

## How to Grow Potatoes

Choose a site that gets full sun and has light, well-drained soil that's high in phosphorus and potassium and very low in nitrogen (which encourages lush foliage growth at the expense of the tubers). If your soil is very heavy, grow your potatoes in raised beds.

Dig the soil to a depth of at least 12 inches and remove rocks and other debris that could obstruct the tubers as they grow. Work in plenty of compost to ensure the right soil texture, but avoid adding manure, which can cause a disease called scab.

Plant potatoes two to four weeks before the last expected frost and when the soil temperature is at least 40 degrees F.

Cut Seed potatoes into 1½-2 oz pieces with at least one eye per piece. Let the cuts heal for a day before planting. Small potatoes should be planted whole. Space seed pieces 10-12 inches apart and cover with 2-3 inches of loose soil.

Use the deep-planting method for the lowest-maintenance potato patch: Simply plant the seed pieces, cut side down, 12 inches apart and 7 to 8 inches deep. The stems will work their way to the surface, along the way forming spuds on underground stems called stolons.

Use the mulching method for the easiest harvesting: Dig a shallow trench and set in the pieces, cut side down, 12 inches apart, and cover them with about 4 inches of soil. Pile a thick blanket of mulch around the stems when the plants are 6 to 8 inches tall, leaving the foliage exposed. Keep mulching as the plants grow. The potatoes will form inside the layer of mulch. For the mulching method, dried leaves or straw also work well; so does hay if it's been cut before it set seed.

Harvest small, early potatoes as soon as seven to eight weeks after planting. Harvest the main crop about two weeks after the tops have died back and before the first hard frost.

Make sure you keep potatoes well-covered. If the tubers are exposed to sunlight while they're growing, they'll develop solanine, a bitter, toxic alkaloid that imparts a greenish tinge.