

family  
**Vegetable  
Garden**  
series

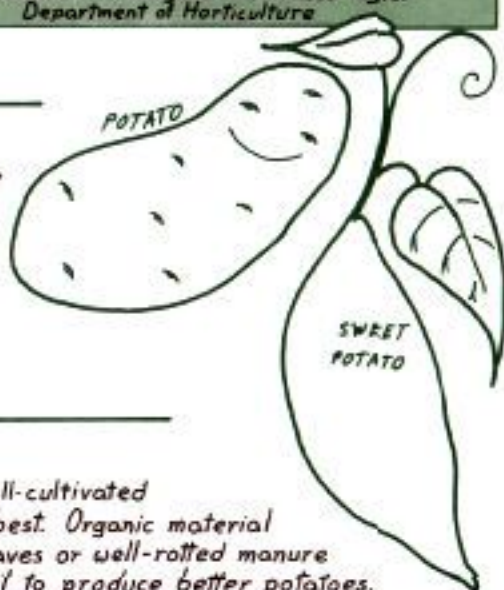
EXTENSION BULLETIN E-824 (23)

# Potatoes and Sweet Potatoes

by Elizabeth C. Naegle and J. Lee Taylor  
Department of Horticulture

## PRODUCE A LOT

Potatoes and sweet potatoes are fun to grow and produce a lot of vegetables, but require some work and a lot of space. They are good for you and can be used many ways.



## THE BASICS

**soil:** Plant in a well-drained, well-cultivated soil. A sandy loam soil is best. Organic material such as grass clippings, leaves or well-rotted manure can be worked into the soil to produce better potatoes. Do not plant for 1 year after tilling sod because of grub damage.

**fertilizer:** Before planting, work in 2 pounds (4 cups) of 5-20-20 fertilizer per 100 square feet of soil. Apply a high nitrogen fertilizer no later than July 4.

**water:** Do not allow soil to dry out for a long time. Alternate dry and wet periods cause a hollow center in regular potatoes.

- weeding:**
- Weed well after planting, but be careful not to injure shallow roots.
  - Stop cultivation when blossoms form on regular potatoes and when sweet potato vines cover the ground. Just cut weeds off at ground level.
  - A mulch will save work, keep in moisture and prevent exposed potatoes from turning green.





## POTATOES

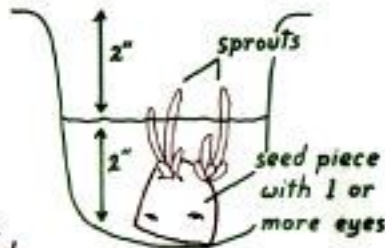
Potatoes are swollen underground stems called "tubers." They have buds or "eyes" on them. They grow well in cool weather, but frost can hurt sprouts.



### PLANTING

Plant April 20 to May 10 for a summer crop. Plant midseason or late varieties May 10 to June 1 for potatoes to store overwinter.

- \* Use "seed potatoes" (small potatoes or pieces of large ones with 1 or more eyes each). Buy them from garden stores, farmers' markets or seed catalogs. Buy certified seed potatoes to avoid disease.
  - \* Do not plant potatoes from the store. They are treated with chemicals to stop sprouting and may carry disease.
- 1 Small potatoes are ready to plant. Cut large ones into pieces with 1 or more eyes each. Store in a cool place 4 to 6 days so cuts heal.
  - 2 Plant 4 inches deep, 1 foot apart in row. Leave 2 to 3 feet between rows.
  - 3 Cover with 2 inches of soil. After they sprout add 2 more inches of soil — 4 inches in all.
  - 4 Don't plant when soil is very wet or hot and dry.
  - 5 If any potatoes show aboveground, cover with soil. If exposed to sun, they turn green and can be poisonous.

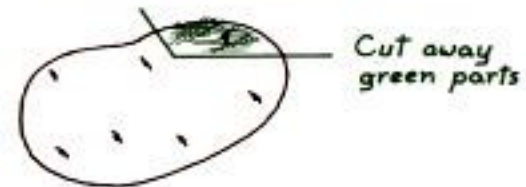


### HARVESTING AND STORAGE

Each plant yields up to 5 pounds of potatoes.

- 1 You can dig "new" potatoes when vines start flowering. This reduces yields, however. Well-matured potatoes store better.
- 2 Dig mature potatoes after vines die down, before ground freezes. Use a spading fork or shovel. Be careful not to cut or bruise potatoes.
- 3 Let them dry off before storing.
- 4 Store only perfect potatoes.
- 5 Store in the dark at about 40°F. If it's much warmer, they'll sprout. If kept below 35°F, they may turn sweet.

Cut off any green parts of the potato before eating — they may be poisonous.

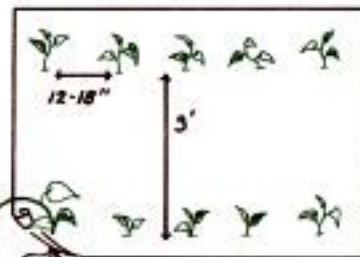


## SWEET POTATOES

These need a long, warm growing season. Plant after the last frost (May 20 to June 1). They are enlarged roots called "tuberous roots." They have a few buds at one end, so cannot be cut up for planting like potatoes. They don't always produce well in Michigan because of the cool summers.

### PLANTING

- 1 Plant transplants. Get them from a garden center or seed catalog. Sweet potatoes from the store may not sprout and can carry disease.
- 2 Plant 12 to 18 inches apart in rows 3 feet apart.



### HARVESTING AND STORAGE

- 1 Dig on a warm, sunny day after the first light frost. Be careful not to injure them.
- 2 Let them dry off before storing.
- 3 Leave in a warm (80°F) room with good air circulation 2 to 3 weeks.
- 4 Then store at 55 to 60°F in a dry place. Check often and remove spoiled or rotten ones.



## RECOMMENDED VARIETIES — Days from planting to harvest in ( ) —

### Potatoes —————

Early (75) *Onaway*  
*Irish Cobbler*  
*Norland (red variety)*  
*Superior*

Midseason (90) *Norgold Russet*  
*Norchip*

Late (110-120)  
*Katahdin (susceptible to  
scab disease)*

*Sebago*  
*Russet Rural*  
*Kennebec (susceptible to  
scab disease)*  
*Russet Burbank*

### Sweet Potatoes —————

*Centennial (150)*

## INSECTS AND DISEASE —————

- *Plant disease-free seed pieces and resistant varieties when possible.*
- *Pesticides will probably have to be used to control insects and disease on potatoes.*
- *See Extension Bulletin E-760(b) or your County Extension Agent for more information.*



KEYS  
TO  
SUCCESS

- *Plant disease-free seed potatoes.*
- *Plant in well-cultivated soil.*
- *Keep potatoes covered with soil.*
- *Control pests.*
- *Dry before storing.*

*Other bulletins in this series provide additional information on vegetable gardening.*

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