

Potatoes

Most varieties of potatoes can be grown in the Northwest. While the Puget Sound area typically has cooler temperatures, adequate water must be provided during summer months to keep tubers from drying out. Always use nursery-selected seed potatoes. Trying to grow plants from potatoes purchased at grocery stores is not recommended as they are often chemically treated to prevent sprouting.

Potatoes can be planted as soon as ground temperatures allow you to dig but realize that potato plants will only start growing when soil temperature reaches a minimum of 45 degrees. Potato plants can tolerate light frost but should be protected with row covers when the plants are young.

Potatoes need a rich, loose, slightly acid soil with a pH of about 5.4 to 6.6. If soil is not acidic enough, scab disease may occur. Potatoes are adaptable and usually do well even if the soil is less than perfect. Soil should be moist but not soggy. Overly wet soil may result in the soil becoming compacted where potato tubers will rot. Potatoes thrive in high levels of organic matter, such as aged compost. Too much nitrogen (N) will produce lush, leafy vines but few tubers.

To sprout or not to sprout? Sprouting your potatoes first can cut your harvest time by at least two weeks. Sprouting is as simple as buying potatoes that have already sprouted (this happens later in the season) or place them on paper in a warm sunny countertop location and lightly mist.

To prep your potato tubers for planting divide (cut) them into segments that have at least two or three "eyes". These are the little bumps that emerge on the tuber. Anything larger than a golf ball sized potato should not be planted whole. Cure the cut pieces by leaving them on a table or counter in a warm sunny location for three to five days. This allows the potatoes to become calloused and are less likely to rot when planted into soil.

Hilling is a term commonly used when planting vegetables in the garden. New potato plants will sprout lateral stems and it is necessary to cover these lateral sprouts with soil. When your potato sprout reaches 8" -10" it is time to mound or 'hill' soil and chopped straw, or other compost material, to within four inches from the top. Repeat this each time your potato sprouts. Stop hilling once your potatoes flower. The more you 'hill' the more prolific your harvest will be. Never fear, you can do this in containers as well.

Love the taste of homegrown potatoes but don't think you enough room to grow them? Container gardening is the answer. For container grown potatoes, just start your soil at a lower level when you begin planting. Potato tubers require darkness, otherwise they become green when exposed to the light. If you can see the potatoes, cover them with additional compost. If hilling seems too much, plant your potatoes about 8"-10" deep. The downside will be smaller tubers and longer sprout time.

The flowers and foliage are the best way to determine when it is time to harvest your crop. Baby (new) potatoes should be harvested two to three weeks after the plants have finished flowering. Mature potatoes for storing should be harvested two to three weeks after the plant's foliage has died back. It is also fine to leave potatoes in the ground until later in fall and before the weather becomes too severe. Potatoes store well in the ground. When you are ready to dig up your potato tubers, store them in a cool dry place for winter. Brush off the dirt and store them dry. Do not wash before storage.

Arizona Gold: Medium to big, round to oval tuber. Yellow, thin skin with small eyes. Light yellow flesh and buttery flavor. Versatile. Very high yield and stores well.

Cal White: Oblong white skin tubers that may take on a subtle pink color. Medium in size at maturity. Thin, golden-brown skin with yellow-white flesh. Buttery flavor, good for baking, boiling, and frying. High yield and mature early. Stores well.

Chieftain: Round to oblong shape, red skin tubers. Shallow eyes with white flesh. Good for boiling and frying. High yield. Stores well.

French - Fingerling: Oval Tuber with pale pink skin and yellow flesh streaked with red. Outstanding nutty flavor. Larger than other fingerling potatoes. If you harvest them early, they are fantastically sweet.

German Butterball: Round tuber with brown skin and deep yellow flesh. Smooth, creamy texture with buttery flavor. Late season. Excellent keeper.

Jelly: Oval tuber shape with smooth yellow skin and flesh and shallow eyes. Tasty, buttery flavor. Mid- Season. Harvest with high yields of medium to large size tubers.

Purple Majesty: Deep purple color inside and out. Buttery flavor. Makes for colorful French fries or mashed potatoes. High yields.

Red Pontiac: A popular main crop variety. Dark red skin with sweet white flesh. Great flavor. Perfect for home gardening. Excellent keeper.

Russet Burbank: Oval tuber with dark brown skin and white flesh. This is the most widely grown russet potato. Great boiled, mashed, or fried. Long storage life.

Russian Banana - Fingerling: A long oblong tuber with deep gold skin and yellow flesh. Firm texture. And sought after for its great flavor. Heavy yields. Matures late.

Satina: Round to oval with smooth yellow skin and yellow flesh. Similar to Yukon. Buttery flavor and good for mashing. Matures late. High yield. Excellent keeper.

Sunrise Gold: If you like Yukon Gold potatoes you must try this one! Large round tuber with yellow skin and flesh. High tuber set for an early potato. Moist flesh that is great breakfast potato.

Utamilla - Fingerling: Large, long/oblong shape with yellow/brown skin and white flesh. Late season potato with high yield. Fairly new variety, cultivar ?? specifically developed for making french fries.

Valery: Oval tuber with crimson skin and pearly white flesh. Smooth, sweet, and delicate flavor. Excellent for roasting and boiling. Early harvest variety.

Viking Purple: Round tuber with purple skin and bright white flesh. Creamy texture with sweet buttery flavor. Great all-purpose potato. Stores well.

Yukon Gold: Popular early variety. With gold skin and deep yellow flesh. Delicious, rich flavor. Great for baking or mashing. High yield and stores well