

Renfrow Hardware

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Irish Potatoes

Harvesting your first patch of home grown potatoes is one of the most gratifying experiences in the gardening world because you get to dig up big, beautiful tubers that you were not able to see during the entire growing process. This makes every potato a sweet surprise! The flavor of homegrown potatoes will surpass those that are store-bought every single time.

Always use certified seed potatoes because they need to be tested and certified as disease-free. Grocery store potatoes and potatoes saved from your previous year's harvest are not tested. Plant your potatoes in a new spot each year to help break any disease cycles that may occur. Potatoes are in the nightshade family, along with tomatoes, peppers, and eggplant, so rotate all of these crops as much as possible.

Cut your large seed potatoes so that there is at least one "eye" or bud on each piece, typically in 4-5 pieces. Or select small potatoes and plant them whole. Allow several hours, or up to 3 days, to pass between slicing and planting your seed. You want to allow time for the fresh cut to "scab over" which will help prevent potential rot issues after planting.

Plant between January and March, and harvest in early June. Potatoes need to set new tubers before the heat (and potential drought) of summer so get them in as early as the rains of winter will allow.

There are a few diseases that plague potato crops but consistent crop rotation should prevent most from becoming a problem in your backyard. If you see any problems in your beds, bring in a few sample leaves and we will assess the problem and provide our recommended treatment options, if applicable.

Watering needs: water heavily especially once blooming. Potatoes need about an inch of water per week in the spring and early summer. Do not water if we are getting sufficient rain. One heavy watering is better than multiple light waterings each week. Do not let the soil remain sopping wet – the young tubers may rot!

Potato plants create new tubers *above* the planted piece, not below it, so bury your seed potato 1-2 inches deep and as they grow, ensure that any newly developing tubers are covered with plenty of soil and/or leaf mulch – when potatoes are exposed to sunlight, they turn green and bitter. Mound more soil around the stem of your plant as it grows, burying the plant to its neck until a ridged mound is formed that is 10-12" high.

You will know it's time to pull up your potatoes when the foliage turns yellow and dies back – no more photosynthesis will happen at this point and so the tubers are as large as they are going to get. Store your freshly harvested potatoes in a cool, dry, dark place. They will keep for several months, but do check them periodically and toss out any that show signs of rot or mold.