

Step 4: Caring for your Crop

A little attention to your potato plants while they are growing can make all the difference to the quality and size of your yield. The key steps are:

Protection

Remember that potatoes originate from South America and are tender in our climate. If frosts threaten early crops, protect young seedlings with fleece or a cloche.

"Earthing up"

As the tubers develop, they can be pushed towards the surface, where, if they are exposed to light, the flesh becomes green and poisonous. To prevent this from happening, pull the surrounding soil up around the stems and lower leaves to create a ridge, leaving only the top 5cm of leaves exposed.

Feeding

Potatoes can benefit from the addition of fertilizers such as Growmore; or for organic growers, Blood Fish and Bone. Follow the directions on the packaging for recommended application rates.

Watering

Once the developing tubers have reached about the size of a marble (part the soil carefully to check), they need plenty of water to swell. Water well in dry periods, applying about 2 watering cans full to each plant every 10-14 days, adding to the soil, not the leaves.








Step 5: Harvest

With First and Second Early potatoes, open flowering is often a good sign that the potatoes have reached a suitable size to eat. Harvest them as required, allowing others to grow on, as they do not keep well. Main Crop potatoes are best harvested after the foliage has died back. This allows time for skins to develop, making them suitable for storage. In all cases, dig the potatoes up carefully using a fork, taking care not to damage the tubers.

Early types are best eaten soon after lifting. Main crops can be stored and should be allowed to dry in air before being put in paper or cloth sacks and kept in cool, dark, frost-free conditions for use over the winter months.

Extra Notes for Growing Potatoes in containers

All the guidance above also applies to growing potatoes in containers. Additional points to consider are:

-  Make sure the container has good drainage ie holes in the base and if possible, some crocks or stones at the bottom
-  Use a rich compost, such as a preparatory Vegetable growing compost or home-made compost
-  Part-fill the container with 4-10 cm of compost, place the seed potatoes (one seed per 20 litres capacity of the container) on top and then cover with another 10-20 cm of compost
-  As the shoots develop add more compost until the level is 4-5 cm below the top of the container and above all...
-  Keep the growing potatoes well-watered but without waterlogging – the compost needs to be moist but if too wet, it can lead to disease and rotting tubers

