

Time for potato planting

With rain in the offing Autumn is the time to think about planting the "Irish Staple" or the not so humble potato. Rain reduces the maintenance required to grow this marvellous home garden crop. New varieties introduced over the past few years have given us a wider range of flavours and some.

Potatoes are always a very satisfying crop because they are wonderfully productive. For example, did you know that it's possible to harvest a crop nearly one hundred times the weight of the original sets or seed potato? Plus, the flavour of freshly dug baby potatoes steamed and topped with sour light cream and chives is really hard to beat.

If you can find a sunny spot where a trench can be dug you're ready to plant seed potatoes. These small size tubers are specially grown on supervised farms to ensure freedom from disease. They are available in your Waldecks Garden Centre today.

Dig a trench about 20 centimetres deep (8 inches), mix sheep manure and a dusting of "Plant Starter Potato E manure" in the base. Push the seed potatoes into the side of the trench about 2 centimetres above the manure mix that lies in the base. Fill in the trench so that the seed potatoes are covered with soil. As the green shoots emerge from the ground and grows into a small shrub, continually heap soil up against the stem.

Potatoes actually grow on the stem of the plant so the more of this stem you cover as the plant grows the more taters you get. A monthly dressing of Potato E manure will keep the crop moving.

Once the potato plant has flowered the small "Cocktail potatoes" are ready for harvesting. Wait till the plant begins to turn yellow and wither if you want to harvest the largest size tubers.

Use a garden fork to dig well under the bunch of tubers then lift up, rocking from side to side to shake off the soil.

NO DIG PLANTING

Another growing method that involves no digging is sometimes called the straw potato system. Any area of soil or even lawn can be covered with a thick layer of wet newspaper to kill off weeds. The next step is to lay out the seed potatoes on the paper. This is immediately covered with a 30 to 40 cm thick blanket of straw. Cover this with a layer of sheep manure and a sprinkling of blood and bone, water it well and that's all the hard yakka done.

Checking the crop is as simple as peeling back the straw layer and having a look. Harvesting is as easy as lifting off the straw and there are the spuds, all clean and ready for the pot.

VARIETIES

Well what about the varieties? Not all those listed are available at any one time.

'Delaware', also known as 'white rose', is the main variety grown in W.A. It is best suited to late winter planting. Tubers are large, oval in shape and have buff colour skin with white flesh. They store well and are best boiled, roasted or baked. Fried chips tend to absorb too much oil and appear limp.

'Nadine' has cream coloured skin and creamy white flesh. It is highly rated for salads and boiling but not for frying. This is a high yielding variety.

Foxton is an oval shaped variety that has pink skin and light yellow flesh. It is very well suited to winter planting (May to August). You can use this variety for anything from frying to salads - delicious.

Atlantic is a white skinned tuber and shaped from oval to round. This variety produces good quality crisps as it has a high specific gravity. Good disease resistance too.

Spunta is a large, new Dutch variety that is ideal for early winter planting (April to August). Like Delaware is it not a good frying type. Tubers are long and have pale yellow skin and flesh.

Desiree is a high yielding red skinned yellow flesh type very well suited to winter planting (May to August). The medium size tubers are smooth and not well suited to frying.