

News Column for use week of March 11, 2024
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Time to Plant Potatoes

If you listen to the ole wise tale about planting your potatoes on St. Patrick's Day, you better start planning now! St. Patrick's Day is right around the corner, but any time from mid-to-late March is fine for planting potatoes.

Before you purchase your potatoes, make sure you buy seed potatoes, not the ones bought for cooking. Seed potatoes are certified disease free and have plenty of starch to sprout quickly as the soil temperature gets warm enough. Most seed potatoes can be cut into four pieces; though large potatoes may yield more. Each seed piece should be between 1.5 and 2 ounces to insure there is enough energy for germination. Each pound of potatoes should yield 8 to 10 seed pieces.

Cutting the seed potatoes 2 to 3 days before planting so the freshly cut surfaces have a chance to suberize, or toughen, and form a protective coating. Storing seed in a warm location will speed up the process. Plant each seed piece about 1 to 2 inches deep and 8 to 12 inches apart in rows. Though it is important to plant potatoes in March, emergence is slow. It is often mid to late April before new plants poke their way through the soil.

As the potatoes grow, pull soil up to the base of the plants. New potatoes are borne above the planted seed piece, and you don't want sunlight hitting the new potatoes. Potatoes exposed to sunlight will turn green and produce a poisonous substance called solanine. Keeping the potatoes covered with soil will prevent this from happening. I hope these tips help your potato crop be successful. If you have any questions feel free to stop by or contact me in the Washington office, 785-325-2121 or khatesohl@ksu.edu.

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