

POTATO CARE GUIDELINES

Preparation of Seed

Potatoes are not grown from seed like most other vegetables. Instead, pieces from the potato itself start new plants. Home gardeners should purchase good seed potatoes that are free of disease and chemicals. Do not buy potatoes from a grocery store for planting.

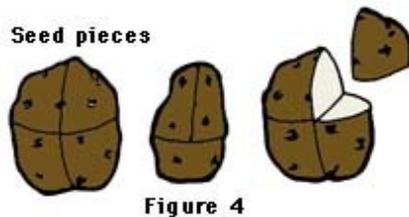


Figure 4

The seed potato contains buds or "eyes" which sprout and grow into plants. The seed piece provides food for the plant until it develops a root system. Too small a seed piece produces a weak plant. Seed potatoes for the spring crop should be cut into pieces (about the size of a medium hen egg). Each seed piece must have at least one good eye (see figure 4). Cut the potato 2-3 weeks before planting.

Keep the cut seed in a well-ventilated spot so it can heal over to prevent rotting when planted. At this time you can place the cut potatoes in egg cartons with the "eyes" up until the "eyes" grow (this procedure is called chitting) One pound of seed potatoes will make 9 to 10 seed pieces.

Planting

Potatoes should be planted when the soil temperature 4 inches deep reaches about 50°F, or about 3 weeks before the last spring frost. Potatoes should be planted in *late March or early April* in our area. If planted too early, the tops can be frozen off by spring frost. Choose a sunny location with good drainage. Do not plant in an area where potatoes, tomatoes, peppers or eggplant were planted the previous year. Mix in composted organic material, since loose, rich soil is best for potato growth. Use a hoe or stick to open a trench about 3" deep down the center of the bed. place seed pieces with 'eyes' upward 10"-12" apart in the trench careful not to break off "eyes"(see Figure 5). Rows should be 3 feet apart.



Figure 5

Cover the seed about 4" deep. If covered too deeply, the plants will be slow to break through the soil and will be more subject to disease and seed decay. Sprouts usually appear after 2-3 weeks. When plants are 5"-6" tall, hill-up the mulch and soil around the growing stems. Continue to hill-up the soil as the plants grow so that tubers remain covered.

Fertilizer & Water

Use a fertilizer with low nitrogen but high in phosphorus and potassium every 2-4 weeks. Too much nitrogen may cause excessive leaf growth at the expense of the tuber. Potatoes need a steady moisture supply. Try to keep the soil moist to a 1' depth throughout the growing season. If the soil dries out after the tubers begin to form, growth stops. It starts again as the soil is moistened. This start and stop growth leaves you with a misshapen, knobby, split, or hollow tuber.