

## Potatoes Are Easy To Grow In Containers

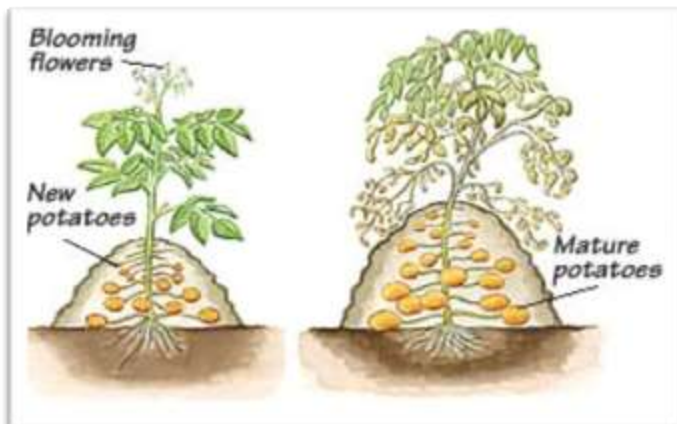
by Jolene Adams, Alameda County Master Gardener

One of the handiest garden tips I learned from Mom was to grow potatoes in a large pot (or two or three) on my back porch. The idea was to have early spring potatoes for the Easter Holiday.

Potatoes don't ask for much care – and they can be easily grown by anyone with a large pot, some potting soil, lots of shredded newspaper or straw for mulch, and some patience. They like to grow in cool weather, so late Fall, all Winter and early Spring is the best time to plant. Most of the popular varieties take 70 - 90 days to form large tubers. You can check if the tubers are large enough to dig up by gently pulling soil away from the stems until you can see and feel the tubers in the ground.



1. Select seed potatoes from your local nursery. There are many kinds to choose from. You can either cut them into chunks or use them whole. Growing potatoes from a leftover spud from the grocery store usually gives bad results. You can cut the potatoes into chunks with a few eyes on each chunk.
2. Using an egg carton as a 'holder', place each potato or chunk into a cup in the holder with the eyes at the end or along the side pointing up (some potatoes will have eyes all over them).
3. Place in a cool, lighted area – not too cold, not too hot.
4. In a couple weeks shoots will start forming. Remove all but two on each potato.
5. Have a large pot handy for each seed potato. Put shredded newspaper in the bottom of the pot and press it down into a layer about 2" thick. Add 2" of moistened potting soil on top of the paper. Place the pot in a sunny location. If the pot is a dark color, shield it from the sun so the roots don't get too hot.



6. Place the sprouting potato or the chunk with the sprouts on the soil (sprouts pointing up) and cover with another 2" of potting soil. Moisten again.

7. Cover the surface of the soil with 2" of shredded paper or with straw mulch. This allows the sprouts to emerge from the soil and grow up towards the light. Water lightly once a week.

8. When you see the sprouts emerge from the newspaper get ready to 'hill' your potatoes. You will want to add more soil to cover the stems as they grow, leaving just the tops showing. You can fill up that pot!
9. As the plants mature the underground tubers will form and begin to swell. Make sure they stay covered with soil and newspaper mulch.
10. Once the plants have formed flowers you can harvest the first new potatoes by reaching into the soil and gently popping a few off the stolons they are attached to.
11. If you stop watering at this point the plant will spend its energy in developing larger potatoes as it slowly dies back. You can harvest the crop by turning the pot over and dumping them out.

Keep newly harvested potatoes in a dry, cool, dark place until you are ready to wash them and cook them.

For more information about cultivating potatoes go to:

<http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/GARDEN/VEGES/potato.html>