



## **Growing Potatoes in Central Indiana**

Growing potatoes can be a lot of fun, especially if you are involving children and/or grandkids. The fun part comes especially at harvest when the kids dig through the soil with gleeful smiles and grubby hands, exclaiming, "Look at the size of this one!" Of course, potatoes do require a certain amount of work and attention. Several varieties are available at Garden Gate, all of which are suited to our area. All varieties mature within 90 days; thus, potato planting can begin in early spring and continue till early July. However, remember that it is difficult to find seed potatoes late in the season. So, if you want to plant late potatoes, it is best to buy the seed potatoes early and save them yourself. Ten pounds will plant approximately a 100-foot row.

When buying potato tubers for planting (seed potatoes), it is easier if you select tubers that are starting to sprout. Some people like to pick small consistent size tubers, planting them whole or halving them. If tubers have not started to sprout, you can leave them in the bags in a warm place for several days and they will quickly sprout. The reason most people want to see sprouts is to make it easier to cut the tubers for planting. However, you don't have to wait till they are sprouted for planting. Tubers should be cut to give 2-3 eyes per piece. Plant soon after cutting in loose soil that is high in organic matter. Potatoes need full sun (a minimum of 6 hours). Plant the pieces in shallow trenches 3-4 inches deep and cover with 1-2 inches of soil. The pieces should be planted 9-12 inches apart in rows 28-36 inches apart. Fertilize with  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of 12-12-12 to 10 feet of row (a handful to 3 paces) at the time of planting, and again 4 weeks later.

Keep weeds under control with shallow and frequent cultivation. As the plants begin to grow, start mounding the soil up around the plants to form a ridge. Continue doing this until your last cultivation. The ridge may be 4-6 inches tall and 16 inches wide. This will keep potatoes from being exposed to the sun and turning green.

Watch for flea beetles, leaf hoppers, and Colorado potato beetle. Rotenone and diatomaceous earth are good organic insecticides that will deter these pests. High pH soils can promote potato scab. Blights can also be a problem, so rotate your potato crop from year to year.

After the plants bloom and start to die, you can start digging a few for new potatoes; however, you should let all the tops die down and dry for 2 weeks before digging for storage. Dig potatoes and dry for about 2 weeks in a dark location. Sunlight will cause the potatoes to turn green. Store potatoes in a moist, dark location at about 40 degrees.