

Planting Irish Potatoes

Irish potatoes are not grown from seed like most other vegetables. Instead, pieces from the potato itself start new plants. Home gardeners should purchase good seed potatoes that are free of disease and chemicals. Do not buy potatoes from a grocery store for planting.

The seed potato contains buds or "eyes" which sprout and grow into plants. The seed piece provides food for the plant until it develops a root system. Too small a seed piece produces a weak plant. Large seed potatoes for the spring crop should be cut into pieces that weigh about 1 1/2 to 2 ounces (about the size of a medium hen egg). Each seed piece must have at least one good eye (see figure 4). Cut the seed 5 or 6 days before planting. Hold the cut seed in a well-ventilated spot so it can heal over to prevent rotting when planted in cold, wet or very hot weather. Plants killed by a late spring frost will not come back if the seed piece is rotten. One pound of seed potatoes will make 9 to 10 seed pieces. It is not recommended to save potatoes for seed. This can cause buildup of virus or leaf diseases that will reduce yield.

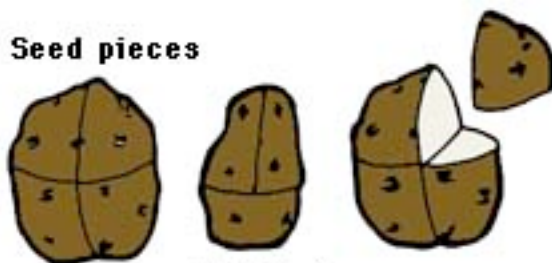


Figure 4

Planting

Potatoes should be planted when the soil temperature 4 inches deep reaches about 50 degrees F, or about 3 weeks before the last spring frost. Potatoes should be planted in late March to the middle of May. If planted too early the tops can be frozen off by spring frost.

Use a hoe or stick to open a trench about 3 inches deep down the center of the bed. Drop seed pieces 10 to 12 inches apart in the trench (see Figure 5). Step on each seed piece after dropping it to assure good contact with the soil. Cover the seed about 3 inches deep. If covered too deeply, the plants will be slow to break through the soil and will be more subject to disease and seed decay.



Figure 5