

The Potato Lovers Garden

Are you a 'meat and potatoes' kind of eater? Are you one of the millions of Americans who have made the potato our most popular vegetable? You can satisfy your taste for that 'new' potato flavor by growing some in your own garden this winter.

Potatoes can be planted in North Florida now through early March. This is one of our cool season crops that do well when days are warm and nights are cool. Freeze protection is still necessary, however, to protect the above ground plant during any late deviant temperatures.

The relatively short season varieties that mature in 85-100 days perform well in our area. Some of the most popular varieties for home gardens are Pontiac, Yukon Gold, Gold Rush, and Red LaSoda. But don't hesitate to try some of the unusual and exciting red, blue or fingerling types that you can't find in the grocery store. Just make sure they are early maturing varieties.

The 'seed' pieces that are planted are actually cut up potato tubers. The tubers are cut so that each piece is about the size of an egg and has at least one 'eye' which will sprout. Purchase certified disease-free seed potatoes from garden supply stores or mail order dealers.

Plant potatoes four inches deep in loose, well drained soil that is slightly acidic. When the sprouts peek through, mound several more inches of soil on top to form the 'hill'. This keeps the new potatoes from pushing up above the soil surface and turning green.

You may be wondering how many pounds of certified seed potatoes to purchase. Fifteen pounds will plant a 100 foot row, with plants spaced 12 inches apart. That row will produce at least 150 pounds. If you go to the website <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/hs183> and follow the directions for irrigation and fertilization, you might even harvest 300 pounds.

Two Vegetable Gardening Workshops will be held in February by Master Gardeners. Saturday, February 19th at 2:00 pm, Columbia County Public Library in downtown Lake City. Also, Thursday, February 17th at 5:45 pm, at the new library branch in Fort White. Free, fun and informative. *(Published 1-30-11)*

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