

Potato Project Planting and Care Instructions

Where to plant

Potatoes require full sun (a minimum of six hours of direct sun). They will grow almost anywhere (inside old tires, garbage bags, under straw, in patio containers, etc.) Potatoes will grow in almost any soil but it should be able to drain well.

Types of potatoes

There are probably more varieties of potatoes than there are varieties of tulips. A couple of ideal types are Irish Cobbler (white, excellent for mashing – very creamy) and Red Chieftain (produces large potatoes in large numbers) The Irish Cobbler produces 5 to 10 potatoes per plant while the Red Chieftain can produce 10 to 15. To produce 100 lbs of potatoes you will need approximately 20.

Planting

It is safest to use seed potatoes that are “certified” disease free. Each potato can be planted whole (minimum size the size of an egg) or cut the day before planting into two or three egg-sized pieces, each bearing at least one “eye”. The potatoes can be “chitted” before planting – ie give them an early start indoors by placing them on a tray in a warm light place this will allow the eyes to develop into shoots, and let any cut surfaces to dry thus avoiding disease. Planting can be anytime in May when the soil has warmed up. They can survive some late spring frost.

Plant in holes in 10 to 12 inches of soil only. Add a little bone meal (approximately ¼ cup) to each planting hole. Cover with a few inches of soil. As the plant emerges and grows keep adding a few inches of soil until it reaches the full height of the trench or hole. Then let it grow 10 to 12 inches more, add some more bone meal and hill a mound of soil around the plant until it is almost covered. Optionally the plant could be hilled once more when it grows another 8 to 10 inches. Do not hill when the plant is flowering. It is very important to NOT to completely fill a container with soil and plant your seed potatoes. They must be covered with additional soil as they grow to produce a large yield - it is critical to keep all potatoes covered and not exposed to sunlight!

Watering

A steady supply of water (2 to 3 cm a week) is ideal for potatoes particularly when they are in bloom. Avoid overwatering as the potatoes will rot in waterlogged soil. Two or three times in a week in dry spells should be sufficient

Pests

The only real pest in Ottawa is the Colorado Potato Beetle. The adult is about ¼ inch (1 cm) in size and yellowish with black spots. Try to destroy the adults before they lay eggs by nudging them into a container of soapy water. The adults lay orange-coloured eggs on the underside of the potato leaves. Remove the leaf with the eggs and destroy in soapy water. If not removed the young emerging larvae will strip the potato stalk bare in a day or two.

Harvesting

The time for harvesting is after the plant has flowered and the stalks are starting to show signs of withering. Dig out the potatoes and lay them on the bare ground for a few hours (NO WASHING/NO WATER) to dry for a few hours and then store in ventilated cardboard boxes or paper boxes in a cold, airy dark place.