

GROWING POTATOES – Part 2

MAY 6, 2020

Scientists keep records, so do farmers, and so do we! Since planting your potatoes, what have you noticed? What can you observe? After planting your seed potatoes, in Part 1 of this activity, your Project CHEF task over the next two months is to look closely, pay attention to the details, and write down your observations. The more specific, the better.

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

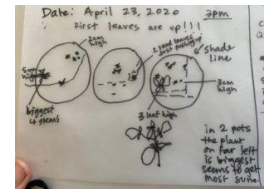
EQUIPMENT

- Food Journal (or other notebook for observational notes)
- Pencil crayons or pen
- Tape measure or ruler (optional)

INSTRUCTIONS

STEP 1: FIRST LOOK

Record the date. Draw quick sketches or write your first thoughts. What do you notice



Step 2: Closer observations - Look for the evidence

If your first impression was “they aren’t growing”, then ask yourself “how do I know?” Sometimes, looking more closely you see new things like the two little sprouts pictured above that are just about to burst from the soil. The following checklist can help you search for evidence:



- Check the moisture level of the soil. Stick one finger into the soil to your first knuckle. Sometimes the top looks dry but it’s still moist below.
- Leaves: Colour, texture, discolouration (check bottom side of leaves too).
- Stem: color, texture, structure.

Write specific and detailed observations. For example, “18 leaves have blackish-red spots” or “18 stems with bright green leaves”

Step 3: Measure

Use a tape measure or ruler to measure the size of the plant, the overall growth (or not), the leaves and the stems. Count the number of leaves and stems. Do you recognize this plant? It’s not a potato.



Step 4: Get curious

Question your findings and try to come to some conclusions. Is there an observation you have made that you would like to know more about?

Here are some question examples:

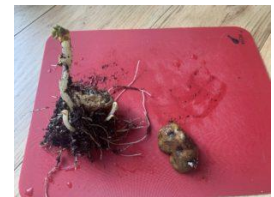
- Is it healthy?
- Does it need something?
- What are some differences or similarities compared to last week or last year?



Step 5: Caring for your plant

Can you learn more about your plant? What do you need to do to care for it? Take action if something doesn't look right. Your action could be:

- Observing at a different time of day
- Adding nutrients or compost
- Adding soil to hill them
- Troubleshooting something that doesn't look right through research on the internet



ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

DRAWING

On some weeks, instead of taking notes, focus on drawing. Drawing from observation to be as true to life as possible is good for the brain. Try drawing the stages in the plant lifecycle. Draw what you see: seed, sprout, full-size plant, plant and roots at time of harvest. Above we have a botanical illustration that shows the overall shape and structure of the plant and in the circle, a leaf detail. What shape and color are the leaves and the veins?

HILLING

When your potatoes are 15cm or so, if you add more soil, the potato leaves will become roots with potatoes attached. Here are a couple of tips for hilling: Do NOT dump the soil directly on the plant as the tender new shoots may break. Instead, put the soil into an empty space between shoots and push it up around the plant stem with your hands or a hoe. Leave only the top 3-5 cm of new growth uncovered (some people cover them completely as well).



Before Hilling

After Hilling

COOKING

The best part of growing potatoes? Eating them of course. How will you prepare your potatoes when they are ready to harvest? Find a recipe that looks good to you and record it in your food journal. Remember to write down your sources. Check out Project CHEF recipes with potatoes: Roast Potatoes, Potato Gnocchi and Frittata.

TASTING

Can't wait to harvest? New potatoes will be at the market at the beginning of June. Plan a potato tasting party with new potatoes from the farmer's market. Get a few varieties, find a recipe and share it with your family. In your food journal, write down the tasting notes to help decide on varieties to try growing next year.