



GROWING POTATOES IN CANBERRA

There is no end to the variety of ways you can grow potatoes. You may choose standard garden beds, Potato growing bags, bins, or use raised containers made of Chicken wire, old pallets, car tyres etc. Certified seed potatoes are available in Winter and Spring and you can have fun trying out the many different varieties on offer. Potatoes are very easy to grow, producing well in the Canberra district.

WHAT DO I NEED?

- A sunny place is best - at least 6 hours a day.
- Good drainage - no wet feet.
- Soil well prepared with lots of manure, organic matter and fertiliser - well drained clay soils are fine.
- No lime - they prefer the acidic soil, found naturally in this region.
- Generous mulch - it will conserve water and help stop your new spuds going green.
- Regular deep watering (but not too wet as to cause rot) and fertilise for continuing growth.
- Plant only Certified seed potatoes, to keep diseases at bay.

HOW DO I GROW POTATOES?

- First, 'chit' or 'green' your seed potatoes by leaving them in a dry, bright (but not sunny) place so that they sprout shoots from the eyes after a week or two. You can cut larger tubers into pieces, each with at least two eyes - the cut surfaces will heal over fairly quickly. Expect to harvest 8-10 times what you plant.
- Prepare the planting bed well by digging deeply and removing any stones that might distort the newly forming potatoes. Mix in lots of well rotted cow manure, compost and a complete plant food - we recommend *Healthy Earth* fertilisers. A raised bed is ideal, or you can mound the soil to ensure good drainage. Canberra soils are usually acidic, which potatoes prefer, but you might need Claybreaker to deal with poorly drained clay soils.
- Use a premium potting mix if you are planting your spuds in a container. (see 'Tips' below).
- Plant the chits or whole potatoes about 8cms deep from late August to September. When planting at this time, heavy frosts will most likely have passed by the time the 1st shoots emerge from the soil in October. There is enough time in our season to plant though to December too, if you wish. Space plants 30-40cm apart and rows 50-70cm apart. Water in with *Healthy Earth Liquid Fertiliser* or with a Seasol solution to give them a good start.
- Mulch with Pea straw, Lucerne, or Sugar cane mulch to conserve water and help stop your new spuds going green from too much light. Water regularly and deeply during the growing season and fertilise with *Healthy Earth*.
- By gradually 'hilling' soil and mulching up and around the growing stems (to about 30cms) you can increase your potato crop.
- You can harvest potatoes quite early by 'bandicooting' - carefully digging out some of the small 'new' potatoes about 3 weeks after the plants start flowering. The main harvest is usually ready when the top growth starts to die down with the first frosts. Store potatoes in a cool, dry and dark place so that they do not go green - green potatoes are poisonous!

TIPS

- Growing potatoes is a great way to help break up heavy soils in new gardens.
- Rotating the potato patch every year is a good way to fight disease.
- Short of garden bed space? Growing in bags, wire mesh bins or large containers can be worth trying, **but**, choose a position and method where the container and root ball stay cool in the heat of our summer, or else tuber production can slow or stop. Start with a 15cm layer of potting mix inside your container, sit the sprouting spuds in that and cover with more mix, manure and mulch. Continue piling up more layers as the plants grow, as high as a metre, always ensuring the newly forming tubers are not get exposed to light.