



Growing Potatoes

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Potatoes Like it Cool

Potatoes are a cool season crop, but new shoots are frost sensitive. They need to be planted early while the ground is still cool (mid May for Peterborough area). If there is danger of frost after the potatoes sprout, then they should be covered.

It is not a good idea to plant store bought potatoes. They may have been treated with growth inhibitors and may be diseased. It is preferable to plant special seed potatoes. These whole seed potatoes can be cut into pieces with at least 2 'eyes' each. Store the cut pieces for a few days to allow the cut surfaces to heal before planting.

Growing Potatoes

Potatoes grow best in loamy or sandy soils with good aeration and drainage. Both sandy soils and clay soils can be improved with the addition of compost. The potatoes develop on underground stems. Although potatoes need lots of sun, it is important to ensure that the tubers are kept well under the ground and away from the sun. Potato tubers that have been exposed to light turn green and develop toxic alkaloids in the exposed tissue. Prevent this and increase yields by hilling soil around the base of the plant. The soil needs to have consistent moisture.

Potatoes can also be grown in containers.

Harvesting

You can start to harvest your potatoes as soon as the tops start to die. After harvest, sprouting will be inhibited for up to 90 days.

Be careful when digging the potatoes out of the ground, to make sure you don't damage them. It's better to work from the outside of the row & then dig closer to the plant to find the potatoes. Work around a bit so you don't miss any.

Insects and Diseases

Probably the most common problem you will encounter is the potato beetle that can completely defoliate the plant. Check the plants regularly for the yellow and black striped beetle and remove them as soon as you see them. Check the underside of the leaves for clusters of eggs and remove them.

As potatoes are related to tomatoes, they are susceptible to the same diseases and insects. Take care not to plant them in the same spot as you had tomatoes or potatoes in the previous year and not right beside each other.

Storage

After harvest, leave the potatoes exposed to the air for a few hours to dry off. Brush off any excess soil and check for damage. Any suspect potatoes should be put to one side and used as quickly as possible. You can store potatoes in a cold room or root cellar in a paper bag with the top slightly open to allow excess moisture to escape. Check on them occasionally and remove any damaged or diseased ones.

Learn more about growing potatoes from the Cornell University site www.gardening.cornell.edu >

Learn more about potatoes on Wikipedia >