end" uppermost. Keep the flats warm (70

degrees) where light levels are medium in intensity (bright shade). The warmth stimulates the development of strong sprouts from the bud eye clusters. Usually seed potatoes are greened up starting a week or two before planting. Do not cut the seed before greening up. Cut it just before planting. Using a clean, sharp knife cut up larger potatoes into pieces immediately before planting, tubers the size of a hen's egg may be planted whole. At minimum, however, each piece should weigh at least 2-4 ounces and *must contain two or more strong eyes*.

## 1 preparing the soil

The ideal potato soil is deep, light and loose, a well drained but moisture retentive loam. Fortunately, the potato is also very adaptable and will usually produce quite respectably where soil conditions are less than perfect.

All soils, be they ideal or too heavy or too light, should be deeply fitted before planting by sub-soiling or double digging and by incorporating organic matter. Humus is important. It lightens and aerates heavy ground while it increases the moisture holding capacity of sandy earth.

Potatoes do best in soil with a pH ranging from 5.2-6.8. Alkaline soil will tend to make many varieties get scabby. Potatoes need well balanced nutrition. Properly made compost dug into the rows below the seed is generally sufficient to produce a fine crop. Potatoes given too much nitrogen grow lots of leafy vines but few tubers. Too much potassium and your tubers contain less protein.



## 2 planting

Planting early is risky as seed potatoes can rot in cold, water-logged soil. Optimum soil temperature for good growth ranges from 55° F. to 70° F.

The width between rows and overall plant spacing is determined by the size of your garden, your method of cultivation and the amount of irrigation you have available. gardeners can get by with as little as 2 feet between rows. Whatever your row spacing, dig a shallow trench about 6-8 inches deep. Plant the seed pieces 10-14 inches apart in this trench. Using a rake, cover the seed with 3-4 inches of soil—do not fill the trench completely.

## 3 hilling

Hilling is crucial to creating a place for potatoes to develop a large size and abundantly. Sprouts will emerge in about two weeks, depending on soil temperature. When the stems are about 8 inches high, gently hill the vines up with soil scraped from both sides of the row with a hoe. Leave about half the vine exposed. Hilling puts the root system deeper where the soil is cooler while the just scraped-up soil creates a light fluffy medium for the tubers to develop into.

Subsequent hilling will be needed twice more, once in two weeks after the first and again in another two weeks.

## 4 watering

Potatoes can grow without irrigation if the soil is deep and open, where there is no hardpan that restricts root penetration.

Unirrigated potatoes are less watery and taste better. If irrigation water is scarce, potatoes must be given "elbow room", so they can forage for their water without having to compete with other potato plants—and most importantly, the weeds must all be eliminated so they also don't compete for soil moisture.

## 5 fertilizing

After emergence and until blooming ends foliar spraying every two weeks with fish emulsion and/or a good liquid seaweed extract. Spray in the morning while it's still cool and the dew lingers on the leaves. This way all the fertilizer is absorbed. The best time to make the first application is the day before you hill up the vines for the first time.

## 6 harvesting

Normally seven or eight weeks after planting, the earliest varieties are blossoming. This signifies that early potatoes may be ready, so gently poke into a potato hill by hand to see what you can find while making as little disturbance as possible.

Dryish soil is definitely an advantage when harvesting; the tubers come up a lot cleaner and with much less effort.

After the tops are dead, rest the tubers in the ground, undisturbed for two weeks to "cure", while the skins toughen up, protecting the tubers from scuffing and bruising during harvest and storing. It is best to harvest in the cool morning hours. You want to chill your tubers down as fast as possible. If the soil is wet, let them air-dry on the surface for a few hours before gathering them.

