Tips for growing potatoes 

 Separate the Eyes

Only small, golf ball-sized potatoes should be planted whole.

Cut large tubers into pieces. I cut mine so that each segment has two or three "eyes" (the little bumps from which sprouts emerge, as shown in the photo). The reason for cutting the potatoes is because the many eyes on a large potato will create a crowded, multi-stemmed plant, with each stem competing for food and moisture, and in the end, bearing only small potatoes.

 Cure the Cut Pieces

Next, "cure" the cut pieces. Either set them out in the sun or place them on a table or counter in a warm (about 70°F), moderately lit room for three to five days. This step permits the cuts to become calloused. Calloused seed potatoes will help prevent rot.

 How to Plant Potatoes

Plant seed potato segments cut-side down (eyes up) in a 6-inch-deep hole or trench. Space each segment 12-inches apart on all sides.

Between each segment, sprinkle 2 tablespoons of a low-nitrogen, high-phosphorous fertilizer. Then cover both potatoes and fertilizer with 2-inches of soil, and water the soil well.

Hill Around the Stems

Because new potatoes form on lateral stems, or "stolons" above the seed potato, it’s necessary to "hill" the vines. When the green sprouts achieve 8 inches in height, bury all but their top 4 inches with soil, chopped straw, or shredded leaves. Hill again when potato plants grow another 8 inches. The more you hill, the more prolific your harvest is likely to be. I usually hill mine to a height of 18 inches. Stop hilling when the vines flower.

Potato tubers, like vampires, need to live in darkness. In fact, they will turn green if exposed to light. And a green potato can cause sickness if consumed. Therefore, it is absolutely essential to keep the tubers covered with soil or mulch.

How & When to Harvest Potatoes

Two weeks after the vines have flowered, you can, if you wish, reach into the soil or mulch and retrieve a few baby potatoes. Otherwise, wait until the vines die back. Dead vines signal that the tubers have reached maturity. Now reach into the soil with your hands and pull the tubers up.

**How long do potatoes take to grow?** Small new potatoes can be ready as early as ten weeks. However, full sized potatoes take about 80-100 days to reach maturity.

Store Your Potatoes

Since my potatoes are grown for storage, I leave them in the ground until cool weather arrives. Why? Because potatoes will only store well if they are placed somewhere cold, but not freezing.

After digging the tubers, I let them sit on top of the raised beds for a few hours to dry, as illustrated. This brief drying-period toughens their skin and prepares them for storage. Then I gently brush off any loose soil from the tubers and place them in double thicknesses of paper bags.

More potato growing tips:

* If you don’t want to bother with hilling, plant your potatoes 8-9 inches deep. The downsides are the potatoes take longer to sprout and your harvest might be smaller.

Preventing Potato Blight

The dreaded fungal disease known as the "potato blight”. To reduce the chance of infection, never plant potatoes (or tomatoes and other members of the nightshade family, such as eggplants or chili peppers) in the same patch of land without leaving an interval of at least three years. Also, promptly remove any volunteer potatoes that emerge in your garden. The disease overwinters in tubers left behind during the previous year’s harvest.