

Planting potatoes (no dig) by Richard Collins

Ask 10 gardeners how to plant potatoes you'll probably get 10 different answers. Many thanks to Angelo and Juan who introduced me to this method several years ago. Since when my crops have less pests, are very easy to lift, and a 5m bed takes less than an hour to set up, and needs very little after-care

1. Preferably the seed-potatoes have been chitted. Wait until the chits are 2-3 cm long. This promotes faster growth when planted.
2. Choose a bed where potatoes have not been grown for at least 3 years. This reduces the number of potato pests in the soil. If this is not possible then the preparation is even more important. When? : 1st earlies – late march, 2nd earlies/main crop- early->late April. Delay if heavy frosts forecast.
3. Sprinkle a layer of potato feed and slug pellets down the centre of the bed. If the bed is not potato free for 3 years you can cut some old potatoes in half and put about half a dozen pieces down the centre of the bed. This will hopefully attract pests like eelworm and wireworm away from your crop. Although potatoes prefer slightly acidic soil a small sprinkling of lime can also discourage pests.
4. Rake up the edge of the bed towards the middle. Do this on both sides to produce a pyramid mound down the bed about 50cm high.
5. Using a fence post (8cm diameter) make holes along the mound 30cm(1st earlies)->40cm(2nd/main) apart, 15->20cm deep about a third up from the base. Alternate the holes either side of the mound. Each mound can allow 21-29 holes (5m bed)
6. Into each hole sprinkle a small handful of slug pellets followed by a chitted potato. Take care not to break any of the chits. Try to leave the longest chits facing outwards. Rake up soil from the edge to fill the holes.
7. Cover the mound with horse manure or straw. This provides frost protection and warmth. If using bought straw, sieve it first to remove grass/corn seeds. Also, after lifting this provides nutrients for next year.
8. Cover **loosely** with insect netting(1-2mm) or fleece. This protects early shoots and allows them to grow.
9. When frosts have gone remove netting/fleece. The potato plants can be clamped up using soil/compost although I have not found this necessary unless new potatoes are appearing above the manure/straw. Good Luck, hope it works as well for you as me.



In very dry weather, water the side channels. This enables water to get to the roots easily and avoids the leaves getting wet. A factor in reducing blight.

Lift potatoes after flowering and when plants start to die off. Individual plants can be easily lifted leaving others.

Don't worry about brown spots on the leaves, this is a sign of early blight which does not affect the tubers. It does weaken the growth so affected leaves can be picked off. You can get early blight fungicides to spray your plants.

****If the leaves/stems start to go black, this could be a sign of late blight. If left this will destroy all your potatoes.****

****Cut ALL the foliage down to ground level immediately. Include non-affected plants, and cover with weed retardant or similar. Bag up the cut leaves/stems and remove from the site. DO NOT COMPOST as blight spores can last several years. Late blight can also affect and destroy Tomatoes and Aubergines****

****Report the presence of late blight to your neighbouring allotment holders and a committee member.****

The topped potatoes can be left underground for several weeks and lifted when needed.



Early blight



Late blight