

BELL COUNTY MASTER GARDENER

Tip of the Week

By Beverly Wickersham

Growing and Harvesting Potatoes

Growing and harvesting potatoes is a rewarding experience for vegetable gardeners.

SELECTING AND PREPARING SEED POTATOES

*First, buy certified "seed" potatoes from your garden nursery. (Grocery store potatoes are not recommended.)

*Select potatoes that are large enough to be cut in three to four pieces. Each piece should have at least two buds or "eyes."

*Treat the cut pieces with a fungicide such as dusting sulphur and allow them to "cure" for about 5 to 7 days before planting time.

*To apply the sulphur, place the potato pieces in a paper bag, add the appropriate amount of sulphur, and shake vigorously.

PREPARING THE FURROW AND PLANTING

*Till into the planting bed a 3 to 4-inch layer of organic matter: well-decomposed leaves, grass clippings, or commercial compost

*When using a raised bed method of planting, cut a 4 to 6 inch furrow, spread a thin bead of 10-20-10 fertilizer in the furrow, add water if the soil is dry, then add 1 to 2 inches of soil before planting the potato pieces 8 to 12 inches apart.

*Cover the potato pieces with 3 inches of soil; firm the soil with a rake to ensure good soil/potato contact.

*Plants will emerge within 3 to 4 weeks. When they are 5 to 6 inches tall, "dirt" them by using a hoe or shovel to throw 3 to 4 inches of soil to the base of the plants. Repeat the dirting process several times during the growing period until the seed piece is about 6 to 8 inches beneath the soil surface.

HARVESTING THE CROP

*Red skinned potatoes can be harvested early by digging down in the planted area with your hands or with a trowel and removing "new" potatoes one at a time.

*When the tops of the potato plants die back, usually around the first of June in Central Texas, harvest the crop by digging up the entire plant. In addition to the full-sized potatoes, you will find many smaller, usable, potatoes.

*The spring crop can be stored out of direct sunlight for several weeks.

