



ASK A MASTER GARDENER

POTATOES

By Laurie Meyerpeter, Placer County Master Gardener

Q What are seed potatoes? Can I grow potatoes from the sprouting potatoes in my cupboard drawers? How do I grow potatoes?

A Potatoes are typically not grown from seed but from sections of the potato. The potato sections are referred to as "seed potatoes." It is recommended that Certified seed potatoes are used. These are specially grown potatoes to prevent the introduction of diseases and pests into the field or garden. They are sold in nurseries or through mail order sources and display a "Certified Seed Potato" tag.

Potatoes from the market are often treated with a growth-stopping chemical so don't make good seed potatoes. In addition, they can transmit disease into the soil which may affect the health of the plant or future potato plantings. If you have vigorously sprouting potatoes in your cupboards and you wish to grow them, you may want to grow them in a large container, and then properly dispose of the soil and vines in the garbage when your harvest is over to prevent the potential introduction of a potato disease into your vegetable garden or compost pile.

Potatoes are easy to grow and are commonly planted in early spring in this area (St. Patrick's Day is the traditional planting day), with a second planting time in late summer or very early fall. Many nurseries stock certified seed potatoes in early spring, and some also stock potatoes in the fall. Seed potatoes can also be ordered through the mail.

Cut the potatoes into sections with one "eye" or bud in each section. Let the potato sections dry for a day or so to form a slight callus. Small potatoes can also be planted whole if desired.

Plant each potato section about 3" deep and 6-12 inches apart in well-drained fertile soil. Water regularly. As the plants grow, use a hoe or similar tool to pull soil around the base of the plant to keep developing potatoes buried.

You can begin to eat the new potatoes when they are a desirable size (pull back some of the mounded dirt to check on the potatoes). When the potato plants begin to die, and turn yellow and brown, the potatoes under the ground will be ready to harvest and store. Unlike a bag of store potatoes, it is normal for homegrown potatoes to be a variety of sizes.

Home grown potatoes are delicious! Enjoy!

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