

# Growing potatoes at home

**Q**uestion: My neighbor gave me some home-grown potatoes. I never knew a potato could be so delicious! Now I am planning to grow them next year. What are the steps I need to take?



**Scott McKain**  
Ask a Master Gardener

**A**nswer: Your timing is good as next year's garden is planned now in August.

Potatoes are a member of the Solanaceae family that includes tomatoes, peppers and eggplants. They can harbor the same soil diseases. Therefore rotating this group to ground that has not had them for three years is a good practice. So the first step is to determine the location to prepare.

Potatoes are native to the Andes Mountains of South America, and varieties have been developed by the natives for 10,000 years. Their habitat is cool temperatures with dry, sandy soil. The valley bottoms of Douglas County are good potato ground.

Breaking new ground from grass could be an option. Cover the grass with a tarp or black plastic to block sunlight. The vegetation will die underneath and add organic matter to the future garden. In the first week of October, remove the tarp and plant a winter cover crop of fava beans or crimson clover. It will be chopped in with a sharp hoe before planting time in spring.

Plant certified, disease-free seed potatoes. Potatoes from the supermarket are treated with a hormone that prevents sprouting and thus hindering growth. Look at the seed catalogs from our region to see what varieties will do well here. Bakers, boilers and salad types are all offered. They become available in mid-March. The Douglas County Farmers Co-Op has seed potatoes in bulk at that time.

The bed should be 4 feet wide and as long as needed. Figure 2 pounds production per running

foot. Dig a trench down the center about 8 inches deep. Put in an inch of compost and a sprinkling of complete organic fertilizer. Place a seed potato every 12-18 inches. Cover with 2 inches of soil. As the shoots grow, pull in more soil containing compost and fertilizer, keeping 6 inches of plant exposed. Eventually the soil will be hilled up around the plants. These elongated shoots are where the potatoes will form.

There are two times to plant. Early planting is in March. This should be an early variety and will be harvested during the summer. The soil will be cold and wet so plant whole seed, not pieces, to prevent rotting. Two weeks after blooming there will be "new" potatoes. They are golf ball size, served with skin on, melted butter and fresh parsley. They are not available in any store.

Storage potatoes are planted in early June. Set aside these seed potatoes purchased in March in a dry, outside location with bright light (not direct sun). By June the eyes will swell. Remove all but three shoots to get the biggest spuds. Plant as before. Harvest in cool September weather.

Commercial potatoes were grown dry until irrigation became available. Dry-grown potatoes are less susceptible to disease, have better flavor and up to 11% protein. This is the perfect crop for gardeners with limited water.

*Do you have a gardening question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners via email at [douglasmg@oregonstate.edu](mailto:douglasmg@oregonstate.edu), by phone at 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg.*



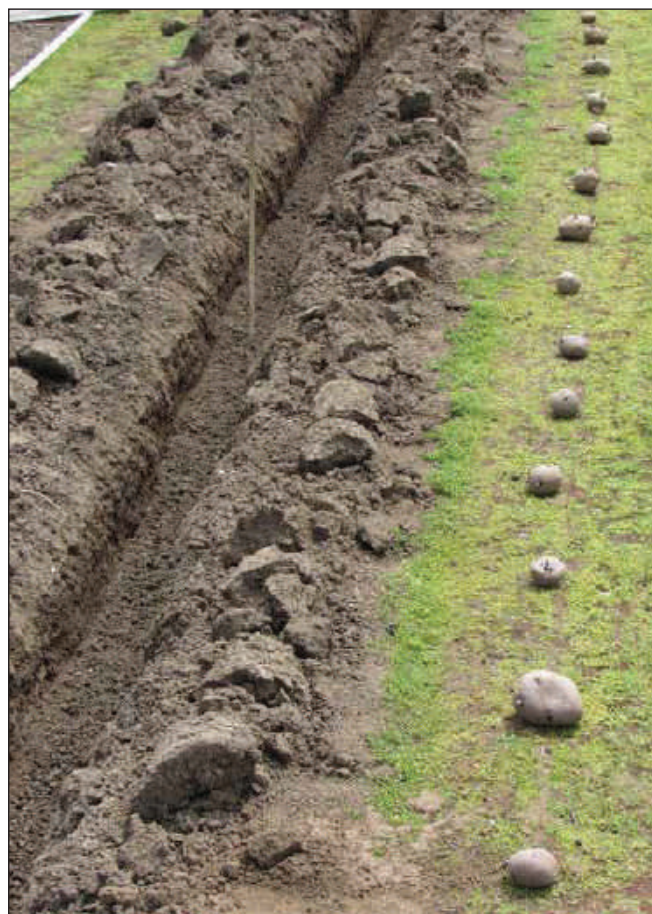
COURTESY OF BONNIE COURTER

Harvesting potatoes in late August.



COURTESY OF SCOTT MCKAIN

Potato plants in bloom in July.



COURTESY OF SCOTT MCKAIN

Planting seed potatoes in May.