

Bluestem Breezes
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Happy St. Patrick's Day!

A long-standing tradition amongst many gardeners is to plant potatoes on St. Patrick's Day. There seems to be a sense of disapproval in the voice of my father (my late grandfather was the same way) when most years I confess that I was late in planting my seed potatoes. Fortunately, K-State says that any time from mid- to late-March is fine for potato planting. Specialist Ward Upham has a few other tips for us as well. Please, read on:

Be sure to buy seed potatoes rather than using those bought for cooking. Seed potatoes are certified disease free and have plenty of starch to sprout as quickly as soil temperatures allow. Most seed potatoes can be cut into four pieces, though large potatoes may yield more, and small less.

Each seed piece should be between 1.5 and 2 ounces and include at least one eye to ensure there is enough energy for germination. Each pound of potatoes should yield 8 to 10 seed pieces. Cut the seed 2 to 3 days before planting so freshly cut surfaces have a chance to suberize, or toughen, and form a protective coating. Storing seed in a warm location during suberization will speed the process.

Plant each seed piece about 1 to 2 inches deep and 8 to 12 inches apart in rows. Though it is important to plant potatoes in March, emergence is slow. It is often mid- to late-April before new plants poke their way through the soil. As the potatoes grow, pull soil up to the base of the plants. New potatoes are borne above the planted seed piece, and it is important to keep sunlight from hitting the new potatoes. Exposed potatoes will turn green and produce a poisonous substance called solanine. Keeping the potatoes covered will prevent this.

I attempt to eat a somewhat healthy diet; but, writing this column is making me dream about fried potatoes dug fresh from my garden!

For additional information, visit the Extension Office (215 Kansas, Courthouse, Alma; kamayer@ksu.edu; 765-3821). For Bluestem Breezes archives, check out wabaunsee.ksu.edu.