



Groves Guide to...

Growing Seed Potatoes

Chitting

Buy your seed potatoes as early as possible to avoid disappointment but don't put them in the ground until Jack frost has gone on his summer hols!!!! You can however get them started indoors, especially useful for first earlies to get a good early crop. Place the seed potatoes in a seed tray or egg box with the rose end (That's the blunt end with the most eyes). Give them maximum exposure to light but protect from frost. A good chit should be firm and green and not be easily knocked off.

Timing

Plant into warm soil after frost risk has passed. Its easy to test if the soil is warm enough, just push your hand into the soil, if you can keep it there comfortably its warm enough!!!

Planting

Potatoes will yield a worthwhile crop under a wide range of conditions. Traditional winter digging incorporating well-rotted farmyard manure and trenching in more fertilizer in spring undoubtedly produces the goods but it is very hard work!!! Why not try for reasonable yields with less effort??? Loams and light soils don't need digging. Natural organic composts can be placed in contact with the seed potatoes in a shallow trench. High potash chemical fertilizer can be placed on the surface after the tubers have been buried using a trowel or a bulb planter. .

Earlies: Plant 3" deep 12" apart with 18" between rows

Second earlies generally need a little more space while main crop varieties are traditionally planted 15" apart with 27" between rows. Larger varieties like King Edwards would benefit from even more room.

It is a good idea to fork between the rows to loosen the soil.

Growing

Earth up the rows two or three times using a rake or a draw hoe before the foliage gets too extensive. This provides enough soil to cover any potatoes near the surface to stop them going green and is very effective at controlling weeds. Water well in long dry spells and spray with Bordeaux mixture or a suitable fungicide to control blight if required.

Harvesting

Earlies are ready 9-12 weeks after planting. Open flowers, if present indicate that the first tubers are ready underneath. Main crops take 14 weeks or more to mature. After natural dieback (or cutting off of the foliage if blight has taken hold) leave the potatoes for 2-3 weeks in the ground to set firm skin, ready for storage. As soon as the skin is set lift the crop because the underground slugs are usually at their most active at the end of the season.