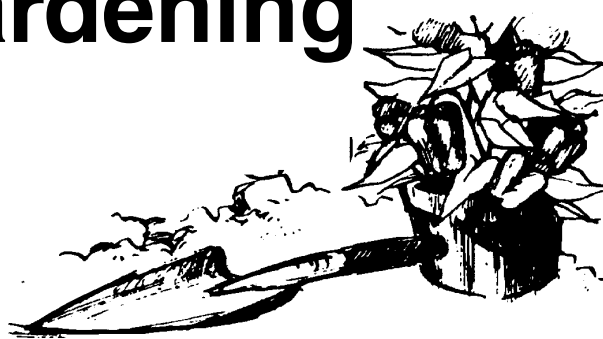


Vegetable Gardening Hints



Grow Irish Potatoes in the Home Garden

Irish potatoes are a cool-season vegetable grown in the late winter and spring in Louisiana and, to some extent, in late summer and fall. When grown under favorable conditions, they return a high yield for the space occupied.

Potatoes produce best on well-drained soils that are well supplied with organic matter. They respond to generous use of commercial fertilizer, especially on soils of medium to low fertility. Potatoes will tolerate acid soils, that is, soil pH below 5.5; in fact, it is recommended that potatoes be grown on soils with a low soil pH to control scab, a disease that affects the tubers. Generally, it is not recommended that acid soils be limed unless the pH is extremely low.

In preparing the soil, build a good high bed. Space rows at least 36 inches apart. On medium to low fertility soils, apply 6 to 8 pounds of 13-13-13 or 5-6 pounds of 8-24-24 or similar complete fertilizer per 100 feet of row before planting. This fertilizer may either be applied broadcast over the bed and worked in or placed in one or two bands well below the seed pieces. Apply additional fertilizer when the plants are 6 to 8 inches tall. Apply ammonium nitrate at the rate of 1 pound or 1 pint per 100 feet of row. In sandy hill soils, sidedress with 3 to 4 pounds of a complete fertilizer such as 13-13-13 or 8-24-24 per 100 feet.

Varieties

Three varieties are highly recommended for Louisiana. All were developed by the LSU AgCenter, and all are adapted to our growing conditions. There are two red-skin varieties, Red LaSoda and La Rouge, and one white-skin variety, LaChipper. Sebago, Norchip and Atlantic, white-skin varieties, and Norland, a red-skin variety, also may be planted. The variety planted is determined primarily by the seed available locally.

Irish potatoes should be planted in mid-January through February in Louisiana. The earliest plantings are made, of course, in south Louisiana. Potato plants are sensitive to frost and may be killed by a severe frost but will generally renew growth quickly from uninjured portions of the stem. Only certified seed potatoes should be used to plant in the spring, because they are relatively free from disease and generally out-yield noncertified seed. Potatoes bought at the grocery store should not be used for seed since they have been treated with chemicals to prevent sprouting. Also they may not be as disease free.

Seed potatoes should be cut a few days before planting to allow the cut surfaces to heal over, especially if planting is done early while the soil is cold. This will help to reduce soft rot, a disease that causes



the seed potatoes, and sometimes plants, to rot. Seed potatoes may be cut and planted the same day, especially late in the season when the soil temperature has warmed. When cutting seed potatoes, cut into blocky pieces about 1 1/2 to 2 ounces each or about the size of an egg. Be sure each seed piece has at least one eye or bud, since this is where the plant originates.

After the rows have been made and fertilizer applied, open up a furrow 4 to 5 inches deep in the row, and drop the cut seed pieces in the furrow about 12 inches apart. Place the cut surface of the potato down. Cover the seed piece, and firm the soil. About 7 to 9 pounds of seed potatoes are required to plant 100 feet of row when 1 1/2 - to 2-ounce pieces are planted 12 inches apart.

Cultivation should be shallow and frequent enough to control weeds. Try to avoid deep cultivation since

potato roots may be cut and growth slowed. Generally, potatoes begin to form about the time the flowers bloom, but the plants don't have to flower to produce the tuber. Be careful at this time not to cultivate too deeply.

