

Growing Potatoes



Selecting and Preparing a Site

Select a site that receives at least 6 hours of direct sunlight each day. Soil should be fertile, loose, and well-draining. Before planting, ideally in the fall, add compost or organic matter into the soil.



Planting

Potatoes can be planted as soon as the soil can be easily worked. This is usually about 2 weeks after the last spring frost. Early crops can be ruined if the soil is too wet which can cause the potato seed to rot. The soil should not be so wet that it sticks together and is difficult to work. If this is the case, allow the soil to dry out a bit before planting.

Purchase disease-resistant and disease-free seed potatoes from which eyes (buds) protrude. One to two days prior to planting, cut large potatoes into golf ball-size pieces, with 1 to 2 eyes each. Dig a trench row about 6 inches wide and 8 inches deep. Taper the bottom to about 3 inches wide. Mix in aged manure, compost, and/or leaves. If planting multiple rows, keep rows about 3 feet apart. Place seed potato pieces cut side down every 12 to 14 inches in each trench. Cover with 3 to 4 inches of soil. When sprouts appear, 12 to 16 days after planting, gently fill in the trench with another 3 to 4 inches of soil, leaving a few inches of the plants exposed. Repeat this process as they grow until the trench is at ground level. Applying mulch between rows will conserve moisture, control weeds, and keep the soil cool.



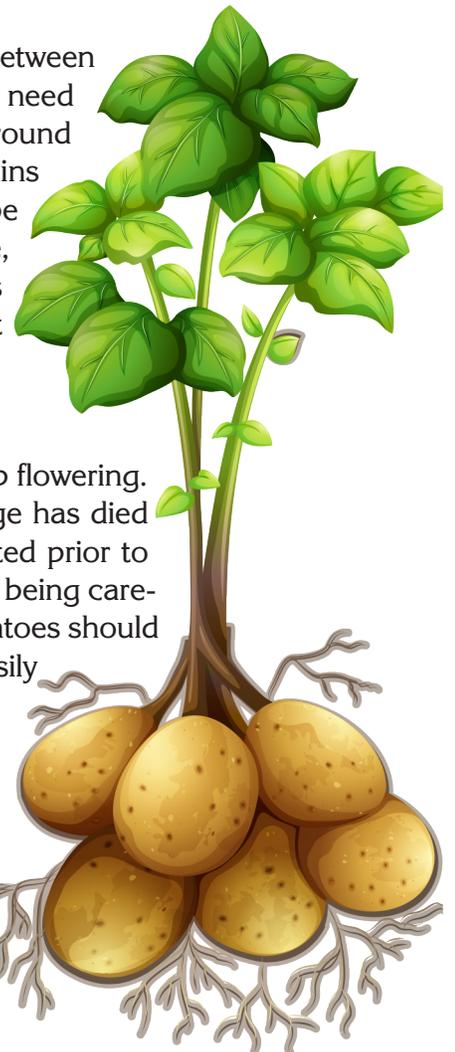
Caring for the Site

Keep the soil moist but not soggy. Allow the soil to dry out between waterings. As potato plants grow above the soil surface they need to be “hilled.” This involves mounding soil and compost around the plant so that only about 6 to 12 inches of growth remains above ground. It is important to not allow potato spuds to be exposed to sunlight as this causes them to turn green and produce solanine, a chemical that has a bitter taste and is toxic. Hilling may be done a few times a season. Check them every 2 to 3 weeks. Stop hilling when the plant is about 6 inches tall but before the potato plant blooms.



Harvesting

Harvest smaller, “new” potatoes 2 to 3 weeks after plants stop flowering. Harvest larger, mature potatoes 2 to 3 weeks after the foliage has died back. Potatoes can tolerate light frost but should be harvested prior to hard frosts. Harvest potatoes on dry days. Dig them up gently being careful not to puncture them or cut or bruise the potato skin. Skins of mature potatoes should be thick and firmly attached to the flesh. If the skins are thin and rub off easily the potatoes should be left in the ground for a few more days.



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