

## Potato Farming In The U.S.

Farming potatoes is a huge business in the United States. Idaho is the largest producer contributing one third of the country's total harvest. The most popular consumed potato variety in the U.S. is the Russet Burbank or 'Idaho' potato which was developed by Luther Burbank in 1871. Potatoes however, are grown in all 50 states and in 125 countries around the world. The potato is the fourth most important crop in the world after wheat, rice and corn. The average American eats approximately 124 pounds of potatoes each year!

There are more than 400 varieties of potatoes. The two main types of potatoes are waxy and floury. Waxy potatoes are great for salads or any dish where you want the potato to keep their shape after cooking. Floury potatoes work better if you want fluffy potato dishes like mashed potatoes.

Potatoes are grown from small potato tubers called seed potatoes. Farmers usually set aside around five to fifteen percent of their potato harvest for replanting. Seed potatoes can also be purchased from commercial suppliers.

Potatoes are grown on well drained land and prefer a moist acidic soil. The plants also like to be fertilized. Many potato growers apply pesticides after planting to prevent pests like late blight and potato beetles. Blight is a fungus that appears in high humidity and spreads over potato leaves causing it to die. Careful steps need to be taken to not contaminate groundwater.

Potatoes love lots of water and need full sun. As a matter of fact, potatoes are 80% water and 20% solid. Many farmers use irrigation systems to control soil moisture and temperature. The potatoes are ready for harvest when the plants begin to brown and wither after they have flowered for a few weeks. If the potatoes are to be



stored, they need to be dug up after two to three weeks from the day the plant dies. More importantly, they must be dug up before a hard freeze.

### POTATO TRIVIA

- The potato chip is the number one snack food in the world. The thinly sliced and fried potatoes were first created in Saratoga, New York and "Saratoga Crunch Chips" are what we now call potato chips. They were made by Chef George Crum on August 24, 1853.
- The Irish Potato Famine was caused by a fungus (blight) that destroyed the country's ENTIRE potato crop. At least one million people died of starvation at the height of the famine at around 1845. Over one and a half million people left Ireland for North America and Australia.
- The Irish referred to potatoes as "spuds," the name that came from a type of spade used for digging potatoes.
- Potatoes were not part of the first Thanksgiving because the pilgrims were not familiar with them yet.
- Mr. Potato Head was born in Rhode Island in 1952 and was the first toy to be advertised on television.
- The potato was the first vegetable grown in space.
- About 1/4 of the potatoes consumed in the U.S. are French Fries.
- Instant mashed potatoes (dehydrated potatoes) were introduced commercially in 1955.
- The Yukon Gold potato variety honors the Alaskan Klondike gold rush of 1897-1898. Potatoes were practically 'worth their weight in gold.' They were so valued for their vitamin C content that miners traded gold for potatoes.

