Potato Seed Preparation and Planting

Excerpts taken from Michigan State University, Extension Bulletin E-2283 *“Potato Production for the Home Gardener”*

Cut potato tubers in half. The seed pieces should be firm, with at least one “eye” per section and a maximum sprout length of ¼ to ½ inch to ensure optimum germination. Seed tubers can be cut and planted on the same day, or cut four to seven days before planting to allow the cut surface to heal over and reduce the risk of seed piece decay; if they are to be planted into cold soils, allow healing to occur before planting.

Potatoes are a cool season crop and can be planted up to 2 weeks prior to the average frost free date, which is commonly believed to be May 21 in the Flint area. If you plant when temperatures are below 45 degrees F or in very dry soils, decay or delayed sprouting may result. Cold, wet soil at planting time increases the risk of seed piece decay. The soil should be cultivated 6 to 8 inches deep in the spring. Remove large clods of soil.

Plant tuber seed pieces 3 to 4 inches deep. Leaving 30 to 36 inches between rows and spacing seed pieces 9 to 12 inches apart in the row will generally produce an acceptable yield of medium-size tubers. One pound of seed potatoes (the amount contained in your kit) should plant 12 feet of row with 12 inches between seed pieces.

Potato plants should be “hilled” when the plants are 8 to 12 inches tall. Mound the soil to a height of 2 to 3 inches and approximately 12 to 15 inches from the base of the plant. Use care to prevent damage to the plant roots, which may extend 8 to 12 inches from the base of the plant. You can expect 3 to 5 pounds of potatoes per hill.

Hilling maintains suitable soil cover for tubers as they expand. Tubers that break the soil surface may have green areas that contain bitter tasting flesh, and those areas should not be eaten.

*Edited by Sam Farah and Terry McLean, April 30, 2013*

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