



It's Potato Planting Time

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Americans love eating potatoes and farmers love planting them on Valentine's Day, a tradition that seems to go back generations.

Potato planting time in North Florida is during the coolest months of January to February, although February 14th seems to be a popular planting day. Look for certified seed potatoes at your local feed store or garden center, which are likely to be good varieties for Florida gardens.

Potato Varieties

The most popular and successful varieties grown in Florida are based on yield, disease resistance, quality and adaptability to warm climates. These include white-skinned potatoes 'Yukon Gold', 'Gold Rush', 'LaChipper', and 'Sebago', and red-skinned varieties 'Red Pontiac', 'Red LaSoda', and 'LaRouge'. For russet varieties, home gardeners can select varieties that mature relatively early (100-115 days) such as the variety 'Russet Norkotah'.

Exotic potato varieties are also fun and exciting to try, since these unusual varieties are hard to find in supermarkets. They are often smaller, taking less time to cook, but are also very colorful which can increase nutritional content. For example, potatoes with a bright orange flesh have more carotenoids and those with red pigments have more anthocyanins, both of which have health benefits. Other fun varieties include fingerling types and varieties with blue/purple flesh. The 'All Blue' potato has deep blue skin, blue flesh, and even produces blue flowers.



Planting Prep

Before planting, you'll need to cut the seed potato so that each piece is about the size of an egg, with at least one eye per section. Let them dry in a cool, dark place for a couple days. Plant the sections in a 4-6 inch deep trench that receives full sun, with the cut side down and eyes (sprouts) facing up.

Unless your soil test results say otherwise, no lime should be applied before planting. Apply a 10-0-10 fertilizer at 7.5 pounds per 100 foot row, both at planting and again 3-4 weeks later by side-dressing fertilizer about 4-6 inches to either side of the plant.

Growing, Harvesting, Storage

Since potato tubers tend to push up above the soil surface, you need to mound soil around the stems as the plant grows. Exposed tubers will turn green in the sun, making them inedible.

In about three months you'll enjoy potatoes. Remove the tops 2-3 weeks before digging to "toughen the skin." After harvesting, keep potatoes in a cool (60-65 degrees F), dark place for 10-14 days to allow cuts and bruises to heal. Then move them to a final storage location with a high relative humidity, good aeration, and cool temperatures (38-40 degrees F). Washed tubers should be allowed to dry thoroughly before storing. Under proper conditions, potatoes can store for 3-6 months or more.

FAQs

Can I grow potatoes purchased from the grocery store? *Grocery store tubers are often treated with growth inhibitors and may carry diseases that could harm your crop. Plus, you'll want to select varieties suited to Florida growing conditions.*

When should I plant sweet potatoes? *In north Florida, sweet potatoes are planted during the warmer months of March through June.*

Additional Resources:

Florida Vegetable Gardening Guide
<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/vh021>

Growing Potatoes in the Home Garden
<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/hs183>

Grow Potatoes in Perlite
<http://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/giam/pdfs/potatoperlite.pdf>

