Growing Potatoes

Potatoes can be planted in spring as soon as the soil temperature has reached 45 degrees F. They will not take a hard frost or freeze so be prepared to provide protection for them if necessary.

Prior to planting, cut your seed potatoes so that each piece has only 1 or 2 'eyes' or buds. Each eye will sprout, so avoid planting potatoes with several eyes in the same hole: they will compete with each other for nutrients and water, resulting in a reduced yield and smaller potatoes.

Prior to planting, work a slow-release fertilizer into the soil and reapply monthly. In a bed, dig a trench about 8 inches deep and plant your potatoes cut side down, about 12 inches apart. Cover with 3 inches or soil. If planting in containers, fill your container halfway with soil then place your tubers on top of the soil, cut side down. Cover your tubers with about 3-4 inches of soil.

The potatoes grow on stems above the seed potato, and if exposed to sunlight the potatoes will turn green which can be toxic if eaten. In order to keep them covered, you will have to 'hill' them. When your potato vines are about 8-10 inches tall, cover the plant with more soil, straw, or hay, leaving only the top 4 inches exposed. Repeat the process when the plant has grown another 8 inches. Continue to hill until the vines start to flower.

After about 7-8 weeks, you can dig in to the soil and harvest some of the small, new potatoes, leaving the rest to continue growing. Stop watering once the vines have finished flowering. When the vines have died back, the potatoes are ready to harvest. After harvesting, place your potatoes in a well-ventilated, warm, dark area to dry for about a week. Do not wash your potatoes! Once dried, lightly brush any dirt off and store in a cool (38-45 degrees) area, such as a basement or root cellar.

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