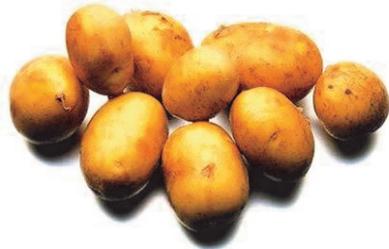


How to grow potatoes



The taste of home-grown potatoes is one of the joys of summer time. It's easy and inexpensive to grow your own and if you don't have much space, you can even grow your potatoes in a large container!

Step 1: Choose your seed potatoes

Buy only certified seed potatoes to ensure healthy stock and a good result. It's a simple premise, **Quality seed = Quality results.**

First and second earlies provide 'new' potatoes in summer.

Maincrop varieties store best over winter.

Step 2: Chitting

Using egg boxes or in wooden trays, place them with most 'eyes' uppermost in a light, frost-free room out of direct sunlight. In a few weeks you will see several sturdy ½ -1in (1-2.5cm) shoots appear—this is called chitting and allows the potatoes to begin growing before they are planted out.

Step 3: Planting

- **First early varieties:** Plant in late March to mid-April.
- **Second early varieties:** Plant in early-mid April.
- **Maincrop varieties:** Plant in mid-late April.

In a sunny spot away from frost pockets, dig a trench 5in (12cm) deep. Place potatoes in the bottom of the trench about 12-14" (30-37cm) apart. Earlies can be closer together as they won't be in the ground as long as the maincrop varieties. Cover with soil making a low ridge over the row and a 'valley' between rows. Rows should be about 24in (60cm) apart for earlies and up to 30in (75cm) apart for maincrop varieties.

If you don't have room in the ground, try growing the potatoes in a container or bag. Fill your container one-third full of good compost place potatoes on the surface and cover with more compost.



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Step 4: Growing the potatoes

Potatoes are not hardy plants and can be damaged by late frosts in spring. If there is a danger of frost, rake the soil over the young shoots to protect them.

When the stems are about 9in (23cm) high, cover the base of the stems with soil or compost. This is called earthing-up, and it increases the yield whilst preventing poisonous green potatoes developing.

Feeding the potatoes with specialist fertiliser whilst they are growing strongly will improve your yield.

It's also important to water the potatoes in dry weather so that the potatoes are not stunted.

Step 5: Harvesting

Early varieties - wait until the flowers are fully open, which will be in late June or early July for first earlies and late July or August for second earlies.

Carefully remove soil from a small part of the ridge and examine the tubers. They are ready for harvesting as new potatoes when they are the size of hen's eggs – insert a flat-tined fork into the ridge well away from the stem and lift the roots forward into the trench.

Lift what you need, when you need them and simply leave the remainder in the soil for another day!

Maincrop potatoes for immediate use - lift in August.

Maincrop potatoes for storage - in September or early October. Once the foliage has turned brown, cut off the stems, wait 10 days, then lift all the potatoes and let them dry off. Make sure you remove all the potatoes, however small, from the soil to avoid problems next year.

Place the dried-off potatoes in a wooden box and store in a dark, dry, frost-free place where they should keep until the spring.



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