

Crofting Connections Heritage Tatties



HOW DO I GROW MY POTATOES?

Planting: Potatoes need light, water, food and space to grow. They do not like to freeze, so plant them when the nights are not too frosty. **This will probably be in late April.**

You can grow your potatoes in the ground

1. First **dig the ground** to get rid of weeds - or get someone to plough it for you.
 - Use string and pegs to mark lines in the soil, **60 cm apart**.
 - Dig trenches **10 cm deep** in the soil.
 - Plant your potatoes **30 cm apart** along each trench.

or

You can plant them in potting compost inside an old tractor tyre or in a grow-bag:

- Plant 5 of them in a tyre or 3 in a grow bag, about 10cm deep.

2. When the potato leaves show through the ground, use a hoe to pull earth over them from between the rows. Do this again, at least once more, about 2 or 3 weeks later. This gives the potatoes more soil to grow in, keeps down the weeds, improves drainage and stops sunlight turning the tubers green. Green potatoes are not good to eat.

*Potato plants have really pretty flowers!
Often the flowers are the same colour as the potato
skins - red, white or blue. Look out for them during
July & August.*



WHEN DO I HARVEST MY POTATOES?



When the leaves start to turn yellow or brown, they have stopped growing and you can harvest the potatoes. This will probably be in September or October although it may be earlier if the potatoes have caught blight. Dig underneath the plants with your hands or with a garden fork to find the tubers.



Potato leaf affected by blight

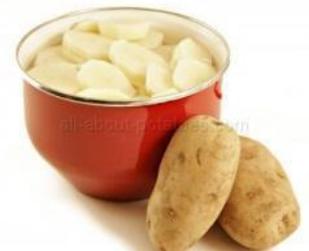
Blight is a fungal disease which spreads on the wind, especially if the weather is damp. It starts on the leaves where it forms dark brown or black spots. If you detect blight on the leaves, you can save the potatoes by cutting and removing the affected haulms (stems and leaves) and leaving the potatoes in the ground for another two weeks before harvesting. This should ensure that the potatoes themselves will not get blight and can be stored up to a few months. Alternatively, if you harvest your potatoes as soon as you see the spots on the leaves, the tubers will still be good to eat immediately.

HOW DO I EAT MY POTATOES?



Potatoes need to be cooked. They can be boiled, steamed, mashed, roasted, baked, made into crisps, chips or wedges. There are many recipes for potatoes. You will need the help of an adult before you cook them.

If your potatoes are grown without chemicals there is no need to peel them as the skin and the



area next to the skin, are the tastiest and the most nutritious. Just wash them well.

Further Reading from Crofting Connections resources:

Soils of the Crofts produced by the Hutton Institute and Crofting Connections – *test your soil and learn how to improve fertility for growing your tatties.*

Guide to Seed Potatoes by Alan Romans – *a comprehensive up-to-date pocket guide covering most seed potato varieties available in the UK. It includes seven introductory pages on history, cultivation and diseases. It is written by experienced seed merchant and potato expert Alan Romans from Fife.*

Garden Organic Guide to Making Compost – Pauline Pears

Gardening on a Bed System – Pauline Pears

Hand to Mouth - The food and Drink of Scotland's Islands – Jane Cheape, Acair Press. *See the chapters on cereals and tatties, to understand how potatoes took over from cereals as staples in the crofters' diet*

DID YOU KNOW?



Potatoes were first cultivated by the Incas of South America, around La Paz and Lake Titicaca in the mountains of Peru. They can be grown at altitudes too high for most other crops, up to 4,200metres above sea level, which is roughly three times the height of Ben Nevis.

There are around 200 species of wild potatoes in South America.

The potato is the most important food crop in the world after cereals because it is high yielding, easy to harvest and to store and very nutritious.

Thanks to the Andean tradition of exchanging potato seeds and tubers at social gatherings, the great range of potato varieties has long been maintained. The International Potato Centre in Peru has 3,800 varieties of Andean cultivated potatoes



Potatoes were first brought to Europe in the 1560s.

By the 19th century, potatoes were a very important part of the crofters' diet. In 1845-49 there was a great famine caused by potato blight. Most potatoes grown in Scotland and Ireland were a variety called Lumpers (named because they were 'lumpy'). They were chosen because they were very high yielding. Sadly this variety had no resistance to potato blight.

For further reading around the history of the potato as one of the world's key foods:

Forgotten Fruits by Christopher Stocks, published by Windmill – *a fascinating book about heritage edible plants – see the section on potatoes*

Plants for People by Anna Lewington, published by Eden Project Books – *traces the history of the relationships between people and the plants that sustain their lives - see section on the potato.*

Crofting Connections Heritage Potatoes Record Sheet

LET US KNOW...

- How your potatoes grow – especially which varieties do/do not get blight this year
- Which potatoes do best in your area this year
- What yields you get from each variety
- What your favourite way of cooking and eating each variety is
- The results of your taste test with your class and with others in the community

Variety					
Date Planted					
Date first leaves showed					
Dates of 'earthing up'					
Date of first flowers					
Blight? – Yes/no					
Date of Harvest					
Yeild – total number of potatoes					
Yeild – total weight of potatoes					
How did you Cook the potatoes					
Which did you like best					
Taste test results 1 = best					