

GROWING POTATOES

CHITTING

The reason for chitting potatoes is that you start the growing process off before planting your seed potatoes, so once you do plant them out in the soil, you've given them a head start. As Aberdeenshire has a short growing season, this helps to produce a better crop and an earlier harvest.

Potatoes will start chitting when exposed to light and heat, so place them somewhere warm and light. A temperature of around 8C-10C should do the trick, but most importantly, it must be done in a frost-free space. A porch, conservatory or a garage, getting a bit of heat from your house is ideal, or you could use your greenhouse if you've got one. –

Place the seed potatoes in a single layer with the blunt end of the potato (with most eyes) facing up. An old egg box is ideal. There has to be plenty of light, otherwise you will grow long white straggly chits or sprouts – you want them to grow dark coloured.



PLANTING



This is what you want the sprouts to look like before planting!

Once your seed potato has got 2-3 good sized 'chits' or sprouts on them, which are about 1.5-2.5 cm long, it's time to plant!. Handle them gently, trying not to knock off the good chits/sprouts. If any tubers have more than 3 chits/sprouts on them, rub the excess off. This is to ensure a better harvest - there will be fewer underground shoots to share the goodness sent underground by the plant, so you might get less tubers, but the ones you get will be bigger.

Potatoes can be grown in strong, thick plastic bags or in pots.

Growing potatoes in bags: An empty 20 litre compost bag can easily double up as a potato growing bag. Fold the bag down to about 1/3 of its height, refill the bottom of it with loose compost. Stab a few holes in the bottom of the bag with a garden dibber or a Stanley knife to allow excess water to drain out.

Growing potatoes in pots: You need to make sure that the pots you're using have got holes in the bottom, so any excess liquid can drain out easily. Ideally, they should be 30 litre capacity. Or you could use a gorilla tub or an old dustbin (ie a pre wheelie one)! Place in your container, 15-20 cm (6-8 inches) of potting compost (or even earth) perhaps mixed with a small quantity of chicken manure pellets

Place YOUR chitted seed potatoes on top of the compost, depending on the surface area of your containers. As a rule of thumb use 1 tuber for a 25 cm (10 inch)) wide container, and 3 tubers in a 40 cm (18 inch)) container.

Now, cover the tubers with another 10-15 cm (4-6 inches) of your compost mix on top of the tubers.



GROWING YOUR CROP

After a couple of weeks you should see potato plants starting to sprout through, if it is warm enough. As this happens, keep covering them in more compost, until the level of compost reaches 2 inches below the top of your container.



This will protect your tubers from light, and the potato plants from frost. Both essential for the success of your crop.

During this period of time you need to keep the soil well-watered. You should check the surface of the earth every day in the evening to make sure that it hasn't dried up. If you don't keep the earth damp, your crop will be the size of marbles! You can apply a liquid plant food to the water as you go along, but only if you haven't already added plant food to the compost. Over-feeding can have fatal consequences for your crop.

HARVESTING



You can start harvesting when the potato plant stop flowering. Take the top off the plant, remove the compost, and take out the potatoes.

