



## Potato – Basic Planting Guide

### Planting potatoes in the ground or garden box

**Choosing potatoes to grow:** Instead of using regular potatoes from the grocery store, buy certified seed potatoes from a reputable source like a garden nursery or online source such as [Gurneys](#). These are specially grown for planting and are less likely to carry diseases.

**Chitting (optional):** Chitting is the process of allowing the seed potatoes to sprout before planting. It can help speed up the growth process. Place the seed potatoes in a cool, light location, such as a windowsill, for a few weeks until they develop small sprouts.

**Soil preparation:** Potatoes prefer loose, well-draining soil. Start by removing any weeds or grass from the planting area. Dig the soil to a depth of about 8 to 10 inches and incorporate organic matter, such as compost or well-rotted manure, to improve fertility and drainage.

**Planting:** Cut the seed potatoes into pieces, ensuring that each piece has at least one or two sprouts (or "eyes"). Larger potatoes can be cut into multiple pieces. Let the cut pieces dry for a day to form a protective callus. Plant the seed potatoes about 4 inches deep and 12 to 15 inches apart, with the sprouts facing upwards.

**Hilling:** As the potato plants grow, mound soil around the stems to create hills. This helps to prevent sunlight from reaching the tubers and turning them green, which can make them toxic. Hilling also encourages the growth of more potatoes. Repeat the process of hilling every few weeks as the plants grow taller. You'll see only the top greens/leaves growing out of the hills as you pile soil higher and higher as the plant grows taller.

**Watering:** Potatoes need consistent moisture, especially during the tuber formation stage. Water the plants regularly, aiming to keep the soil evenly moist but not waterlogged. Be cautious not to overwater, as this can lead to diseases and rotting.

**Fertilization:** Potatoes are heavy feeders, so it's beneficial to fertilize them. Before planting, mix in a balanced, slow-release fertilizer or compost into the soil. Additionally, you can apply a side dressing of fertilizer when the plants are about 6 inches tall.

**Pest and disease control:** Keep an eye out for common potato pests such as potato beetles, aphids, and wireworms. Regularly inspect the plants and handpick any pests you find. There are also organic insecticides available for pest control if needed. To prevent diseases, avoid overhead watering and ensure good airflow around the plants.

**Harvesting:** Potatoes are usually ready to harvest when the plants have flowered and the foliage/leaves begin to turn yellow and die back. Carefully dig around the base of the plants with a garden fork to avoid damaging the tubers. Harvest as needed or wait until the foliage has completely died back to harvest the entire crop.

## Growing Potatoes in Bags

Growing potatoes in bags is a popular method for gardeners with limited space or poor soil conditions. Here's a step-by-step guide on how to grow potatoes in a bag:

**Select the right bag:** Choose a large, sturdy, and breathable bag or container for planting potatoes. A fabric grow bag or a burlap sack works well, as they allow for proper drainage and aeration.

**Choose the right potatoes:** Purchase certified seed potatoes from a reputable supplier or use your own sprouted potatoes. Avoid using potatoes from the grocery store, as they may be treated with chemicals to prevent sprouting.

**Prepare the seed potatoes:** If using whole seed potatoes, cut them into pieces, making sure each piece has at least two "eyes" or sprouts. Allow the cut pieces to dry and form a protective callus for a day or two before planting.

**Prepare the bag:** Fill the bag with a well-draining potting mix or a mixture of compost and soil. Leave about 4-6 inches of space at the top to accommodate the growing plants.

**Plant the potatoes:** Place the seed potatoes or potato pieces with the sprouts facing up into the prepared bag. Space them evenly and cover them with 3-4 inches of soil. If you have multiple layers of potatoes, separate them with a layer of soil.

**Water and care:** After planting, water the soil thoroughly, ensuring that it is evenly moist but not waterlogged. As the potatoes grow, water them regularly to keep the soil consistently moist. Avoid overwatering, as it can lead to rotting.

**Provide sunlight:** Place the bag in a location that receives at least 6-8 hours of direct sunlight each day. If sunlight is limited, you can move the bag around to maximize exposure.

**Hill the potatoes:** As the plants grow and reach a height of about 6 inches, cover the stems with additional soil or mulch, leaving only the top few leaves exposed. This process, known as hilling, promotes the growth of more potatoes along the buried stems.

**Fertilize:** Potatoes are heavy feeders, so you can apply a balanced organic fertilizer or compost tea every few weeks to provide essential nutrients. Follow the package instructions for proper application.

**Monitor pests and diseases:** Keep an eye out for common potato pests like aphids, potato beetles, or slugs. If necessary, use organic pest control methods or insecticidal soap to manage infestations. Additionally, be vigilant for signs of diseases like blight, and promptly remove and destroy infected foliage.

**Harvesting:** Potatoes are usually ready for harvest when the plants have flowered and the foliage begins to yellow and die back. Carefully reach into the bag and remove the potatoes by hand. Alternatively, you can dump the contents of the bag onto a tarp or a clean surface and collect the potatoes.

**For even more information:** [CSU Extension article on growing potatoes](#)