

How to grow potatoes biodynamically

Have you ever had anybody say: “those taste like the potatoes I ate at my grandmothers when I was a child!” when they ate your home-grown potatoes?

I have often had that experience, even when growing them in a wet climate in Wales.

Origin:

The Potato slowly evolved into its current form in the South American Andean highlands between Peru and Bolivia. The climate of the Andes is light-filled, with hot days and cool nights and very low humidity. Their soils on the side of the hills are well drained, often volcanic, with a very balanced nutrient supply. It's said that the most flavoursome, nutritious and disease resistant potatoes are grown in sandy soils, rich in silica, perfectly imitating the climate of the potato's original environment.

You might ask, how can we emulate the same in a wetter, dull and less sunny climate in Britain, particularly if you are on a heavier soil? The most challenging soils are the silty soils, as they act like clay, but are poor in nutrients and very temperamental concerning getting too wet or too dry. If you have them add more organic matter to compensate.

Growing Conditions:

In any heavy soils, drainage is essential. I usually grow the potatoes in raised beds, rich in humus. Humus is a clay, silicate complex, which derives its silica from compost made from materials rich in lignins and cellulose (brown, carbonaceous materials).

Beds, conditioned with compost treated with biodynamic preparations or Mäusdorfer, rich in stable, base-saturated humus (stains hands black when you touch it), are ideal to grow healthy potatoes. This compost tempers the soil, avoiding extreme conditions and provides therefore the best growing conditions for potatoes, helping their need for good nutrition.

The best organic material to make compost for potato tubers and root crops is kitchen waste, leaves and hedge-prunings, hoof and horn meal, or pig manure, rich in potassium (K) and phosphorous (P) and relatively low in nitrogen. The aim for the soil for growing healthy and nutritious potatoes is to keep nitrogen rich materials to a minimum, except in early spring, when we want them to grow fast.

Planting potatoes:

For our first early and second early potatoes it is highly recommended to chit the potatoes.

Ideally use healthy potatoes of a medium-sized egg (1oz=28grams of weight).

If you have bigger potatoes, cut them down the middle and dip the flesh in a mix of woodash and soot or basalt powder. Put them in an open crate in a warm, light-filled environment, placing them “rose” end up.

The main season potatoes don't need chitting in my experience as they will grow on very fast as the earth will have warmed up sufficiently by their planting time in April.

Add some fresh woodash or slaked lime (hydrolysed) at a rate of 150-200 grams/m² (1-2 handful – *use gloves, both substances are mildly corrosive*) into the furrows, which were filled with a bucket/m² of a half-rotted compost (see above) and spray the soil activator (Horn Manure prep - 500), when planting.

Plant the potatoes after 2-3 weeks and cover shoots with the compost and the surrounding soil.

The earliest planting is traditionally end of February to end of March, followed by second early planting end of March until middle of April. Plant maincrops from mid-April to late April.

You can now get varieties, which you can plant in July to harvest as small potatoes for your Thanksgiving and Christmas dinner (if protected from frosts).

Plant when the moon is in a light/air constellation of the Gemini (Twins), the Libra (Scales) or with the moon Apogee, (furthest away from the Earth) for best results for tasty and more disease resistant potatoes. Potatoes are 'flowers' under the Earth, botanically speaking. They are not roots but they are tubers. I'd suggest you experiment to grow and earth up potatoes with woodchips or finely-chipped prunings. I have had very good results with that method last year and it built soil.

Maintenance:

Spray 2-3 days before full moon with horsetail preparation (508) and earth up the potatoes every two to three weeks.

Spray the Horn Silica preparation (501) when the first flowers develop. When they are the flowering, is the when the formation of the tubers happens in the soil. Pick the flowers off every few days to increase the growth of the tubers rather than fruit.

Spray the horn silica preparation a 2ndtime 2 weeks before harvesting (for maincrop potatoes), when the haulms are starting to brown. This will help the storing qualities as well as flavour.

Storage: Only maincrop potatoes can be stored either in a clamp or a root cellar.

Grow your own seed potatoes:

If you want to grow your own seed potatoes take a 1 ½ oz (40gram) potato and cut out 3 - 4 triangles, each one with a bud or two and dip in the mix (see above) and plant in rows 1 ½ foot apart and 1 ft distance in the row. This will produce perfect seed potatoes for the next year. Treat them with the biodynamic preparations as you would do for your eating potatoes.

Enjoy your delicious garden produce in the form of mashed, baked, cooked and air fried potatoes.

Health advice given by nutritionist. Don't eat potatoes if you have tendencies to develop auto-immune diseases or have disposition for cellular overgrowth.

Happy Lent and gardening

Hans-Günther Kern

