

Potatoes

Low in fat, rich in vitamin C, a good source of iron, vitamins 1, B3 and B6, potassium, phosphorus, magnesium, and dietary antioxidants. Sounds like an ideal wonder food, but to get all of these essentials you need look no further than the humble spud!

SOIL PREP

Potatoes require an open, frost free site with deep, fertile, moisture retentive soil for high quality and heavy yields. Improve soils by adding a little organic matter, such as well rotted manure, in the autumn. Before planting, supplement with a general fertilizer, such as blood meal or fish and bone meal applied to the soil surface or spread along the sides of the row during sowing. Soil should be acidic to prevent soil scab

PROPAGATION AND SPROUTING

Potatoes are generally grown from tubers known as 'seed potatoes'. These are sprouted prior to planting, particularly when growing early season cultivars. Sprouting tubers extends the growing period and leads to earlier tuber formation and higher yields.

- Place tubers on a tray in a single layer.
- Keep trays of tubers in a cool, frost free place with moderate light, such as an unheated room and avoid direct sunlight.
- Sprouts form within a few weeks and, after about six weeks, shoots should be 5cm long and dark coloured.
- Choose about four strong shoots and remove the weaker shoots.

PLANTING

Once sprouted seed tubers can be planted in a row or individual holes and earthed up as they grow. Plant early potatoes in early April, with later cultivars being planted mid April. In northerly districts and during adverse weather little loss of production results from delaying planting up to mid May.

- Dig a row 7.5 - 15cm deep with a hoe or spade.
- Place tubers with the sprouts upper most in the hole. Early cultivars should be spaced 30cm apart in the row. Leave about 60cm between rows.
- Push the soil gently back over the tubers ensuring that they are covered with at least 2.5cm of soil.
- Lightly rake over the soil surface.

HARVESTING & STORING

Lift early-potatoes carefully with a garden fork as soon as the tubers are about the size of a chickens egg or more. Flowering often occurs at this time. Provided the crop is healthy, it is okay to leave the plants until early to mid autumn to bulk up.

STORING

For storing, lift main crop potatoes when the tops die back and the skin resists gentle pressure. All potatoes should be gathered by mid October to avoid weather damage.

- Lift on a dry day and allow potatoes to dry on the surface of the soil for two or three hours.
- Handle tubers gently, as they bruise easily.
- Store in burlap or paper sacks or in boxes in a frost proof shed. Avoid plastic materials, including plastic lined paper sacks, as these promote condensation that favours rots.
- Early potatoes have a short dormant period and will sprout earlier so keep for a shorter time than main crop cultivars.

