

# Milaeger's



Kevin Milaeger

## The Year of the Potato!

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**I tried growing potatoes many years ago**, and I can't even remember how they turned out. I guess I must have been too busy, so they were ignored and didn't turn out well. Now it's time to give them another try.

I've always liked potatoes, but I haven't eaten many in recent years, because of the carb thing. They are quite nutritious, though, especially the dark fleshed types. If I grow a decent crop, I'll probably give most of them away anyway. I'm sure I can find some takers--the average American eats 130 pounds of potatoes every year.



### seed potatoes

For starters, you need good soil. That's true with most all plants, but maybe especially so for root crops. Potatoes like a loose soil, so mix in plenty of compost. They also prefer a slightly acidic soil, so don't add any lime. Our soil is naturally on the alkaline side, so compost or peat moss will help with that. Potatoes grow best in full sun. A little shade is alright, but the yield might be diminished.



At Milaeger's we offer six kinds of "seed" potatoes. I don't know why they call them that, since you plant potato parts, not seed, but we may as well stick with the accepted nomenclature. You don't want to use potatoes from the grocery store. They are often treated with growth inhibitors to keep them from sprouting in the store. Plus, they are not certified disease free. I'm going with a small red potato called 'Red Norland,' a small fingerling called 'Russian Banana,' and 'Adirondack Blue,' a dark fleshed type. The red one is an early potato, the other two are midseason. Planting time in our part of the world starts around April 1. The soil should be dry, and

the weather forecast for a week or so following planting should be relatively dry, too. If the weather is cool and wet, the potatoes are prone to rotting. Once you can foresee a planting date, cut up your potatoes so that there are 2-3 eyes on each piece. The eyes are the small indentations on the potato. Put the potato pieces on a piece of cardboard, spread them out, and let them sit in your garage for a couple of days ([click here for a video demonstration.](#)) Now you are ready to plant. Dig a hole about four inches deep and plant the potato, with the eyes up. Cover with soil and water in. For a while, there is very little to do. Water during dry spells and fertilize with a balanced fertilizer once you see growth.



**cutting seed potato**

After six or eight weeks, you should see plenty of plant growth. Look and feel around the base of the plants. If you can feel the young tubers (potatoes),

cover them with soil or compost. As the tubers develop, they get pushed up. They should not be exposed to light. You will likely have to do this more than once. That's a good thing---it helps you better understand the nature of the plants. Every variety is a little different, so they may not all need top dressing at the



**Adirondack Blue potato**

same time. If you fail to cover the potatoes, they can be poisonous. The white skinned varieties will show green if they are not covered. That is a sign that they are inedible.

The tubers will be developing at this time, so dig around a little underneath some of the plants. See what's happening. Some varieties are ready earlier than others. You can begin a small, partial harvest when the potatoes are as big as a marble, or larger if you

prefer. These first tubers are called "new" potatoes, and you can gather them without disturbing the plant too much, letting the other potatoes on that plant reach a larger size.

Later, the plants will die down. When they are fully down, but before a hard frost, you should harvest all the remaining potatoes. Carefully dig them up. A "flat fork" works best. (Remember, because you added plenty of compost before you planted, the soil should be relatively light, and workable, for easy harvest.) Let the potatoes lie on the ground for a day or two. Then clean off excess dirt. (See the photo of my antique potato shovel. You would scoop them up with this shovel and shake them to remove most of the soil. I've never actually tried it---sounds like a back breaker, but the shovel is interesting.) Spread the potatoes out on cardboard in your garage for two weeks or so, to "cure." Then you can store them for later use. Do not wash them during any of these stages, just wash them before you cook them.



Remember, in general, the darker the flesh of the potato, the more nutritious it is, and not by just a little---the difference is huge. The dark fleshed potatoes that I have tried all tasted like potatoes, with a twist. You wouldn't mistake them for anything else. Don't be afraid to try something new---especially if it's better for you.



**antique potato shovel**

Please email me ([kevin@milaeqers.com](mailto:kevin@milaeqers.com)) if you have any questions or comments.