The first time I grew potatoes was for a work competition. We were all given a sack, three seed spuds each, and were told to use any product Oderings sold to see who could get the most. After 90 days we all lined up, tipped out our sacks and I thought, really, it can't be this easy, but it was. Potatoes are an easy-to-grow vegetable that can be grown in the garden or pots and containers.

Growing potatoes in the garden can take up a bit of space and many gardeners forgo growing them for this reason. There are ways around this in the form of planter bags, pots, sacks and containers. Whether you want to grow in the garden or in pots follow these simple steps for success.

In the Garden

Potatoes are a warm-season plant and are very susceptible to frost. Most gardeners prefer to grow potatoes between July and September, with a second crop again in January–February; however, in colder areas planting time is generally restricted to August– January. Potatoes are adaptable to both light and heavy soils; however, good drainage is essential.

Oderings sell certified seed potatoes, which means they are free of virus and disease. There are plenty to choose from, so look at your local Oderings 'Potato Board' and choose one based on your taste buds and growing season.

Step 1: Spread the potatoes out in a warm, shady, frost- and water-free area for two weeks to allow their 'eyes' to sprout.

Step 2: While waiting for the potatoes to sprout start preparing your soil. If you have light soil or well-worked soil, weed removal is all that is needed. For heavy soil you can add Gypsum, which will break down the clay. Adding Gypsum adds calcium, which potatoes love, and gypsum won't alter the pH levels of your soil. Fertilise with potato fertiliser, one-quarter of a cup per metre, covered over with 5cm of soil so it does not burn the potatoes. Add Neem Granules to the soil also, and reapply at 4–6 week intervals. If you want to make sure your spuds are pest free, this is the best natural product to help achieve it.

Step 3: If planting in rows the rows should be 15cm deep and 60cm apart. Place potatoes 30cm apart. Cover over with soil and rake the surface level. Sprouts will start to emerge in two to three weeks.

Step 4: When sprouts are 15cm tall, pile up the soil (make a mound) 10cm. This will support the plants, protect new potatoes from sun exposure and prevent pests attacking them. Each time the sprouts get to 15cm, pile up another 10cm of soil, until maturity date or when the shoots above the ground begin to flower or wither and die. However, a colleague recommended that I pile up the soil (make a mound) 30–40cm, at step 3 above. I did this and although the crop took a little bit longer to mature, it was so much easier and in my opinion a time saver. So if you do not have the time or inclination for step 4, then follow this tip.

Potato Space Savers

Even if you don't have a lot of space you can still enjoy the taste and ease of growing your own potatoes.

First pick something to grow them in. I've seen it done with rubbish bins, tyres, big buckets, wine barrels, large pots and of course sacks. Whatever you use make sure you clean the container well and that there are plenty of drainage holes.

Step 1: Follow step 1 for garden planting above.

Step 2: Prepare the soil by adding 10cm of soil, then a layer of potato fertiliser, and another 5cm of soil. Then place one layer of seed potatoes (for tyres around 3–5 potatoes) and cover with another 15cm of soil.

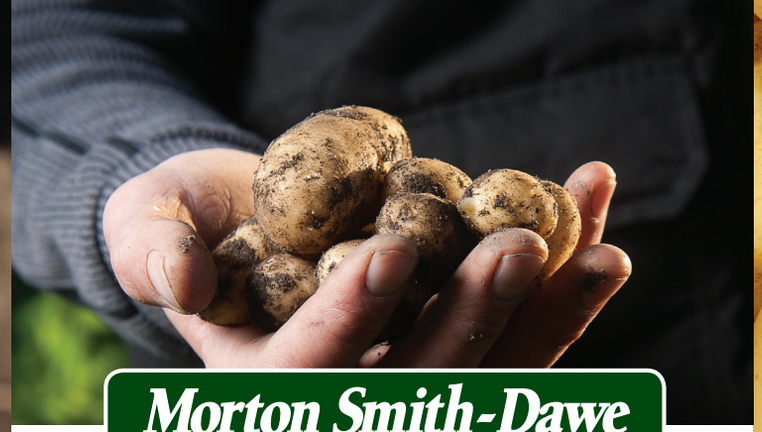
Step 3: Follow step 4 for garden planting. Keep repeating step 4 until the selected space saver is full of soil and or the maturity date has lapsed. Or based on my tip above, fill the space saver to the top once you have placed the seed spuds and wait until the maturity date or when the shoots above the ground begin to flower or wither and die. Then turn the space saver over and sort through your potatoes, store and enjoy.

