

# How To Plant And Grow Potatoes.

Potatoes are a wonderful nutritious vegetable and are the staple diet of many millions of people the world over. Many people go out daily to buy potatoes and when they come home with a pocket of them find them to be rotten, or with black marks on them or even going to seed. When this happens the potatoes although still edible are not as nice as they could be if they were fresh.

Unless you know a farmer and can go and get your potatoes fresh off his farm you will always get potatoes that are not completely fresh. It's a problem that is easily solved if you have a small plot of ground that you can use to plant your own potatoes in

No I'm not mad or insane, potatoes are extremely easy to grow so why not try growing your own this spring. Here in South Africa you can start planting your potatoes in early spring once the days start warming up. Early September is a good time, just watch the trees around you and when they start sprouting their new leaves then you can plant your potatoes.

In places such as the USA where the time to plant potatoes is March to April (spring) the soil is sometimes still cold and soggy. If you plant potatoes in this soil you will find that the potatoes will take their time to sprout.

How do you plant potatoes if you cannot get seedlings or potato seeds from nurseries. Seed potatoes is the answer. A seed potato is any potato that has grown an eye. These days when you purchase potatoes there are normally a few potatoes with eyes. Sort through the potatoes and select those that have no blemishes or marks but have eyes. These can become your seed potatoes.

There are two ways to use your seed potatoes. You can either plant them whole or you can cut them into pieces with each piece having at least one eye. Seed potatoes with a large number of eyes will produce a large number of small potatoes. Seed potatoes with fewer eyes tend to produce fewer but larger potatoes.

To protect seed potatoes that you have cut up from diseases that occur in soil you should allow the cuts to seal for at least a day before placing them in the ground.

Plant your seed potatoes in a good rich soil about three inches (7cm) deep and with plants about a foot (25cm) apart and in rows about a metre apart.

To prevent scabs forming on your new potatoes place each seed potato on a hand full of pine needles before covering it up. Potato scab appears as a rough patch on the skin of the potato. To prevent diseases forming in your potato or other vegetable crops also practise crop rotation in your garden. Once your potatoes have been planted the shoots could take anything from one to three weeks to sprout. When they emerge they grow pretty quickly and when the shoots are about a foot in length it's time to build up the soil around the base of the plant to the height of about eight inches (20 cm) to ensure that any potatoes forming below the ground stay below the ground. If a potato ends up in sunlight it turns green and becomes bitter and inedible.

During this growing period potatoes should be watered regularly to avoid the potato hollowing out on the inside. Keep an eye out for pests attacking your potato plants. (see below)

Your potato plants depending on the variety you have planted should start blooming after about eight weeks. Once they have bloomed you can start harvesting small potatoes. If you want larger potatoes wait until the foliage starts to wither and die and then you can harvest the whole crop at once. The trick is to wait for at least two to three weeks after your foliage has died off before harvesting the potato. This allows the potato tuber to grow bigger as they are no longer in competition with the foliage for food supplies.

Potatoes must be stored in a cool dry dark place but before you place them in storage you should allow the skins to dry out for a day or two. You will now have some very tasty home grown potatoes with which you can make some of your favourite dishes.

## **Pests that attack your potatoes.**

The potato beetle is a bug that feeds on the potato foliage and damages it so badly that your potato crop is threatened or considerably smaller than it should have been. The beetle lays its yellow eggs on the underside of the leaves of the plant and when the larvae hatch they are a deep orange with black spots on either side and as they get older the orange gets paler and the dots on the sides become stripes and they develop black spots on their heads.

The best way to control this pest is to check the plants regularly for eggs and if you see them to crush them. The larvae you can take off with your fingers and crush if your potato patch is small. If you need

to control the outbreak chemically you can use Bacillus thuringiensis or Bt which is an organic spray that is safe to use and will not poison pets and people. When purchasing BT check to see that it is specifically mixed for the potato beetle.

<http://www.gardensgalore.co.za/potatoes.html>

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