

media release

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"Gardening Made Easy!"

Helpful advice from the Nursery & Garden Industry, NSW & ACT

Perfect Potatoes

Originating from South America, potatoes have become one of the most widely used and commonly cultivated staple foods to millions around the world. It's also known as a spud, pomme de terre in French, alu in Hindi and aardappel in Dutch – plus countless other names. The South Americans were cultivating the humble potato way back over 1,800 years. It's been around a bit! A member of the Solanaceae family, it is related to the Tomato which also had its origins in South America.

Just to get things completely clear, it is the tuber that we eat as long as it is not green (discard any showing green) and the foliage and flowers are poisonous. Potatoes were first brought to Australia with the First Fleet in 1788. Potatoes used to be a commonly grown vegetable in the backyard, but in recent times popularity has dwindled. It's time to revive the art of growing them in the backyard! It's not at all difficult and there are so many wonderfully tasty new varieties for you to try. Have a look around your local garden centre and ask them about potato cultivation. Here are some tips:

- Buy certified, disease free, seed potatoes – the packs will identify them as such
- Many varieties: - Nicola, Desiree, Toolangi Delight, Spunta, King Edward, Pontiac and Sebago are a few to consider
- If using potatoes from your veggie basket that have 'eyed' up, ensure they are still firm and not showing signs of rotting
- Large spuds with multiple eyes can be cut in half. Ensure the raw side forms a dry callous before planting
- Plant the tubers in very well composted, rich soil – good drainage and full sun
- Many ways to grow these – in a veggie bed, in large pots, sacks, tiered car tyres and 'no dig' gardens.
- Plant the tubers at least 10 – 15 cm deep
- When the new shoots have pushed through the soil by about 5 cm, cover up with soil. This is called 'hilling.' Do this twice. It forms a strong root system and the possibility of an increased tuber yield
- Liquid fertilise with Yates Flower and Fruit regularly
- Potatoes are ready for harvesting when the majority of the foliage has withered down. Dig down carefully to collect the tubers. Clean and store in a cool dark place. Exposure to too much sunlight turns the tubers green – exactly what you don't want to happen

Potato growing is a fun occupation for the kids to be involved in. Everyone likes a boiled, mashed, roasted or chipped potato and they are even better if home grown.

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