



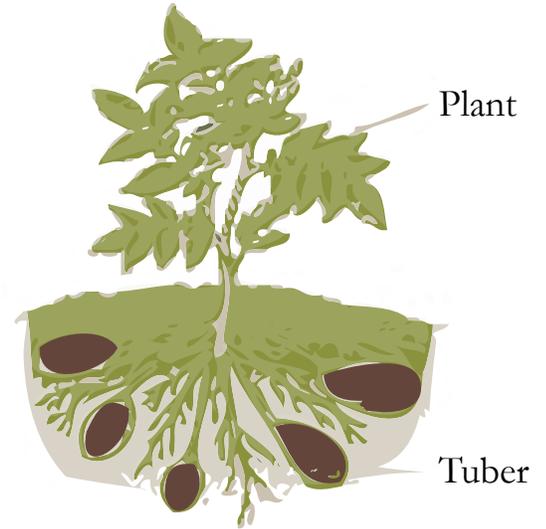
## A GUIDE TO GROWING POTATOES

This staple American crop is one of the most fun and interactive foods you can grow in your garden. Originating in the Andes of South America, potatoes are a great crop for cooler springs of the Midwest. Traditionally planted around St. Patrick's Day (March 17th), potatoes will be ready to harvest by early/midsummer depending on the variety. Potatoes come in many different colors besides brown (yellow, red, purple, blue) so be adventurous and try these as well!

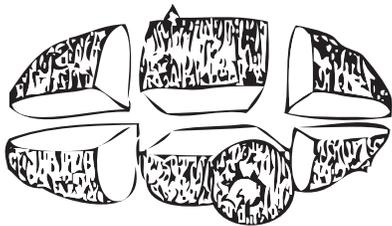
### PLANTING

Potatoes are most commonly grown from certified seed potatoes, meaning the "seeds" are actually potatoes that will sprout new plants. Potatoes from the grocery store will probably not work (they've been treated), so go with actual seed potatoes.

If the potatoes are small, you may be able to plant these whole. Otherwise, cut the seed potatoes with a clean knife into smaller chunks each containing 2-3 "eyes". Let these cuts dry for a day before planting. Some gardeners toss these in a bag with sulfur to decrease chances of rot. If the potatoes have already sprouted, handle carefully so you don't break them off.



*Figure 1 Potatoes will need to be covered with soil as the plant grows*



*Figure 2 Cut the seed potato into pieces with 2-3 "eyes" remaining*

Prepare the soil before planting by deeply incorporating organic matter to loosen and ensure good drainage. Potatoes like a slightly acidic soil, so decreasing the pH with sulfur might help decrease the chances of disease. Plant the potatoes, eye side up, about 6" deep, 2-3' apart. Do this 3-4 weeks before the last frost, or when the soil can be worked. Potatoes can also be planted above ground or in containers. This allows for a cleaner harvest, however, expect lower yields. Remember, potatoes belong to the same botanical family as tomatoes, eggplants, and peppers, so do not plant any of these crops in the same location of the garden during consecutive years.

### MAINTENANCE

The interactive aspect of growing potatoes comes in "hilling" or continuously covering the potatoes as they attempt to grow up through the soil. As the plant grows, the potatoes want to pop out of the soil, exposing them to light and making them inedible (and potentially poisonous). Cover the base and a good portion of the plant (keeping up to 6-10" of the actual plant foliage exposed) with soil, straw, leaves, or other organic material. Do this until the plant blossoms (3-4 times while growing). Water deeply during dry spells.



## MAINTENANCE CONT.

To keep away pests: maintain proper spacing for air circulation; use floating row covers and BT (var. sandiego) against Colorado potato beetles; use disease-resistant varieties; keep the garden clean.

## HARVEST

When the flowers bloom, mulch heavily to con-serve moisture. At this time, “new” potatoes can be harvested by carefully reaching under the hills and finding the attached small potatoes. To develop larger tubers, let the plant mature until the foliage dies back. This will ideally happen before the first fall frost. Two weeks after the foliage has died, harvest by using a shovel, digging fork, or trowel, digging widely around the plant and finding the potatoes buried inside the hills.



*Figure 3 Potato flowers in bloom (left)*

*Figure 4 A potato field in Shropshire, England. Note the soil is up around the base of the plant, covering the plant and leaving 6-10” of vegetation exposed (below)*

