

# Let's Grow Some Potatoes!

Marcie Mathews, Horticulture Agent, LSU AgCenter Northeast Region

Valentine's Day is a day for love, balloons, flowers, chocolate & cute stuffed animals. But for the eager gardener, it's also a great day to prune roses, start seeds indoors and plant potatoes! Mid-February in North Louisiana is the recommended time for home gardeners to plant potatoes, so start preparing now.

Irish potatoes are delicious, nutritious, and surprisingly easy to grow in your own backyard. Here are some step-by-step instructions for growing your own potatoes at home:

## What did you plant here last year?

Vegetable crops need to be rotated to avoid soil borne diseases from accumulating, spreading, and infecting your crops. To prevent this, plant crops of a totally different plant family from year to year. For example, tomatoes, potatoes, eggplants, and peppers all belong to the Solanaceae plant family. So if you planted any of these in your garden last year, you would want to follow up with vegetables of a different family, like beans or peas (Fabaceae), squash or cucumbers (Cucurbitaceae), or okra (Malvaceae). If you are planting in raised beds or containers, instead of crop rotation, you could replace with fresh soil and compost. Be sure to sanitize and clean your reused plant containers.

## Purchase your seed potatoes

You can order seed potatoes from several online retailers or purchase directly from your local feed & seed store or garden center. These sources are generally disease free and best for starting your potato crop. So why can't we just go to the grocery store and buy a bag of potatoes? Well, you can! Grocery store potatoes have been treated to prolong sprouting, so you may have a delay in getting your crop going. Seed potatoes are always the best option for a successful harvest. But, if you have a bag of sprouted potatoes, don't throw them away! Plant them in the garden. Here's how.

## Cut your seed potatoes

We all know potatoes have eyes, not for seeing but for growing! Potatoes are not roots but modified stems called tubers. The 'eyes' are branches budding from the stem. Cut the potatoes into 1-2" pieces with 1-2 eyes per piece. Allow the cut pieces to heal for a few days before planting.

## Time to plant

Dig a furrow 4-5" deep and plant the pieces 12" apart. Bury the pieces deep by mounding soil back into the furrow. You can also incorporate a 13-13-13 fertilizer into the soil at this point or broadcast it over the bed after planting. Water it in thoroughly.

## Watch them grow!

Potatoes take approximately 2-3 weeks to begin sprouting, and 90-110 days to mature. When plants are 6-8" tall, you can fertilize again with calcium nitrate. Always be sure to follow the label instructions for proper application dosage. Keep the base of plants mounded with soil or ground cover to keep potatoes from being exposed to sunlight. When the plants begin to bloom, this is usually when it is also setting tubers. Leaves will begin to yellow, and plants will begin to die when potatoes are ready to harvest.

## Harvest time

At the 90-day mark, dig up a few potatoes to see if they are mature. If not, you can give a little more time. When fully mature, loosen the soil with a spade or shovel, being careful not to cut any of the

potatoes. Remove any attached soil but do not wash them. Store in a cool, dark place. Remember, do not eat any green potatoes! This can cause sickness.

Enjoy!

Potatoes can be eaten straight from the garden. Wash and prepare your favorite way: boiled, fried, mashed or baked.

Recommended varieties for our area are:

Red potatoes-Red LaSoda or Red Gold

Yellow potatoes-Yukon Gold or Nicola (Nicola is a low glycemic option)

White/Russet potatoes-Kennebec or Goldrush

Best of luck! For a more detailed guide, please refer to the [Irish Potatoes Vegetable Gardening Tips](#) on the [LSU AgCenter website](#) or contact Marcie Mathews at 318-766-3769.

Marcie Mathews  
Horticulture Agent, LSU AgCenter  
Tensas, Catahoula, Concordia, Franklin, Madison, East Carroll Parishes  
Tensas Extension Office  
4589 Hwy 605  
St. Joseph, La 71366  
318-766-3769



*Figure 1. Potato plant in bloom*



*Figure 2. Yukon Gold potatoes*