



GROWING POTATOES – Part 1

APRIL 30, 2020

Planting potatoes is just plain satisfying. Easy. Fun. Forgiving. If you just put a potato in soil during the spring, it will grow. It is always fun to see what happens at harvest time.

Many Vancouver students we work with plant *Spuds in Tubs*, a program of BC Agriculture in the Classroom. For my daughter, it is a favourite school activity. Believe me, at harvest time, we are giddy with excitement. So, why not try this at home?

In our school programs, potatoes are a beloved ingredient. We especially love to use Russian Blue and Amarosa potatoes for the beautiful colors that surprise and delight us all. Think of all the delicious things you will make with your own homegrown potatoes. This year at Project Chef we planted Warbas; an heirloom variety with an all-around bumpy shape and pink eyes. We also planted the delicious Seglinde, buttery and rich, ideal for frittatas, pizzas, minestrone and really all things potato.



PLANTING POTATOES

EQUIPMENT

Large Container

- recycling bin or rubber tote with holes drilled in the bottom OR
- a big pot from a landscaper OR
- Stackable container—something you can add modular sections to contain more soil.

Soil

- $\frac{2}{3}$ Potting soil mixed with $\frac{1}{3}$ compost (if you have a veggie vitamin amendment or fertilizer, you can sprinkle in a couple tablespoons but potatoes are not fussy.)

Seed Potatoes

- or sprouting organic potatoes is a second option

INSTRUCTIONS

Each potato needs 60-90 square cm of growing area.

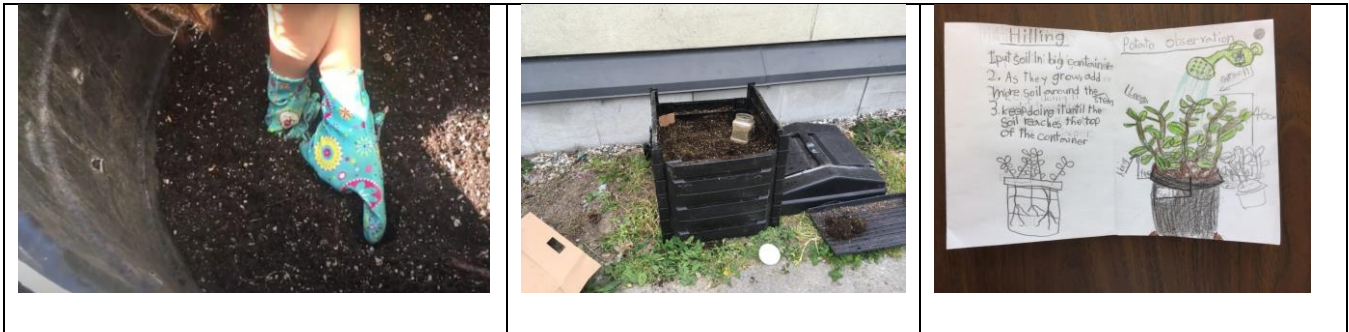
1. Dig a 12-15cm hole in your soil.
2. Place the potato into the hole then cover with soil.
3. Water.

It can take 2-3 weeks for the potato sprouts to come up.

EXPERIMENTING WITH POTATOES

EXPERIMENT #1: DISTANCE & YIELD

Experiments are fun! Using three big tree pots from a landscaper, we planted the potatoes in each pot at different distances to see how it will affect the yield (how many potatoes we will get). For any experiment to have trustworthy results, you need to keep all other factors the same: same amount of sun & water, same kind of pot and soil, and same variety of potato. *Can you plan an experiment for your potato planting?* Here, we used the distance from thumb to index finger as a measurement. In another pot, we used elbow-to-fingertip. **The traditional distance is 30 centimetres (cm) apart and 6-8 cm deep. If you plan to harvest new potatoes, you can plant as close as 15 cm apart.**



EXPERIMENT #2: GROWING IN A COMPOST BIN

This is a way to get more potatoes in less space. When the plant gets to about 10 – 15 cm tall, we will add another section to the bin and more soil with compost. This is called *hilling* potatoes. Potatoes have some crazy magic. If you take off a leaf, and the plant cells touch soil, they will grow a root instead of a leaf. In the case of potatoes, more roots, means more potatoes to eat! As any good grower, we keep a record. Our record helps us next year or can even be a memento. In our next potato activity, you will learn how to observe and record your growing.

A NOTE FOR PARENTS

Getting your hands on seed potatoes: You often have more choice in variety early in the season if using seed potatoes from a nursery, because potatoes can handle cool temperatures and frost. The annual St. Patty's day tradition on farms is planting potatoes. Helmer's or Eagle Creek are our go-to sources but both are sold out early in 2020. This is why we are not growing Amarosa or Russian Blues. Sometimes, organic potatoes that have sprouted eyes will grow a good number of potatoes, so if you can't get seed potatoes, put your potatoes in a dark drawer until they sprout and then plant them. Most of us growing potatoes at home will harvest to eat. New potatoes are just so scrumptious. You can plant into June and get something to harvest in the fall.

