GROWING POTATOES

• Planting Irish Potatoes
  • Buy certified disease-free seed potatoes
  • Plant 2 to 3 ounce pieces (egg-sized) with one to three eyes each
  • Store freshly cut pieces at room temperature for 1 - 3 days before planting
  • Potatoes prefer sandy soil so add organic matter to clay soil to improve drainage
  • Add manure and fertilizer higher in P and K than N (1-2-2)

• Cutting and Chitting

• Planting
  • Rows vs. Beds
  • Holes vs. Trenches

• Cultivation
  • Plant in full sun, cut-side down, 10 - 12 inches apart
  • When plants are about 6” tall, use a hoe to pull about 4” of soil up to the plants
  • Water generously and keep soil evenly moist
  • Hill up once or twice more as plants grow
  • As potatoes form, cover any that protrude above the soil

• Hill Up
  • Soil
  • Straw
  • Compost

• Harvesting
  • Cut back water as soon as plants bloom or begin to turn yellow
  • Start digging potatoes as needed two weeks after bloom or when about 20% of leaves are yellow
  • Complete harvesting two weeks after plant tops die back and on a day when soil is relatively dry
  • Dig up carefully with a pitchfork and allow to dry on top of soil for several hours
  • Use any damaged potatoes immediately
• Carefully brush of most dirt and store remainder in cool dark place

• Cage Method
  • Dig several inches of compost into soil and place seed potatoes 6” apart in a 16”-diameter circle
  • Make an 18”-diameter cage from 4’-wide galvanized fencing
  • Set over potato circle and stabilize with rebar or stakes
  • Cover with 6” of mixed straw & compost (1/3 straw to 2/3 compost) and then water
  • Keep the mix moist and as plants grow add more straw/compost mix, leaving only uppermost leaves exposed
  • Stop watering when foliage fades; wait 2-3 weeks and life cage

• Trash Can Method
  • Drill lots of holes in bottom of 20-32 gallon trash can and around outside wall
  • Place layer of gravel on bottom for drainage
  • Add 6” of potting soil mixed with 1/2 cup fertilizer high in phosphorus and low in nitrogen
  • Cover lightly with more soil and plant potato seeds 5” apart (4 starts to a can)
  • Cover with 4” soil mixed with mature compost
  • Keep soil moist and as plants grow add more soil, leaving only uppermost leaves exposed
  • Stop watering when foliage fades; wait 2-3 weeks and dump potatoes out

• Saving Your Own Seed Potatoes
  • Use potatoes dug when plant is partially yellow or just died back
  • Use 2” - 3” potatoes whole, or larger potatoes cut into egg size pieces
  • Don’t save any with signs of disease on potato or plant
  • Store in plastic bag in refrigerator for a couple of months before planting

• Which Potatoes to Grow
  • Defined by cooking characteristics
    - Baking
    - Boiling
    - All-purpose
  • Defined by Maturity
    - New Potatoes
    - Early Potatoes
- Early Main Crop Potatoes
- Late Main Crop Potatoes
  - Defined by Color
  - Defined by Shape

• Some Recommended Varieties
  - MG Handbook: White Rose, Kennebec, Chieftain, Norgold Russet Red Lasoda, Yukon Gold
  - My Favorites: Austrian Crescent, Kennebec, Bintje, Mountain Rose, German Butterball

• Sweet Potato Characteristics
  - Sweet potato is a modified root
  - It requires a long, hot summer
  - Yields 1 to 6 pounds of usable roots per plant
  - Leaves are edible
  - Grown from rooted cuttings or slips produced from the sprouts of sweet potato roots
  - Sweet potatoes are in the morning glory family; Yams are a different botanical species

• Ordering Sweet Potato Slips
  - Sand Hill Preservation Center (sandhill preservation.com)
  - Jim Alvernaz, P.O. Box 255, Livingston, CA 95334 (209-394-3337)

• Things to Consider
  - Dry Flesh vs. Moist Flesh (light yellow vs. darker orange/sweet potatoes vs. “yams”)
  - Vining Habit vs. Bush Habit
  - Length to Maturity (90 days to 120 days)

• Making Sweet Potato Slips
  - In February set sweet potato in damp sand or potting soil half submerged or at a 45 degree angle, thicker, sprouting end exposed, or
  - Cut off sprouting end (leaving several inches of potato attached) and suspend in glass of water, cut side down
  - Keep in bright window out of direct sun
  - When shoots are 6 to 12 inches long, cut them off about an inch from the potato and place in water half submersed, or potting soil to develop roots

• Planting Sweet Potatoes
  - Add mature compost to planting bed
• Optionally, make a ridge 6-10 inches high and 6-8 inches wide
• Plant slips 12-18 inches, 4-6 inches deep, with leaves above soil

• Make sure several nodes (joints) on the stem are under the soil)
• Plant late on a dry calm day

Growing Sweet Potatoes
• Mulch plants with straw or shredded newspaper
• Protect plants from wind or hot sun and keep well-moistened until roots become established
• After that keep soil evenly moist but not wet, and reduce watering after plants mature
• As plants grow make sure the vines do not root, as that reduces yield (pull them up if rooting)
• Plants can be trained (tied) onto a trellis
• Allow about 4 months and dig potatoes up as late as possible in fall while weather is still warm

Harvesting and Curing Sweet Potatoes
• On a dry day, cut back vines and lift roots with pitch fork, carefully brushing off loose soil
• Allow to dry on soil surface several hours
• Pull out any damaged roots for immediate use
• Cure unblemished roots to toughen skins by air-drying in a warm, humid, well-ventilated place (80-85 degrees) for two weeks
• Wrap each root in newspaper and store at 55-65 degrees

Selected Varieties
• Georgia Jet (early; prolific; deep orange flesh)
• Beauregard (early; prolific; bright orange flesh)
• Centennial (early; prolific; carrot colored flesh)
• Covington (an improved Beauregard; Alvernaz)
• Diane (developed by Alvernaz - prolific; orange)
• Porto Rico (bush habit; yellowish-pink flesh)
• Vardaman (bush habit; orange flesh)
Santa Clara County Master Gardeners Website: mastergardeners.org