Soil should be pulled from the row middles to the plants to cover shallow potatoes or potatoes that are exposed. Since the tubers are modified stem tissue, they will turn green when exposed to light and an alkaloid material forms. So, keep the potatoes covered with soil.

Insect and Disease Problems

Aphids, Colorado potato beetles, wireworms and grub worms are the main insect pests in Louisiana. They can be controlled with the proper pesticides. Read all labels carefully before applying pesticides.

Insect	Chemical	Rate	Cutoff date	Application
Aphids	Malathion 57% EC	2 T/gal.	3	as needed
Colorado Potato Beetles	Carbaryl 80% WP	2 T/gal.	0	
	Bt (Bacillus thuringiensis tenebrionis) Novodor		see label	
	SpinTor 2SC (Spinosad)	1-2 tsp./gal.	7 days	when beetles appear
Leafhoppers	10% D			
Grubs	Sevin 50W	3 lbs./5000 sq. ft. in enough water to drench	0	
Wireworms	Disyston 2% G	7-10 lbs./1000 ft. of row	2 months	7-21 days before planting



Disease	Chemical	Rate	Cutoff date	Remarks
Early Blight	chlorothalonil	2 t/gal.	0	First appearance 7-10 day intervals. Use certified seed.
Late Blight	Maneb + Zn 80% WP	0		

Control of grubs and wireworms is important when new ground is used for first time.

Two fungus diseases, early and late blight, and one bacterial disease, soft rot, are the primary disease problems. A regular spray program with a satisfactory fungicide will help to control early and late blight but will not control soft rot.

The only practical way to control soft rot is to be sure to let the cut seed pieces heal over before planting.

Harvesting and Storing

Irish potatoes require 90 to 120 days from planting until they are ready to dig. As the plants approach maturity, they begin to turn yellow and die. Allow the vines to die and then dig the potatoes. This allows the skin of the tubers to “set” and reduces skinning and bruising and thus rotting in storage. To check for maturity, dig a few hills and rub your thumb across the potato. If its skin slips off easily, the potato is not mature, so wait several days before digging, if possible. When digging potatoes, don’t leave them in the sun; gather them and place in the shade or a dark place. Potatoes deteriorate quickly in hot weather.

Most homes don’t have an ideal place to store potatoes. To prolong their storage life, place them in as

cool a place as possible (above 40 degrees F) with as high a humidity as possible. Also, the room should be dark to prevent greening of the tubers. The ideal storage condition for Irish potatoes is 60 to 65 degrees F and 85% relative humidity for 10 days, then drop the temperature to 40-45 degrees F and high humidity.

Fall potatoes can be grown in our state although they don’t usually produce as well as the spring crop. The potatoes from the spring crop are used for planting. These 1 1/2 to 2-inch potatoes are planted whole from about August 10 to the first of September. Potatoes will be ready to dig about the first of December. Light frost will not harm the tubers even though it might kill the plants. If frost occurs, remove the dead vines. The potatoes may then be dug or allowed to remain in the soil for several days.

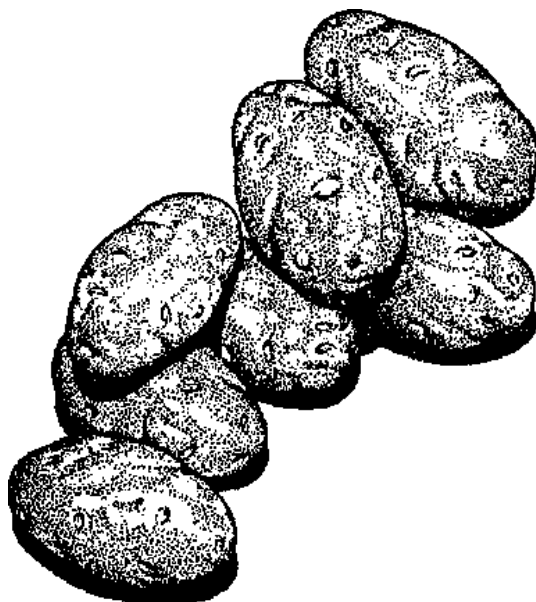
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