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Seed Potatoes



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Potatoes are one of the easiest vegetables to grow! They are a great choice for gardeners just beginning to develop their green thumb.

To grow potatoes, you plant a seed potato. Despite their name, seed potatoes are not actually seeds. The seeds potatoes you find at a garden center are actual potatoes grown specifically for the purpose of growing more potatoes.

It takes patience, and most of the excitement is happening underground out of sight, but your efforts will be rewarded with lots of tasty homegrown spuds!

Questions? Give Martin's Home & Garden a call at 615-867-7121!



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Choosing Seed Potatoes

Grocery Store *versus* Garden Center

Why should you use the seed potatoes you find at a garden center rather than the potatoes you find at a grocery store for planting?

Produce at a grocery store, including potatoes, is often treated with a growth inhibitor. The growth inhibitor keeps produce from sprouting, which keeps it fresher for a longer period of time. This means, though, that the potato may never take root in your garden if you plant it. The potatoes at the grocery store also may not have been tested for common plant diseases.

Seed potatoes at a garden center, however, have not been treated with a growth inhibitor. Most garden centers also receive their seed potatoes from a certified, reputable dealer that provides certified disease-free potatoes. This means that the ones you grow will not inherit any problems from the mother plant.





02

Preparing Seed Potatoes

Dividing

You can cut your seed potatoes into pieces to produce even more plants. If your piece has more eyes (small buds that grow into new plants), you will grow a larger quantity of potatoes, but they will be smaller in size. If your piece has fewer eyes, you will grow a smaller crop of larger potatoes.

Cut your seed potato only a day or two before you plant it. This is enough time for the piece to “heal” and form a protective layer that helps the piece retain moisture and protects it from rot. But, it’s not so far ahead of time that the piece rots before you can plant it.



Chitting

It’s not required, but many gardeners will chit their seed potatoes before planting. Chitting is the process of pre-sprouting your seed potatoes, and it is highly recommended if yours are already sprouting or if you have chosen an early-maturing variety and want an early harvest.

Start chitting about one month before you are ready to plant. Put the seed potatoes in an egg carton with the bud end facing up, or lay them on a tray in a single layer. Place the carton or tray in a bright, very cool spot. In two to four weeks, your seed potatoes will start developing sturdy shoots.

If you decided to cut your seed potatoes into pieces, do so after chitting.



03

Planting & Harvesting

Timing

The best time to plant seed potatoes is after the last hard frost has passed but temperatures are still cool. A light frost may kill any new growth that has sprouted, but the seed potatoes under the ground will survive and quickly produce new foliage.

You also don't want your soil to be too cool and wet, or too warm. Cold, wet soil can lead to rotting, and warm soil can cause them to not produce new potatoes well.

Planting

When the sprouts on your seed potatoes are 1/2" to 1" long, it's time to plant! Handle the seed potatoes with care so the sprouts don't break.

Work the soil at least 12" deep. Amend the soil with compost and a starter fertilizer for best results.

Plant your whole seed potatoes or your pieces at least 8" apart from each other and 4" deep. For seed potatoes that you've cut into pieces, place the cut side facedown in the soil.

Cover with 1" to 2" of soil. As your potatoes grow, gradually mound more soil around the plant. Water your freshly planted potatoes well.



Harvesting & Storing

On average, one pound of seed potatoes (five to eight seed potatoes) will yield about 10 pounds of mature potatoes

If you want new potatoes (smaller and with tender skin), harvest two to three weeks after the plant has stopped flowering. You can replant the rest of the potatoes on the plant if you'd like them to become more mature.

Harvest more mature potatoes after the foliage has died. Cut back the dry brown foliage, and wait at least 10 days but no more than 14 days to harvest. Don't water the plants during this period. This allows the potatoes to develop a thick skin. If they are left too long, though, they could rot.

Remember to be gentle as you dig up your newly grown potatoes. Work your way inward from the edge of your planting spot, and try not to damage your potatoes with your spading fork or shovel.

After you have dug up your potatoes, allow them to dry before storing. Use a soft brush to remove any remaining dirt. Don't wash them, as washing them shortens their storage life. Their skins will cure, and they will keep longer. Set them on a screen in a dark, dry, humid spot for one to two weeks.

Never store potatoes near apples. Apples release ethylene gas, which can cause surrounding produce to spoil. Also, don't store them in a refrigerator as the air inside is too dry. Potatoes should be stored in a dark, cool place that stays fairly humid. Check them periodically for rotting or for any that have begun sprouting. The sprouts can be removed with your hands.





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