



School Gardening
Resources

PRIMARY LEVEL

BORD BIA
IRISH FOOD BOARD

Growing Potatoes in School





Time of Year	January to April
Aim	To demonstrate to children how to grow early potatoes that can be harvested in June and maincrop potatoes that can be harvested in September.
Resources Needed	Organic seeds of first early potatoes, such as Home Guard, Sharpe's Express, Red Duke of York, Arran Pilot, Orla and Rocket, organic, blight free Sapro Mira maincrop potatoes, hand trowels, garden compost or well-rotted manure, planting string, empty egg cartons, potato grow bags if raised beds are not available.
Cross Curriculum Relevance	SESE: Living things, exploring / research, recording, observing Maths: Measuring, recording, active learning Literacy: New words, writing, spelling Art: Making signs, photos Informal Curriculum: Food Dudes, Healthy Eating, Discover Primary Science



Chitting

Order the certified potato seeds in December so that the first earlies will be ready for chitting in January. Chitting potatoes gives them a head start so that they can be planted around St. Patrick's Day and harvested about 80 days later. When these arrive place them in empty egg cartons in a cool part of the classroom that receives the least amount of light. Make sure the ends with the most "eyes" are facing upwards. These eyes are tiny buds from which new stems grow and this part of the potato is called the rose end. Short, stubby, sprouts will grow from these eyes. If the seeds are exposed to too much light and heat the sprouts will grow long and spindly.

Health and Safety

- ★ Wash hands after planting.
- ★ Do not leave tools such as spades lying on the ground.
- ★ Discard any tubers that are green because these are poisonous. They turn green when have been exposed to sunlight.





Planting

1. If you have a raised bed, you must first remove any weeds growing in it. Then you need to dig in plenty of home-made compost, vegetable compost or well-rotted horse-manure in the bed. Using a wooden ruler for measuring make holes 15cm deep and 30 cm apart in the bed. Place a chitted potato into each hole and cover with soil or compost.
2. If you don't have a raised bed, you can plant the tubers in strong hessian bags, refuse bags, recycled bags or potato grow bags. Add drainage grit or small stones to the base of each bag for drainage. Make drainage holes if the bags are missing these. Place about 15cm of a soil plus compost mixture in the bag. A ratio of 50:50 is ideal. On top of this place 3 sprouted tubers. Cover these with about 10cm of the mixture. As the stems begin to grow add more growing mixture around them. If they are growing in a hessian bag roll up the bag as you increase the mixture. Stop rolling when a height of 45 cm is reached. Do not let bags dry out.



Aftercare

When the potato stems appear above ground and are about 20cm high cover the stems with soil leaving the top 5cm exposed to the light. You will end up with mounds along the rows. This process is called "earthing up". It prevents the tubers from turning green which makes them poisonous. It also helps to increase the crop. If frost is forecast cover the bed with old newspapers or fleece. Fleece is an insulator that can be bought in garden centres.



Harvesting

When the flowers start to fade in June it is time to dig the potatoes with a fork.



Maincrop

In mid-April you can grow a blight free maincrop potato such as Sapro Mira. Plant these 30cm apart in rows 60cm apart and 12 to 15cm deep. They will be ready to harvest after the summer holidays, 16 to 20 weeks after planting.

Extension Activity

Plant first early potatoes outside in March in 4 different even sized bags:

- ★ Bag 1-Soil only (Control).
- ★ Bag2-Soil and school compost (50/50).
- ★ Bag 3-Soil and peat-free compost (50/50).
- ★ Bag 4-Soil and soil-based compost e.g., John Innes No.3 (50/50).

Record progress in each bag and weigh the harvest.

