



A guide to growing potatoes

Potatoes are categorised by their maturity (first early, second early, early main crop and main crop) and each variety on our site is marked with the maturity underneath as well as the cooking type.

Chitting

Chitting is a good idea, it wakes the seed potato up after its winter dormancy ready to grow. Chitted seed will be ready to grow much quicker once Spring arrives and the soil warms up. Chitted seed should come through the ground in about 2 weeks.

Put the potatoes in an old egg carton (for example) in a sunny spot. The shoots will start to sprout and when they are around an inch long they will be ready to plant.



When to plant

Mid-Feb till Mid-March is around average to start chitting and gives you 4-6 weeks to chit and then plant in late March /April if the forecast is looking good! However, delaying by a week or two would do no harm.

Earlies take around 100 days to mature and can be planted up until the end of June.

Main crop take around 4-5 months to mature and can be planted up till around mid May.

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How to plant

Small crops of potatoes can be grown in large, deep containers or sacks this is a good way of getting an early batch of new potatoes. Fill the bottom 15cm (6in) of the container with potting compost and plant the seed potato just below this. As the new stems start growing, keep adding compost until the container is full

If planting in raised beds or in the ground, dig a narrow trench 12cm (5in) deep. The seed tubers are spaced 30cm (12in) apart for earlies and 37cm (15in) for maincrop varieties in rows 24in (60cm) apart for earlies and 75cm (30in) apart for maincrop. Apply a general purpose fertiliser at this stage.

When the emerging shoots come through and are about 9' tall, you need to "earth" or "mound" them up. Do this several times as they grow. This encourages downward growth and protects the shoots.

How to grow potatoes in a bag

If you are growing potatoes in a bag, roll the sides of the potato bag down so it's just under a third of its usual height. Add 10cm peat-free compost to the bottom of the bag and place three to five chitted potatoes on the surface. Cover with another 8-10cm of compost and water well. When the shoots have grown to around 8cm, 'earth them up' by covering them with another 10cm of compost. Do this every couple of weeks, gradually rolling the bag back up to its intended height. This stops the potatoes from being exposed to light and developing green patches. Then leave the foliage to grow tall and care for your crop as explained below.

Caring for your crop

Water potatoes regularly, especially during warm, dry spells, and keep the soil weed free. As the potato plants grow, use a spade or hoe to cover the shoots with soil to stop the developing tubers becoming green and inedible. This is called 'earthing up'. Leave the top few centimetres poking out the top. As plants continue to grow you will need to earth them up again. The final height of the ridge should be about 20-30cm, but if you are unable to earth up, or don't have time, you should still get a reasonable crop.

When to harvest

Harvest first earlies in approx. June and July, when the plants are still flowering and the potatoes are about the size of a large hen's egg (gently rummage around in the soil to check). Cut the potato plants (also known as haulms) to the ground, then gently prise the plants out of the ground with a fork. These potatoes don't store well, so dig up the potatoes as and when you want to eat them.

Second earlies are harvested in July and August, again when the plants are still flowering. Harvest in the same way as first earlies. Again, these potatoes don't store well, so dig up them as and when you want to eat them.

Maincrop potatoes are harvested from August to October, when the leaves on the plants have turned yellow and died down. Choose a dry day to dig up your crop so that they store better. You can leave them in the soil for a week to 10 days after you have chopped the leaves down, this allows the skins to set.

How to store

Early potatoes don't store for so long, so should be eaten within a few days of harvest. Main crop potatoes can be stored for a few months in a cool, dark place (not freezing), in a box or hessian bag to allow air flow.

Sources of more information

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/vegetables/potatoes/grow-your-own>

<https://www.gardenersworld.com/how-to/grow-plants/how-to-grow-potatoes/>

<https://www.potatohouse.co.uk/growing-guide/>

<https://horticulture.co.uk/potatoes/grow-bags/>

www.roadfarmcountryways.com/inspiredtogrow/