Tips to remember

- Watering regularly will promote smooth well-developed potatoes.
- Most potatoes are ready for digging after 90–100 days.
- If storing potatoes, allow the tops to completely die off before digging, discard any damaged ones and store in a cool, dark, dry place.
- Pest and diseases can affect potatoes, e.g., aphids, blight and potato moth. Please consult your local store for correct diagnosis and control agents, but use Neem Granules as a general pest control for any veggies in the garden or pots.
- Grow potatoes to help break up the soil in a new garden and the crop will be a bonus.
- Potatoes sometimes get a scab looking skin, normally caused by a lack of calcium in the soil. Prevent it by incorporating gypsum when preparing the soil.

There are four crops you can choose from:

Extra Early Crop: These mature in 60 days.
Early Crop: Matures in 90 days.
Early Main Crop: Matures in 90–100 days.
Main Crop: These can take up to 110 days to mature.



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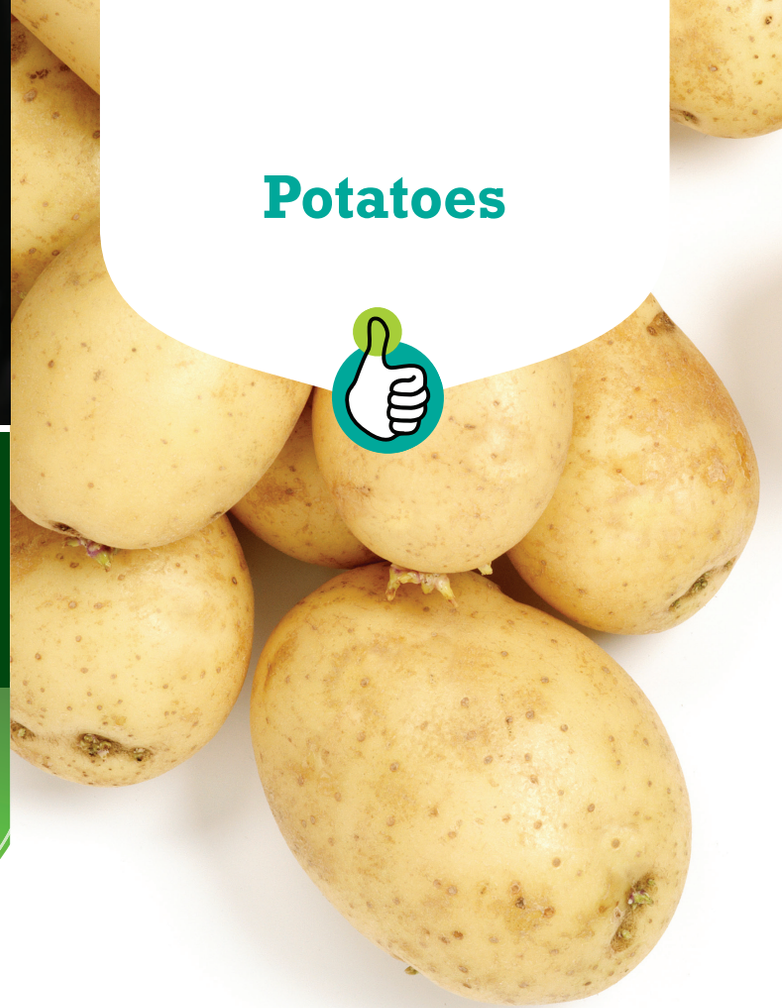

Potatoes

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