



2939 E Madison St, Seattle 98112 (206) 324-0737

Growing Potatoes

If you have full sun and good drainage, you can grow potatoes!

MOUNDING METHOD

To start, dig a shallow hole approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ a foot deep and $1\frac{1}{2}$ feet across. Amend your hole with some nice rich compost to improve drainage and increase soil fertility. You'll also want to add some fertilizer as potatoes are heavy feeders. Down to Earth's Acid Mix, available at the Garden Store, is a good choice. Now you're ready to plant your seed potatoes!

To Cut Up or Not to Cut Up

A lot of customers ask if they should cut up their potatoes before planting. In the case of small to medium seed potatoes, like those from Irish Eyes, this is not necessary or desirable. If you do have large seed potatoes, however, cut them in halves or thirds. The general rule of thumb is that each section should have 2-3 eyes. Make a bit of a mound at the bottom of the hole, and plant 3-4 potatoes four to five inches apart and several inches deep. Be sure the entire potato is covered.

Water & Cover

Give your potatoes plenty of water, and in the warm season water them at least once a week. Once the potatoes begin to sprout and have grown at least 6 inches or so, mound several more inches of soil on top of them. No need to use a ruler -- potatoes are not picky -- just don't cover all the leaves so the sun can still do its job. Continue to do this every few weeks throughout the growing season. If you see any potatoes pushing out of the soil, make sure they get covered up. Potatoes exposed to light will turn green and cause stomach upset if eaten.

When your potatoes start to blossom, that is the sweetest time of all for the potato farmer! Now you can harvest some "new potatoes" Put on some gloves and root around gently in your potato hill. You should find some tasty potatoes near the surface that you can enjoy for dinner with fresh peas. (I hope you are growing some peas, 'cause these are a great combo). Don't get too carried away here, as you don't want to harm the roots, and reduce your future potato harvest.

CONTAINER METHOD

You can also grow potatoes in containers, even garbage cans, provided you drill several large drainage holes in the bottom. You'll want about 6" of soil at the bottom of the container to start. Similar to the mounding method, you will cover the vines again after they've grown several inches tall. For container potatoes, watering is even more important. Be sure to water at least a couple times a week in the summer.

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Harvest Time!

Speaking of harvest... Don't worry about a few autumn frosts. Your potatoes will be fine. One of the things I love about potatoes is that they will tell you when they want to be harvested. Essentially, all you have to do is wait until the vines die back to the ground and have at it! In the autumn, I don't bother to water because there's generally plenty of rain, and anyways it's no fun harvesting potatoes in soggy soil. Once the vines die back, you are free to harvest all your flavorful homegrown jewels!

When digging up your potatoes, don't forget to use a potato fork, if you have one on hand. A shovel will work, but a potato fork will result in fewer damaged potatoes that can't be stored. If you're planning to store your potatoes through the winter, let them sit in the ground for a couple weeks after the potato vines are done. This will "toughen" their skins. Once you've dug them up and let them dry...as the Traveling Wilburys said, "put it in a cool, dry place."