



A54 Growing potatoes without digging



Potatoes are great crops to grow, yielding heavily without much effort. They're even better when you don't have to dig them out the ground, but instead harvest by lifting them off the soil surface. This is possible using no-dig gardening by spreading layers of organic matter such as compost and straw over the soil as a 'mulch'. This activity shows you how to do this.

Resources

- Seed potatoes, ie specially bought tubers, disease free, varieties for cropping, not shop bought potatoes
- Bare soil, compost, straw, grass clippings

Activity

- 1 Follow the instructions on the next page for laying out seed potatoes and covering with mulch.
 - a Plant 'early' potatoes late March to early April.
 - b Plant 'maincrop' potatoes during April.
- 2 Harvest potatoes when ready.
 - a Early potatoes as needed from late June to July.
 - b Maincrop potatoes from September, three weeks after leaves turn yellow. Leave tubers to dry for two hours after uncovering before storing.

Extended activity

Research different potato varieties. What are the key characteristics to look for when choosing? For example, harvest time, organic supply, resistance to late blight disease, etc.

Top tip



Further information

See Food Growing Instruction Card.



Health & Safety

Be careful handling tubers and mulch. Follow usual garden hygiene rules, eg keep cuts covered, wash hands after handling and keep tetanus vaccinations up to date. Follow Manual Handling guidelines (SG1.3) when moving heavy loads of mulch.

See also Health and Safety Guidelines (Section SG1.2)

Further information

A39 Mulching plants
G4.3 Gardening without digging
Potato Council www.potato.org.uk

Instructions for growing potatoes without digging

- 1 Lay organic matter over the soil surface at a rate of one wheelbarrow of compost per 5m² of soil.



- 2 Place seed potatoes on the ground at the normal spacing, ie 'early' potatoes 30x50cm apart after six weeks in a cool light place to grow shoots ('chitting'). Place 'maincrops' at 35x70cm.



- 3 Cover the potatoes with 15cm of straw. Water the straw to bed it down. In exposed positions, you may need to build a low fence of chicken wire around the potatoes to stop the straw blowing away.



- 4 Add more straw as the potatoes grow, helping emerging shoots to come through if needed. Finally, cover the straw mulch with a layer of grass clippings 5cm thick before the potato foliage meets across the rows. This keeps out light and stop potatoes going green.



- 5 Harvest as required by lifting the mulch to remove potatoes. They'll be growing on the soil or just underneath.

