

Growing Potatoes

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In the fall, we see purple, red, and yellow potatoes in the grocery store. Some potatoes are nobby, some are fingerlings, yet all are delicious. It is very easy to grow potatoes, and April to June is the time to get them in the ground.

Potatoes grow along the stems of the potato plant. That is why it is best to start potatoes in a trench, gradually adding soil or organic matter (e.g. straw, compost) to form a mound. Or plant them in containers such as a potato box, burlap bag, garbage can, even a heavy duty plastic bag or a cardboard box.

Add six inches of amended soil to the bottom of the trench or container. Place seed potatoes a few inches apart on the soil. If you use a portion of a potato, make sure the piece has several eyes and that the cut sides have been exposed to the air for a few days in order to seal. Potatoes from the grocery store may have been dusted with fungicide, so it is best to plant seed potatoes from a local garden center. To prevent the proliferation of fungal disease, don't use leftover potatoes that were overlooked in your garden last year.

After the potato plant has grown about six inches, cover the stem with soil until just a few leaves are above the soil line. Continue this throughout the summer as the plant grows. The plant will produce purple or white flowers and have fuzzy leaves. Plant early, mid-season and late varieties to extend your potato harvest.

Potatoes are in the Solanacea family so it is important to rotate your crop by family, i.e. do not grow potatoes, tomatoes, eggplant and peppers where you grew them last year. Rotating crops will significantly decrease the chance of blight --think Irish potato famine!

One last word of advice: Do not make potato salad using purple potatoes and hard-boiled eggs. Purple plus yellow makes green. Yuck!