



## Garden Tips & Techniques: Planting Potatoes

Potatoes are a super fun crop to grow, especially for children (or children at heart!). There's nothing quite like digging through in the soil to find potatoes that have formed over the course of the growing season. Unearthing these buried treasures is one of the magical parts of gardening.

In order to grow a nice crop of potatoes, you'll want loamy (loose), fertile soil. If you've got compacted or clay soils, you can still grow potatoes if you work in a bunch of compost – you probably just won't get quite as much of a harvest as you would with really nice soil. You can also [grow potatoes in containers or bags!](#) There are commercially made [potato grow bags](#) available, or make one yourself with a burlap sack (often available from coffee roasters). Potatoes can handle a more acid soil than most other vegetables. They prefer a pH range of between 6.0 and 7.0 but can handle a pH as low as 5.0.

It's best to purchase potatoes grown specifically to plant: “certified seed potatoes,” as they've been screened for disease problems. Or use potatoes you bought at the farmer's market or saved from previous, healthy harvests. Some potatoes at the grocery store have been treated to prevent sprouting, and sprouting is of course exactly what you want them to do in the garden! If you have some potatoes at home that have started sprouting, you can use them, unless the potato part is squishy and wrinkled. In this case, the potato has spent a lot of energy already and may not survive in the soil.

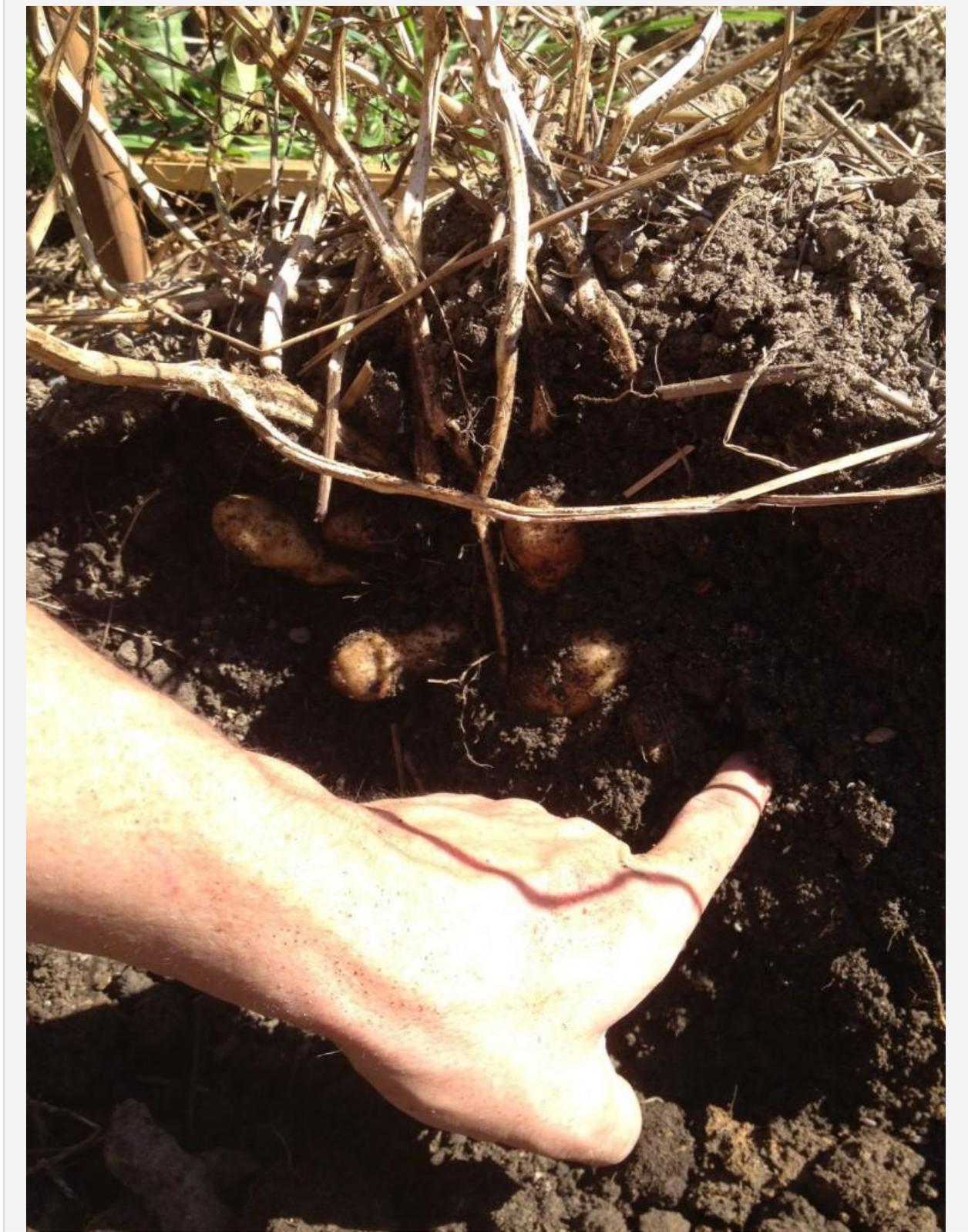
Plant your potatoes in early to mid-spring. Folklore suggests planting potatoes when the dandelions bloom! The tubers can handle cool soil and light frost, so they tolerate early planting well. In order to plant your potatoes, you can plant whole potatoes. Or, cut the seed potatoes into one-inch pieces. Each piece should have at least one “eye.” Let the potato pieces cure for a day or two in a cool, dry place, then plant 2-3” deep and 12” apart. Rows should be spaced about 30-36” apart.

Potatoes need to be “hilled” to keep the potatoes from turning green from sunlight, and to increase production. When the plants reach about 8” high, bury them halfway with soil. Do the same when they reach a foot high.

Over the spring and summer, your potato plant will grow green and lush. About 8 weeks after planting, you can sneak some “new potatoes” out from the soil under the plants. Leave the majority of the potatoes to fill out further. Water during dry periods, and place mulch around the plants after the final hilling, to keep weeds down and the soil from drying out. The plants will flower in the summer then the foliage will start to die back.

After the leaves of your potato plants have been dead for two weeks (giving the potato skins time to cure), go ahead and harvest! Dig up the potatoes. Take care to really explore the area – they can be hard to find! To store your potatoes, brush off the dirt, but don't wash them. Washing can damage the skin and allow pathogens to enter, decreasing the storage time. Keep your potatoes somewhere cool and dark (around 40 degrees is perfect). Scrub them right before cooking.

Check out our [previous post](#) for more info about some interesting varieties.



Potatoes, ready to harvest. Note the dead foliage at the top of the photo. Thanks to Kate Hickey, Director of External Affairs, for the photo from her home garden!