

POTATO GROWING GUIDE

First Early, Second Early and Main crop Potatoes

All the above terms refer to is the time it takes from planting to getting a crop.

First Earlies are usually ready in around 14 weeks

Second Earlies are usually ready in around 16 weeks

Main crop are usually ready after about 20 weeks

Main crop varieties tend to store better but they are at more risk of getting blight than the earlier varieties, which are usually harvested before the blight develops.

Chitting Potatoes

There is no mystery to this process. All it means is that when you get your seed potatoes home you ***put them in an egg tray, in a cool but frost free place where they get some light but not direct sunlight. A north facing window is ideal in a frost free shed.***

The potatoes will then grow short stubby shoots, which will get them off to a fast start when planted out. Some people suggest rubbing off all but three shoots to help get larger potatoes with the Maincrops. There is some evidence that chitting doesn't help with Main crop potatoes, but it certainly can't hurt to chit them.

Planting Times

Earlies – Plant late March onwards. Harvest June/July

Second Earlies – Plant late March onwards. Harvest July/August

Main crop – Plant mid-April onwards. Harvest from late September

To plant you can just make a hole with a trowel or dibber and pop the seed potato in or you can draw a trench (take a draw hoe and scrape a trench) and place the potatoes in it. You want it to be about 10cm deep. You then pull the soil from the sides to cover the potatoes.

First and Second Early potatoes should be planted about 30cm apart in rows about 60cm apart.

Main crop potatoes should be planted about 40cm apart in rows 75cm apart.

Earthing Up Potatoes

As the plants grow you need to ***draw the earth from the sides of your rows over the plants.*** The potato tubers tend to grow towards the surface and if light gets to them they will go green. You should not eat green potatoes as they may give you an upset stomach, so ***"earthing up" will cover the tubers, stop the light getting to them and increase your crop.***

Feeding & Watering

Potatoes are greedy feeders and an additional dose of fertiliser after a month or so, when the plants are established, will really help. Use specifically formulated potato fertiliser or an organic fertiliser such as fish, blood and bone. Potatoes need regular watering, especially if they are container grown. If the water supply is irregular the yield will be reduced and the potatoes can be cracked from uneven growth.

Potatoes can also be grown in bags, containers. Really anything that can hold soil!