

The Grapevine

The Versatile Potato

Spring is coming and it's almost time to plant our first vegetables in the garden. One of the earliest vegetables to be planted in the garden is the trusty potato. Potatoes are an easy and abundantly producing crop to grow in the garden but let's learn a bit more about the potato and some ways to be successful growing this crop.

What variety do I plant?

Potato cultivars will vary in appearance, maturity, growing requirements and culinary quality but all of them are an excellent source of nutrients. Potatoes are extremely versatile as they can be baked, boiled, chipped, fried, roasted and used in a variety of soups, salads and stews. It is important to choose a variety that will suit your culinary needs. Some varieties are mealy in texture and work best when turned into potato chips or fries where others will be sweeter in flavor and are suitable for boiling roasting or in salads. Potatoes are divided up into three different categories including Red-Skinned, White-Skinned and Russet potatoes.



Red-skinned varieties provide a pretty contrast to meat and other vegetables. They tend to have a lower starch content which makes them suitable for boiling, roasting and using in soups and stews. White skinned varieties have a wide range of starch content so it is important to know your variety before you plant them. Lower starch content varieties work well in boiling and roasting where higher starch varieties are suitable for chips or frying. Yukon Gold is a very versatile potato variety and is the most popular variety in the US. Russet potatoes are known for their brown netted skin. Many of these cultivars are suited for making French Fries and other frozen processed products. See the table on the second page for more information on varieties.

You've picked your variety, now what do you do?

The first thing you need to do is look for certified seed potatoes. Certified Seed potatoes are disease free which is very important in preventing diseases from getting into your soil. Potatoes from the grocery store have typically been sprayed with a chemical to prevent them from sprouting and they could have diseases even though they look fine to eat.

How many potatoes do you need and what do I do with them?

For a 100 foot row of potatoes you will need about 10 pounds of potatoes to plant. After you have your seed potatoes it's time to cut them into pieces. You will typically get multiple pieces from each potato. When cutting the tubers the pieces should be about the size of a golf ball and each one should contain an "eye" or a location where the potatoes will sprout from. Eyes are typically indentions in the tuber. Use a sharp knife to cut your potato into pieces. I typically let my potatoes "heal" for several days to develop a skin before planting them. I find it helps to prevent rotting in the soil.

When and how do I plant Potatoes?

Tradition has said to plant potatoes on St Patrick's Day, however it is best to check the temperature of the soil either using a soil probe or by looking at the closest weather station to you. Potatoes need soil temperatures at or above 45 degrees in order to sprout and grow so watch those temperatures. Potatoes should be planted in rows 30-36 inches apart with 10 inch spaces between the potato pieces themselves. I highly recommend "hilling" your potatoes or building up the soil around the plants to give the tubers space to grow and prevent the skins from greening.

When do I get to enjoy the "fruits" of my labor?

Potatoes can be harvested at anytime during the growing season as new potatoes which typically are smaller or wait till the end of the growing season to harvest when the potato plants die. Store potatoes in a cool dark place for the longest shelf life. Don't wash them before storing as this encourages disease and spoilage. At room temperature potatoes will retain their best quality for about a week but at cooler temperatures they can last far longer.

Spring is on its way and I can't wait to get into my garden and enjoy the outdoors. I hope that this helps you get ready to plant potatoes this year. Don't forget to prepare your potatoes for planting several days to a week prior to actually planting the pieces so they have time to callous over to prevent rotting. More information and a video on planting can be found at this website: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xt8bkRz2SD8&t=10s>

If you are interested in growing your potatoes in a container check out this video on planting container potatoes:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7wb9cbdpCMA&t=168s>

Potato varieties and uses							
	Maturity	Depth of Eyes	Scab Tolerance	Storage Quality	Approx. Yield* Pounds/10 ft. row	Cooked Texture	Suggested Uses
<i>White-skinned varieties</i>							
Superior	Early-mid	Shallow	Moderate	Good	13.3	Mealy	Baking, Mashing
Norchip	Mid-season	Shallow	Moderate	Good	16.4	Very mealy	Baking, French Fries
Irish Cobbler	Early	Deep	Poor	Good	13.4	Mealy	Baking, Mashing
Kennebec	Late	Shallow	Poor	Fair	15.2	Mealy	Baking, Mashing
<i>Red-skinned Varieties</i>							
LaRouge	Mid-sesason	Shallow	Moderate	Fair	17.4	Waxy	boiling
LaSoda	Early-Mid	Medium	Moderate	Good	15.3	Waxy	boiling
Norland	Early	Shallow	Good	Good	10.9	Waxy	boiling
Red Pontiac	Mid-late	Medium	Poor	Fair	17.0	Soggy to waxy	Salads, boiling
<i>Russet-skinned Varieties</i>							
Norgold Russet	Early	Shallow	Good	Fair	9.4	Mealy	Baking, boiling
Norkotah	Mid-season	Shallow	Good	Good	13.0	Mealy	Baking, boiling

*Based on K-State research trials over 5-10 years.

