



EDIBLE  
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SERIES



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# How to Grow Potatoes

One of the easiest root crops to grow is potatoes. Plus, they're fun to grow and a small area can provide a nice yield of this tasty vegetable. Early spring is the best time to plant them. So here are a few hints on how to grow potatoes in the garden:

One of the bonuses of growing potatoes is that you can eat them at various stages of growth. The young 'new potatoes' are often harvested and cooked with peas and gravy, while most are allowed to reach maturity and are eaten or stored for use throughout the winter.

**VARIETIES** - choose the varieties that fit your cooking needs and taste preferences. Keep in mind some varieties have special attributes such as being particularly suited for baking, making french fries, boiling or for hashbrowns. Here are just a few of the most popular ones:

**YUKON GOLD** - yellow skin with yellow flesh. Great for baking or mashing. Excellent storage.

**RUSSET NORKOTAH** - This early maturing potato is perfect for small gardens. Great baked or boiled.

**FRENCH FINGERLING** - Rose-pink skin and creamy yellow flesh splashed with pink. Larger and thicker than other fingerling types, with an outstanding nutty flavor - this variety is perfect for any preparation. Thin, delicate skin doesn't need to be peeled.

**RED LA SODA** - rosy skin and waxy white flesh; excellent baked, boiled or fried.

**BUTTERFINGER** - nutty tasting yellow flesh, remains firm when cooked.

**LA RATTE** - smooth and creamy chestnut-like flavor. Firm when cooked, but purees beautifully.

**YELLOW FINN** - this is a new favorite. It is a smaller sized potato with a yellow interior of excellent flavor. It is a versatile potato and stores moderately well.

**RED PONTIAC** - is a popular red skinned variety of average quality. It stores quite well.

**RUSSIAN BANANA** - fingerling potato with great flavor. Easy to grow.

**RED THUMB** - brilliant red skin and red flesh.

**CAL WHITE** - very dependable, best for salads and frying.

Needless to say, there are many other varieties that merit use in the home garden.

**SELECTING POTATOES** - make certain that you choose only certified seed potatoes for planting in the garden. Certification means the potatoes are free of insect or disease problems and that they have not been treated with a growth retardant. **Windmill Gardens** features ONLY certified seed potatoes.



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**SOIL PREPARATION** - potatoes grow in just average soil, so a great deal of soil preparation is not really needed. However the addition of some compost or aged manure is beneficial. Avoid using fresh manure or lime in the soil where potatoes are to be grown, as it tends to cause scab on the potatoes. The addition of either 5-10-10 or 10-20-20 fertilizer is beneficial. Mix the fertilizer into the planting soil, prior to planting. Till or spade the soil to a depth of ten or twelve inches.

**CUTTING POTATOES** - if the seed potatoes are small to medium sized, plant the whole potato. If they are large sized, you can cut them in half, or quarter them. Each section should have two or three 'growth eyes'. After cutting, let the cut surface cure before planting them.

**PLANTING** - potatoes can be grown in many different ways. With each method, make sure the surface tubers are always covered with soil. You can grow potatoes in the ground, in stacks of straw or mulch, in black plastic bags, in garbage cans or in stacks of tires. Potatoes can be a fun and easy crop to grow.

Hilling or mounding is one method of growing potatoes. Three or four pieces of potatoes are planted on a mound of soil, pulling in additional soil as the potatoes develop.

**Field growing:** This is the conventional way most potatoes are grown. Generally, the seed potatoes are planted about 12 inches apart in rows that are spaced 2 to 3 feet apart. The seed pieces are planted about 1 inch deep, then covered with additional soil as the sprouts develop.

**Straw:** For centuries, Scandinavians have grown potatoes in stacks of straw or other mulching material. Potatoes are planted above ground in the straw bale or stack and as the vines begin to grow, additional straw or mulch is mounded up around the base of the plants. This results in a yield of very clean potatoes. New potatoes can be harvested easily even before the potato vines mature completely.

**In plastic garbage bags:** Garden soil or a commercial potting soil can be used to grow the potatoes in the bags, Fold over the top half of the bag, fill with soil, and plant a certified seed potato that has been cut in half. The plastic bag can be set above ground wherever it's convenient. Punch holes in the bottom of the bag for drainage. Unroll the bag and add soil as the sprouts come up.

**Garbage cans or containers:** Old garbage cans, or wooden or fiberboard-type containers are suitable for growing potatoes, if they have adequate drainage. You can conserve space by growing them in this manner. A word of caution, though: The plants tend to dry out more rapidly when grown in containers, so additional watering will be needed. Otherwise, you're likely to end up with misshapen tubers.

**WATERING** - Black or hollow centers on potatoes is often caused by over-watering. Irregular watering causes irregular shaped or knobby potatoes. As a guideline, water potatoes (thoroughly) weekly during warmer summer weather.

**HARVESTING** - New young potatoes are harvested when peas are ripe or as the potato plants begin to flower. For storage of full sized potatoes harvest them when the vines turn yellow or have died-back.

**STORAGE** - Cure newly harvested spuds for a week to 10 days, then store in a cold, dark environment with moderate humidity. Do not store any injured or diseased potatoes.