

Potatoes

Potatoes are tubers: swollen underground stems that form as a storage location for starch. Tubers form best at temperatures of 60-70° F; therefore, early spring planting or fall planting is preferable in KS. Potatoes are grown from cut pieces of tubers, usually referred to as seed potatoes.

Cutting and Preparing Seed: Select firm, solid seed potatoes. Cut the tubers into 1.5 to 2 ounce pieces. An average sized potato is cut into four pieces, while a large potato is cut into six. Store the cut seed in a warm humid location for 2-3 days to allow the freshly cut surface to “heal”. This prevents the seed piece from rotting when planted. Always purchase new potato seed. Do not use your own tubers for seed as reductions in yield and vigor will result.

When to Plant: Mid March – St. Patrick’s Day – is a traditional time to plant spring potatoes in KS, while early to mid July is the time to plant for a fall harvest.

Space: Plant seed 12” apart in rows 3’ apart. Plant the seed less than 2” deep in the spring, or 4-5” deep for a fall planting.

Care: Potatoes develop along the main stem of the plant, above the seed piece. To encourage large yields and to prevent sunburning, potatoes should be hilled or ridged, pulling loose soil along the row as the crop is growing. This ridge or hill eventually should be 8-12” tall. Potatoes like a fertile well drained location with loose soil. Potatoes need consistent watering, especially during development when the plant is 6-12” tall. Irregular watering lowers yield and may result in rough knobs on the tubers. Mulches can be useful in holding moisture near the plant.

Harvest: Early or new potatoes can be harvested as the plants are growing by gently removing some plants in the row. Begin digging potatoes when the vines are about half dead. Remove excess vines and carefully dig the tubers. Allow them to surface dry out of the sun for a day or more to toughen the skin and prevent sunburning. Then move potatoes into a cold dark location for storage. Ideal storage temperature is below 40° F.