Activity of the Week- Forcing Branches Indoors

One of the easiest ways to bring spring indoors on gloomy March days is to force spring blooming trees and shrub branches indoors. Most of our spring blooming trees and shrubs can be “forced” to bloom indoors earlier than their normal bloom time. Most shrubs need at least 6 weeks of winter dormancy in order to bloom and can be brought indoors anytime after that. To force blooms, cut branches with bloom buds anytime when the temperatures are above freezing. Choose branches that are at least 12” long and less than ½” in diameter with a large number of round and fat bloom buds. Place the branches in a bucket of warm water and now we wait. Forsythia are among the easiest bushes to force and will bloom 1-3 weeks after being brought indoors while Magnolias or crabapples take the longest at 4-5 weeks. Change the water every couple of days and prune the end of the branches slightly to encourage water uptake. Once the buds have started to break bring the vase into a main room and enjoy the blooms. If a branch hasn’t started to bloom in approximately 5 weeks it’s best to discard it. Usually that is a sign that you tried forcing branches too early. Late winter is the easiest time to force branches since it’s almost the natural bloom time for that particular species. Once the blooms are done you can discard the branch you cut. It is important to note that pruning branches from shrubs to force them to bloom indoors will reduce the number of blooms that particular shrub will have that spring but it won’t hurt the plant itself.



Reminders-

- Once temperatures are consistently over 50 degrees or when plants start growing clean up the perennial bed by cutting back foliage and removing the winter mulch layer. Divide any perennials and plant back in the garden.
- Sharpen and repair your garden tools. Now is the time to have your lawn mower and other equipment serviced before the gardening season begins.
- Spray peach trees for Peach Leaf Curl and plum trees for control of Black Knot.
- Apply Dormant Oil on fruit trees to control scale and mites.
- Check your houseplants for unwanted visitors.
- Work soil for spring planting if it's not too wet.
- Spot treat broadleaf weeds in the yard. It's still too early to apply crabgrass preventer. Wait till the redbud trees are blooming.

Upcoming Events

- *March 6th at 7 pm- Planning and Problem Solving in the Garden*
Gardening has become an extremely popular activity in the United States. Many of the biggest issues that gardeners have start with not planning the garden out and getting it started correctly at the beginning of the year. Join us to learn the basics of planning the garden from where to plant to when, why rotating plants is important and to cover some basic problem solving for the most common issues that gardeners face. This event will be at 7 pm at the Augusta United Methodist Church at 2420 Ohio Street, Augusta, KS.
- *March 14th at 6 pm- So you want to grow vegetables in containers?*
Are you interested in growing your own vegetables but live in an apartment, have a shady backyard or have a physical limitation that prevents you from gardening in the ground? Container vegetable gardening is a great way to still grow your own vegetables on your window sill, patio, porch or even your front step. Join us at the Bradford Memorial Library to learn how to grow your own tomatoes, corn, herbs and any vegetable in a container.
- *April 5th at Noon- Growing to New Heights with Vertical Gardening*
Make the most of your garden by growing up, instead of out. Create vertical gardens to get your garden off of the ground, provide more space for plants, and expand your gardening area. Join Amanda Groleau, Frontier District Horticulture Extension Agent, as she shares the benefits of vertical gardening. Learn which fruits, vegetables, and flowers will grow best in a vertical garden and how to get started. For more information on the Garden Hour series [click here](#). Register here: <https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/consumer-horticulture/garden-hour/>
- *April 22nd from 9-5 and April 23rd from noon to 5- Grow and Bloom in Butler Lawn and Garden show*
The Butler County Master Gardeners in an effort to promote horticultural activities and to provide educational opportunities are hosting our first Lawn and Garden Show in Butler County. The show will be held at the Butler County Community/4-H Building located at 206 N Griffith St, El Dorado, KS. This event will feature businesses from around the area in our vendor show along with expert speakers both from the area and across the state. Check out our website for more information: <https://www.butler.k-state.edu/horticulture/show/Butlerlawnandgardenshow.html>