

Potatoes

PLANTING AND GROWING

Cultural Needs: Potatoes do best in well-drained, loose, sandy loam soil with a pH between 5.5 and 6.0. Avoid heavy soils that tend to become waterlogged during wet periods; the tubers will rot.

When to Plant: Plant potatoes up to three weeks before the final spring frost.

Preparation: Cut potato into 2-3 pieces with eyes (the “dimples” on potatoes are ‘eyes’) on each piece (at least 3 per piece) and let the cuts dry overnight. Dig trenches (4-6 inches deep for loose soil, or 2-3 inches deep for heavy soil) and space them 2-3 feet apart.

Planting: Place pieces, cut side down (4-6 inches deep for loose soil, 2-3 inches deep for heavy soil) 12 inches apart in the trenches. Sprinkle a tablespoon of organic all-purpose fertilizer (such as Dr. Earth Tomato, Vegetable & Herb Fertilizer) in the space between each potato piece. Fill in trench and water lightly if the soil is dry. Potatoes form close to the surface of the soil and are easily damaged by cultivation.

Growing: After the plants are about 10 inches tall, pile several inches of soil or mulch up around the stems to prevent exposure to the sun, which causes tubers to become green and inedible. Keep the crop watered regularly and free of weeds (note: water heavily/deeply then allow to dry out somewhat prior to the next watering). A light fertilizer with low nitrogen and high phosphorus, such as bone meal is all potatoes need. Occasionally they may need an organic insecticide and/or fungicide application. Dust with sulfur to diminish scab development.

Harvesting: Some potatoes can be harvested as soon as 7-8 weeks after planting, but remove them carefully without disturbing the mother plant. The foliage of many varieties turns brown and falls to the ground, indicating time for harvest. If this does not happen break or cut the foliage from the plant to stop growth. To allow the skins to set and increase storage ability, it is recommended that the potatoes be allowed to remain in the ground once the foliage has died or been cut down. After about 2 weeks have passed, carefully dig out with a spade or fork and avoid bruising or poking the tubers. Brush off any excess dirt.

Storing: Store potatoes in a dark, well-ventilated room at the lowest possible temperature without freezing. If the temperature is below 38 degrees F, the starch in the potatoes converts to sugar and the potatoes become soft. *Do not store apples with potatoes—they will quickly over-ripen!*

EXAMPLES AND DAYS TO MATURITY/HARVEST

‘RED PONTIAC’ – A popular red potato. Its red skin is sometimes netted. White fleshed with oblong to round tubers of medium size. Great for French fries, but can be boiled or baked. Stores well. Matures in about 100 days.

‘RED NORLAND’ – A red skinned, white fleshed potato. It is rounded to oval in shape. Great for frying and boiling but *NOT for baking*. This potato is sensitive to drought—regular watering is required. Matures in 70-90 days.

‘RUSSET BURBANK’ – The original Idaho baker, this potato has heavily netted skin and white flesh. Good for boiling, excellent for baking and French frying. Scab resistant. To prevent rough, knobby tubers it must have regular watering. Stores well. Matures in about 120 days.

‘YUKON GOLD’ – Medium-sized round potatoes with delicate yellow-colored skins and butter-yellow flesh. Excellent for baking, boiling or frying. Matures in about 70-90 days.