

Over the years I've grown quite a few potatoes with reasonable success, but because of the limited space on my allotment and the fact that they take up quite a bit of space to grow, I decided to start growing my potatoes in containers. This freed up my beds for other veggies and I was really surprised at the results. If you've got limited space and you still want to grow potatoes this is an excellent way to do it. I mean there's nothing like the taste of freshly harvested potatoes.

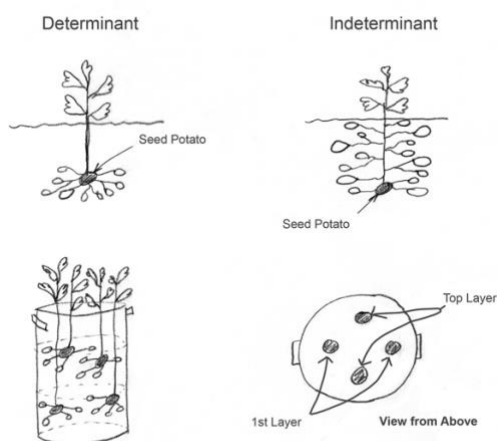
In the UK we have potatoes called first and second earlies and main crop. First earlies & second earlies, as the names imply, are started early and grow quickly. This is where we get our small, new potatoes from and those lovely waxy salad ones.

April is the time to get your first & second seed potatoes in. You should find them sold in bags in your local garden centre. Don't worry if you haven't chitted them (see previous newsletters), best to get them in as soon as possible.

If you've got some large pots handy that's great, but if not, special potato bags can be bought usually in packs of three that should last you several seasons. You will also need quite a bit of compost or well-rotted manure mixed with some spent compost if you have some.

Perhaps you've heard of determinant and indeterminate tomatoes (bush tomatoes and vine tomatoes), but did you know that you can get the same for potatoes? Determinant potatoes, our first & second earlies which grow on one level and our main crop, indeterminants, which grow upwards.

For now, I'm only going to talk about first and second earlies, and you might want to check out my little diagram to show you what I mean.



This is how I plant my potato bags. I first fill the bag a third of the way up and then sprinkle a small handful of potato fertilizer on and give it a good mix. I then place two of my seed potatoes with the chits facing up. I then cover them with another third of compost and repeat the process, but place the potatoes in the opposite spaces, for example, the bottom layer would be north/south and the top layer east/west. I then fill the bag to about an inch or so from the top. Give them a good water and wait. If the shoots start to poke through the compost before the last frost, make sure you cover them with a bit of fleece or move them into a sheltered spot, in a shed or greenhouse overnight and then bring them out in the morning. Once our last frost date has passed, usually mid-May, make sure they have as much sun as possible.

I find that growing in containers have many benefits, the first one being that there is no digging to be done so there's no CO2 escaping into the atmosphere. There's no 'Earthing up'* to be done. It's easier to water and any fertilizer you use is contained in the bags and not washed away when watering. You can move them about, and they are easy to harvest, you just tip the bag over and have a good rummage. I also found that there were less pests and a bigger harvest than when I'd planted in the ground. I found that this was also true of sweet potatoes that I grew last year. Another benefit of growing them in compost is that when you've harvested your potatoes you can re-use the compost to enrich your beds by adding lots of vegetable matter to your soil.

A couple of tips...Potatoes like quite a bit of water, but make sure you have good drainage holes in your container. If you've chitted your potatoes, knock off all the chits except the two largest ones, less is more.

*Earthing up. This is when you pile up the earth around the stems of the potatoes to stop the light getting to the potatoes that might grow near the surface, turning them green, which will make them poisonous.

If you're really into growing lots of spuds this is the chap you want to watch https://youtu.be/VLna4I_ekP0