



Growing Potatoes

- 1) Choosing your location: grow potatoes in an area that gets partial to full sun. They don't need rich soil, but they prefer a lower ph (between 5.0 and 6.0). They also need soil with some organic matter for texture and water retention. They also need potash which helps the tubers develop. In many areas, this is naturally occurring, but in Flagstaff, you will most likely need to add a bit.
- 2) When to plant: potatoes should be planted in Flagstaff in late spring, after the ground has thawed. They can rot if the soil temperature is too low or the ground is too wet; however, the plants themselves aren't afraid of frost. Early to mid-April is usually a great time because it's cool enough that they get established before the aphids arrive but they get a fair bit of growth in before the heat of summer hits.
- 3) What to plant: you plant the actual potatoes and it's VERY important that you use certified seed. Cut the potatoes into pieces about 2" – 3" in size and let them sit out in the open air for 48 hours before planting. Cutting them promotes a more healthy plant rather than competing sprouts and setting them out helps prevent rot because they form a scab over the cut. Planting a couple of different types of potatoes with different growing seasons enables you to harvest over a longer period of time.
- 4) Pests and disease: the easiest way to prevent disease and some types of pests is to rotate your crops. Make sure you do not plant potatoes in the same location as tomatoes or eggplant because they are all related and share many of the same diseases. Some common diseases are blight and scab. Blight impacts the plants and makes them turn black and die – it is difficult to prevent, but burn any affected plant material to prevent spread. Scab impacts the potatoes and makes rough marks on the skins – it can be prevented by lowering the soil ph. Potato beetles and aphids both tend to hit early in the growing season and eat the foliage of the plant; ensuring plants are well-established before insects really "wake up" is a great way to ensure success. You can also use and organic pesticide if it is needed.
- 5) Harvesting: potatoes usually need 8-16 weeks to mature. They grow plants on top of the ground which will often flower. After flowering, the plants usually die back. Once this happens, your potatoes are ready to dig. Prior to die back, you can dig around carefully for tiny potatoes near the top of the soil and eat them in late summer, but these potatoes will not keep well. In order to store a potato, it needs to reach full maturity and the plant needs to be completely dead on top.