

Potatoes

You can use your polytunnel to produce the earliest crop of potatoes you've ever seen. If you plant a 'first early' version in the middle of February, you should be able to harvest your first spuds from around the end of April, leaving the ground free in plenty of time for hot weather plants like cucumbers. And how welcome those first new potatoes are!

Varieties: 'Orla', 'Colleen'

Sowing: Make sure you get hold of your seed potatoes as early as possible, and certainly by the beginning of February. Put each one in the cell of an empty egg box with the cluster of 'eyes' at the top, and leave it in a well-lit frost-free place such as a cool windowsill. A couple of weeks of this treatment (known as 'chitting') will give the foliage a head start.

Dig plenty of compost or well-rotted manure into the ground where the potatoes are to be grown at the end of the previous season, and in February make trenches about 15cm deep and 40cm apart, with ridges 15cm tall between them. Place the seed potatoes, chits up, at 25cm intervals along the foot of the trench, 5-10cm below the surface.



spuds... tatties...
whatever you call them
they are delicious



jersey royals

maris piper

desiree

charlotte



king edward

pentland javelin

pink
fir
apple





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Once the plants are 10-12cm tall, pull the walls of the trenches in to cover all but the very tips of them. Earth them up like this a couple more times, until the trench has become a ridge with the potatoes growing out of the top of it, and keep the plants well watered.

Diseases and pests: Potatoes grown early in the tunnel escape the two biggest potato problems, slugs and blight, but frost can be a problem as the plants are not at all hardy. From the moment the sprouts first appear, have horticultural fleece ready to cover them if frost threatens.



Remember to keep your plants well watered



keep stock of horticultural fleece for the cold days





potatoes

growing

harvest

You can expect your first potatoes nine or ten weeks after planting, although in northern tunnels they may take a little longer. At this point carefully feel in the earth around the base of the plants, and if you find tubers that are big enough to take you can remove a few without disturbing the rest of the plant. Once they are of a good size, dig the whole plants up as you need them: take care to get all the tubers, or they'll sprout right in the middle of whatever you plant there next!

Recipe: With so many varieties of Potato, it's important you plant something that's going to be right for how you cook. Whether it's roasted, chipped, grated or sliced there are lots to choose from. Then you can sit back and enjoy the fruits of your labour.

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ready to go...



mmmmm sunday roast

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