



Harvesting, Curing and Storing Potatoes

Harvesting

If you are planning to harvest potatoes for storage, wait until the tops of the plants yellow, lose leaves, and die. Fully mature potatoes have skin that is difficult to remove when rubbed. Gently dig around the perimeter of the plant and dig up the potatoes. Be careful not to damage the skins. Don't wash the potatoes, just gently rub off any dirt and remove any rotted or damaged tubers.



Figure 1. Freshly harvested potatoes

Curing

The curing period allows any bruises or wounds that occurred during harvest to heal. Place the harvested potatoes in a paper bag or box, woven bag or slotted plastic crate and store in a ventilated but dark area for 7 to 15 days after harvest. Ideal, curing conditions are 15- 25°C with high humidity. Be sure no sunlight comes in contact with the potatoes. Sunlight causes the potatoes to turn green and develop a bitter taste.



Figure 2. Potatoes curing in various containers

Storage

Potatoes should be stored in a well-ventilated, cool, dark, and humid place. A root cellar with a dirt floor is ideal. Store at temperatures 5° to 13°C, and in a place that will not freeze. Again, be sure no sunlight comes in contact with the potatoes. Good air circulation around the potatoes will reduce storage rots and sprouting. Use a burlap bag, slotted bins, or other similar container to store the potatoes. Do not store potatoes with fruit. Ripening apples and other fruit give off a plant hormone, ethylene, which can make potatoes sprout prematurely.



Figure 3. Potatoes stored in burlap bags

Prepared by Ron Voss, Nick Madden, Mark Bell, 2012.

Reference: Integrated Pest Management for Potatoes in the Western United States, Larry Strand; Options for storing potatoes at home, Univ. of Idaho Extension

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