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## Growing Great Potatoes

Potatoes can be a rewarding crop if you have room in your garden. Each plant takes up four square feet of garden space, with vines growing about two feet high. However, for each pound of seed potatoes you plant, you will yield an average of 10 pounds of potatoes!

**About Seed Potatoes:** You can purchase 'Certified' seed potatoes from garden centers. Certified seed potatoes have been inspected, are relatively disease-free and are generally better yielding. Commercial potatoes from the grocery store are usually treated to prevent sprouting. A "potato seed" is a cut piece of a potato. Smaller potatoes are the better choice.

**Planting:** To prepare seed potatoes for planting, use a clean, sharp knife to cut each potato into pieces about the size of a small egg (weighing about 2 ounces), with two or more good eyes. Allow the pieces to "heal over" for a day, out of direct sun. Plant the pieces cut-side down, 4 inches deep and 15 inches apart in rows 2½ feet apart. Small potatoes (1-3 ounces) should be planted uncut. **Ma**

- **Plant potatoes from March through June.** Plant potatoes intended for winter storage later than those for summer use. Choose a sunny location with deep, light and loose soil that drains well but also retains adequate moisture. The best yields come from ideal soils. The planting site should also be weed-free.
- **Poorly drained soil can yield deformed tubers,** but if you do wish to grow potatoes in a heavier soil, here are some suggestions: Remove 3" of soil from the row and loosens the soil in the bottom. Water the row well and let dry for two to three days. Lay down a 2- to 3-inch layer of compost or organic matter in the row, place the potato seed pieces on top, and cover with 3 inches of soil. **DO NOT USE LIME OR FRESH MANURE IN THE SOIL WHERE YOU PLANT POTATOES!** Manure is too strong, and lime can cause potato scab.

**Feeding & Watering:** Begin irrigation when the plants are 5" high. Maintain a moderate moisture level throughout the season. Over-watering can cause watery-tasting potatoes, but extreme dryness can result in smaller potatoes that are thick-skinned and knobby (although some people say that drier potatoes taste better). When plants are 1 foot high, work a low nitrogen vegetable fertilizer into the soil.

**Hilling:** Potatoes form between the seed piece and the soil surface, so avoid cultivating the soil deeply (such as for weed removal) during the growing season. When the stems are 8" high, gently scrape soil up from both sides of the row to cover the maturing potatoes (leave about 4" of the stems exposed). This protects the potatoes from the sun and makes it easy to harvest during the season. Add 1-2" of soil to the hill every 2-3 weeks, or as needed. **Another method** is to mound up straw around the stem of the

plant. To harvest potatoes, simply reach into the straw. In the fall, you can work the straw into the soil to provide organic matter. With either method, the potatoes should never be exposed to light, and the foliage should never be completely covered.

**Tires:** Another planting method uses old tires. Prepare the original soil as suggested above, then place an old tire on the soil, plant your seed potatoes and cover with 3" of soil. As the potatoes grow, gradually add more soil (and another tire, when necessary). Continue until you have added 4 or 5 tires. Make sure you soil drains well, and don't forget to fertilize!

**Diseases & Pests:** Potatoes are subject to attack by several insects, including aphids, leafhoppers, Colorado potato beetles, flea beetles, and mites. Late blight, which is characterized by water-soaked spots that enlarge and turn brown and black, is the most common disease affecting potatoes. You can minimize the risk of both late blight and early blight can by keeping irrigation water off the foliage and removing infected vines at the end of the season, about 7 to 10 days before harvesting potatoes. If your potato plants become afflicted, ask us for other suggestions.

**Harvesting:** Pick "new" potatoes as soon as tops flower. New potatoes are not a variety, but simply any potato harvested before full maturity. They are smaller and tenderer, but will *not* store.

- **You can harvest potatoes during the growing season** by loosening the soil and gently removing the larger tubers, leaving the smaller ones to grow on. For late potatoes, allow two weeks for the skins to thicken and the tubers to mature after the vines have died off. You can use a shovel to loosen the soil and remove the potatoes, but be careful not to bruise or scuff the skins.
- **Allow potatoes to dry, unwashed, for two to three days.** Only well-matured tubers, free from defects, should be put into storage. Store potatoes in a cool (40 degrees), dark area such as a basement or garage. Check the potatoes periodically and remove any that show signs of spoilage. NEVER store potatoes next to apples, as this may cause potato sprouting.

## Spud Varieties for 2005

**Red Red:** Early. With red skin and red flesh this potato is a colorful treat in a potato salad or any other potato dishes! Great for roasting or baking!

**Cal White:** The earliest of the early potatoes! Medium-sized spud with white flesh. Great for baking, boiling, or making into fries. 60+ days to maturity.

**Norkotah:** Early-season. Similar in flavor, appearance, storage & cooking qualities to Burbank, but is far more disease resistant. 65+ days to maturity.

**Red Pontiac-** Mid-season. Large round potato with thin, dark red skin, crisp white flesh and deep eyes. Terrific for boiling and mashing, but not for baking. High yielding, and stores well. 80+ days to maturity.

**White Rose:** The earliest of the early potatoes! Medium-sized spud with white flesh. Great for baking, boiling, or making into fries. 60+ days to maturity.

**Yukon Gold:** Early-season. Round potato with smooth yellow skin and yellow flesh. Excellent, buttery flavor, especially when baked, steamed, boiled or made into fries or potato salad. Good keeper. 65+ days to maturity.