

POTATO

Solanum tuberosum

Solanaceae – Nightshade

ECHO® PLANT INFORMATION SHEET

Origin

The Potato originally comes from the Andes of South America. It has been cultivated there for centuries. Potatoes can be grown at most latitudes, but tend to get more diseases in hot and humid climates, such as those at low elevation in the tropics. There are around 5,000 varieties of Potatoes in eight different species.

Uses

The Potato tuber is eaten as a staple in much of the world. Only the tuber is edible; the rest of the plant is toxic. The tuber is also used to make alcohol and as an animal feed.

Common Names

- Spanish
 - Papa
 - Patata

Cultivation

Typically Potatoes have been propagated by tubers or pieces of tuber called "seed Potatoes." These tuber pieces must have "eyes" or buds from which the sprouts originate. Recently "true Potato seed," seed from the potato plant, has been bred to come true from seed. The advantage of planting actual seed is that you receive disease-free plants (which can then be used as "seed potatoes" if you wish) and that seed is much less bulky to transport than "seed Potatoes." Seed Potatoes or transplants from seed are spaced in rows or ridges with 70-80 cm (23-32 in) between rows. To get small Potatoes, space plants 10 cm (4 in) apart in rows; for large ones, space 15-25 cm (6-10 in) apart.

Harvesting and Seed Production

Harvest can usually take place from 90 to 120 days after seeding. Harvesting should be done early while it is still cool on a dry day. The tubers should be kept cool as much as possible. Avoid damaging the tubers with harvesting tools to prevent microorganisms from getting under the skin. Keep the tubers in a shaded, dry and well-ventilated place for 7 to 10 days prior to storage or marketing. This allows the skin to harden. Store in a cool dark place. Tubers will keep for 2-3 months.

Pests and Diseases

Late blight, caused by the fungus *Phytophthora infestans* will attack at all stages of growth. Bacterial wilt of potatoes is caused by *Pseudomonas solanacerum*. This disease resides both in the tubers and soil. Nematodes will also attack roots. Practice crop rotation, use resistant varieties and apply pesticides if absolutely necessary.

Cooking and Nutrition

The Potato is a versatile food that can be enjoyed in a number of ways, such as boiling, frying, roasting, baking and mashing. Potatoes are eaten fresh and also can be dehydrated, frozen and made into flour. Potatoes are a good source of protein (mostly in the skin), minerals, calories and vitamin C.