

Growing Potatoes in Bags

By Wendy Kubow

As vegetable gardeners see their summer gardens winding down, there is no need to wait until spring to have something growing. There are a few vegetables that can be planted which will still allow the summer gardener to take winter break. One of these items is the potato. This is because you can plant them in such a way that they will have a dormant period. With proper preparations, seed potatoes or potato pieces can be planted in bags and wintered over, ready to harvest in late winter or early spring. It is easy and economical. Any bags can be used, such as potting soil bags or even cardboard boxes. But before you take to your easy chair, you will have to take a little action.



Prepare the bags and plant potatoes as follows:

1. Layer the bottom with leaf waste, about 5 inches.
2. Place potatoes or potato eyes or pieces an equal distance apart (about 5 or 6 per bag)
3. Add another layer of leaves, sawdust, pine needles or other organic mulching material.
4. Add a final layer of soil. About 10 inches all totaled is fine.

It is a good idea to keep the bags light, so that they will be easy to lift later. Place the bags in full sun. This can be in the garden area or on a patio. Keep the soil moist, but not soggy. As the rains begin to come, they will do the watering for you, and the organic materials will begin to break down, creating a little heat for the growing potatoes. Now you can let nature do most of the rest of the work.

The heat that is generated from the slowly decomposing organic materials will continue for several weeks or months, depending upon the amount of mulch used. This encourages potatoes to begin their growth cycle so that the roots begin to grow. The second layer of mulch and the dirt on top prevents the heat from escaping rapidly, while the soil on top is too cold for the plants to emerge from the soil. Small potatoes start to form early, and they will grow all winter.

Every now and then you will want to gently feel around in the dirt to test for potato size and for the moisture content of the soil. If the rains do not keep the soil moist enough, you may need to help a little.

Once the potatoes are of a satisfactory size, you can harvest them. I have found though, that you can also leave them until you are ready to collect them. They are very forgiving, which allows you to stay relaxed and enjoy that easy chair for just a little longer.

To harvest, gently dump the entire contents of the bag into a wheelbarrow and pull out all the potatoes, approximately 7-13 pounds per bag. You can add the remaining composted soil to your garden beds. Happy gardening!

Sources:

<https://homesteadlifestyle.com/how-to-grow-potatoes-in-winter/>

<https://www.gardeners.com/how-to/potato-grow-bag-instructions/7099.html>

<https://www.backwoodshome.com/plant-your-irish-potatoes-this-fall-or-winter/>

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http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.edu/Master_Gardeners/ You can also find us on Facebook.