

## GROWING ORGANIC POTATOES



Growing your own organic potatoes is fun and easy! And once you've harvested your crop, you will have your own "seed" potatoes to plant for the next crop, and the next, and the next... Fresh baby potatoes are a garden delicacy. We have a friend who grows all varieties of potatoes year-round in her five 20-gallon Smart Pots.

**BASICS:** Potatoes are part of the nightshade family, which makes them close cousins of tomatoes, eggplant and peppers. You'll see the resemblance when you see them grow and observe their pretty flowers.

The "tuber", the part we eat, is not a root even though it grows underground – a potato plant has ordinary roots like other plants. The tubers grow on short runners called "stolons", which develop from nodules on the underground part of the stem; the longer the stem (which sprouts out of the "eye"), the more tubers there are to harvest, which is why a deep pot is crucial.

**POTATO CREDENTIALS:** We sell only "Certified Seed" potatoes, which are specially grown disease-resistant miniatures grown specifically for reproduction. Field grown potatoes are susceptible to many diseases, so using seed potatoes in organic soil is a safe way to go. Our seed is also "Certified Organic".

**PREPPING THE SPUDS:** We cut the seed potatoes into 2-3" chunks (any potato smaller than 2" can be planted whole), and let them callus over, which takes a couple of days. You can spray them with an organic Liquid Kelp to encourage sprouting. Spuds which are already sprouting out 1" or so will grow up much more quickly than those which haven't yet sprouted.

**PREPPING THE SMART POT & SOIL:** First, "cuff" down the **20-gallon Smart Pot** 3 times, creating a shallow container. This allows direct sunlight to hit the soil.

Potatoes like a well-draining soil with a pH of 5-7. We fill our Smart Pots with Black Gold Organic Waterhold Potting Mix, which contains 50% coco peat & peat moss, making it fluffy and moisture-retaining. We add in 3-4 cups of Organic Worm Castings, some Organic Compost, and a handful of granular veggie fertilizer, mix this all together and water well.

**PLANTING & “HILLING” THE SPUDS:** Then we plant 4 sprouted spuds 2-3” deep into this soil mix, placing them “eyes up”.

The potato vines will grow up quickly in warm weather (within 2 weeks), and more slowly the colder it is. Using the “hilling” method, once the stems are about 8” high, un-cuff your Smart Pot one cuff, and carefully fill it with the Black Gold Waterhold Potting Soil until only about 1” of the vines remain showing. After another 8” of growth, repeat this, un-cuffing and covering the stems, leaving only 1”. Do this until the Smart Pot is completely un-cuffed and filled. You can do a final “hilling” by firmly mounding the soil and/or compost right around each plant, leaving a lower perimeter for watering.

**CARE:**

- Potatoes prefer full sun.
- Water regularly; uneven moisture will result in mealy potatoes.
- Apply organic granular vegetable fertilizer at the time of the first hilling, and water well.
- Use Great Big Plants or another liquid compost fertilizer or worm tea at the third hilling stage.
- **BE SURE** that no potatoes push their way up into the sunlight! This can cause them to turn green – DO NOT eat green potatoes, as they contain alkaloid solanine, which is TOXIC.

**HARVESTING:** The first tubers will be ready to harvest after 2-3 months (or longer if winter planted); many varieties produce flowers, which is a sign that the potatoes are developing. Please note, though, that some varieties do NOT make flowers. When the vines have died back all the way, your production is probably finished. You can stick you hand into the soil earlier than that, though, and feel around for baby potatoes; if you find some whose size feels right, go ahead and pull. You can use this method repeatedly, or simply dump the entire contents of the Smart Pot out and harvest all the potatoes at once when the plants die back. Make extra sure you search out all potatoes! If left behind, the spuds will eventually sprout and appear right in the middle of your subsequent crop!

That’s it! Be sure to save some of your new potatoes to act as “seed” for your next crop. Enjoy!!

**FINAL NOTE:** **It has been my experience, and that of gardening friends I trust, that potatoes have a time-table all their own. Patience is the key!** Don’t give up on them even if they appear to be duds....if you’re concerned that they’re not going to grow, carefully dig up the seed potatoes and see if it has sprouted vines or is producing roots – if so, just cover them up and wait. Good things come to those who wait!