

## How to grow Potatoes in a Bag

Possibly the mainstay of our diet! Although easy enough to grow, potatoes can be susceptible to soil borne disease and don't enjoy lying around in wet soil. There are three types of potato —earlies, second earlies and maincrop. Maincrop can be bulky, so choose either or both the 'earlies' to grow in bags or planters.

What you will need:

- **Potato tubers** speak to your local garden centre as they should stock varieties suited to your area (e.g. Swift and Arran Pilot are 'recommended' varieties for West Scotland)
- **Compost** good quality general purpose or soil-based John Innes No 2
- **Empty compost bag** with drainage slits cut into base (don't use a bin bag—too flimsy)
- **Watering can**
- **Potato fertiliser** or organic equivalent
- **String** to tie canes together
- **Scissors, labels and marker pen**



'Chitting' is the tuber starting to produce shoots. Chitting should start about 2 to 3 weeks before you want to plant your tubers into the compost to grow outdoors. This will depend on your variety chosen, and weather. Potato tubers must be kept frost free. Visit

<http://www.gardenfocused.co.uk/calendar-veg-personalised.php> for further guidance.



**Step 1** Chitting

**Step 1** Chit tubers. In an eggbox or similar, place the tuber 'rose eye' upwards (this is the end of the tuber with most bumpy eyes and where the sprouts will shoot from). Keep the tubers in a light area, around 10C. The tubers will turn green which is normal. If the sprouts shoot too early to be planted out, gently rub them off—fresh ones will develop. Keep a note of the varieties being chitted and the dates of activity for your records.



**Step 2** Planting tubers. Roll the compost bag down as shown, and fill halfway up with compost. Place 3 tubers evenly across the compost. Cover the tubers with 5cm depth of compost, ensuring they are fully in the dark.

Water well, keeping the compost moist at all times, but not soggy. As the sprouts grow up through the compost, cover them with more compost, unrolling more height to the bag as you go.

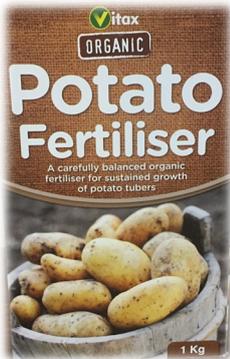


Continue with this procedure until the bag is around 3/4 unrolled. Potatoes will be developing on the shoots that are now covered by the compost. If cats are a problem, cover the bag with a mesh deterrent.



**Step 3** Unrolling bag and covering sprouts with fresh compost. Additional cat deterrent!

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**Step 3** Fertiliser

**Step 3** A specific potato fertiliser, or your own organic feed can be added to the compost when planting and topping up. Alternatively, apply a liquid feed fortnightly when watering. Apply as per the instructions on your chosen product.

For the early potato varieties, we suggest a liquid feed with

- a high Nitrogen(N) feed from weeks 4—8 after planting followed by a liquid feed with high Potash (K) content from week 6 through to harvesting.

**Step 4** The shoots will start to produce flower buds. If not done already, stop layering with compost, and allow the flower buds to develop. Less water is now required by the plants, but ensure the compost remains damp.

Potatoes should be ready for harvesting once the developed flowers start to die off and the leaves turn yellow.



**Step 4** Keep rolling bag up and adding compost until shoots start to produce flower buds.



**Step 5** Harvesting the crop

**Step 5** Place the bag inside a wheelbarrow, slit open the bag and your potato crop will be harvested.

Do not use this spent compost to grow potatoes or tomatoes in the following season and avoid adding it to your compost heap in case of disease build up. A rogue potato could overwinter nicely in the heap and sprout where you don't want it the following spring.

The spent compost is fine for digging into your flower borders as a stray potato is highly unlikely to survive in all but the mildest winters.

Have a look at these videos to see how easy it is to get started:

<http://www.gardenersworld.com/how-to/grow-plants/how-to-grow-potatoes-in-a-bag/>

For more detailed potato growing advice, see

<http://www.gardenersworld.com/how-to/grow-plants/how-to-grow-potatoes-in-a-bag/>

For specific potato growing problem advice, see

<http://www.gardenfocused.co.uk/vegetable/potatoes/potatoes-pest-disease.php>