

# 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 off 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 lift 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 ([sandhillpreservation.com](http://sandhillpreservation.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](http://mastergardeners.org)