

POTATOES FROM TUBERS

Cultural Details: ZZ608

On receipt

On receipt of your tubers, place them with the 'rose end' (shoot buds) uppermost, in trays in a frost-free, bright location, to encourage the formation of sturdy shoots over the next few weeks, in a process known as 'chitting'. In principle, fewer shoots will lead to fewer, larger, potatoes. In general, chitting is of most value with the First Early varieties, to encourage quick cropping.

Planting

Choose an area of ground in a sunny location, which has not grown potatoes for at least 4 years, to reduce the risk of pest attack. The soil should have been prepared by digging in plenty of well-rotted farmyard manure over the previous months, allowing the frost to break it down. Having a loose soil structure will aid the 'earthing-up' process later.

Earlies & Salad types: Plant the tubers around 30cm (12") apart in the row (slightly further apart for maincrop types), in rows 45 (18") cm apart, at a depth of 10cm (4").

For maincrop types, spacing in the row is 37.5cm (15"), at 67.5" (27") between rows, and again, allow 10cm (4") to the top of the tuber.

The idea is to balance the need to cover the ground with potato foliage to suppress weeds, whilst planting far enough apart to allow good-sized tubers to form.

First Earlies and salad types can be grown in big pots and containers. Plant in around 10cm of compost, cover with a few centimetres of compost, then as the shoots grow, keep covering them with compost until the container is full up. These can be grown any time under cover in a frost-free location, to give a very early crop.

When to plant outdoors? Ideally in March in Southern locations, but early sowings are at greatest risk of frost damage.

Earthing-up

As the shoots start to emerge, drag soil over them from either side of the row, this helps control weeds, protects the uppermost tubers from turning green, and gives more soil round the stems in which the tubers will form. Do this until there's too much foliage to allow it.

Harvesting

First Earlies: start harvesting as required when the flowers open, usually June-July.

Second Earlies & Salad types: as above, July-August

Maincrops: August-Sept, harvest once the foliage dies back.

Pest & Disease

Potatoes are subject to a wide range of disorders, some serious, some less so. For an excellent, well-illustrated treatment of this subject, we recommend Dr D.G. Hessayon's 'The Vegetable Expert' which is widely available and inexpensive.

Information provided for guidance only, as cultural practices and climatic circumstances vary.

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