

How to Plant Winter Potatoes in a 5-Gallon Bucket

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There is nothing quite as tasty as fresh, homegrown potatoes. Fresh potatoes taste so much better than store-bought ones, but even in mild climates people often find themselves settling for those bland commercial varieties rather than bothering to dig new beds at the end of the summer growing season. It needn't be that way. A 5-gallon bucket holds an amazing number of potatoes, and you have the option of bringing them in or moving them to a warmer place outdoors whenever bad weather threatens. In mild-winter climates, start winter potatoes in late summer or early autumn.

1. Drill a ring of drainage holes around the bottom of each 5-gallon bucket you intend to plant, using a drill and 1/4-inch or larger drill bit.
2. Add a few stones or broken pottery pieces to keep the holes free of dirt, improving drainage.
3. Pour about 4 inches of good-quality potting soil or compost into each bucket, and place two small seed potatoes, evenly spaced, on top of the soil. You use mature potatoes instead; simply, cut them in half with a sharp knife and let them dry out for a day or two before placing the sections cut-side down on the dirt in the bucket.
4. Add more soil or compost over the top of the potatoes to a depth of about 2 inches.
5. Sprinkle the potatoes liberally with water to settle the soil; place the buckets in a warm, sunny spot; and wait for growth.
6. Put more soil over the plants when the potatoes sprout green growth - leaving only the tips of the top leaves protruding. This encourages the plant to continue growing upward, setting potatoes along the underground stem. For a cleaner, easier harvest, pile straw or sawdust over growing potatoes instead of soil. The plant won't know the difference as long as the material is dense enough to block light, and you save time when washing potatoes.
7. Water the soil whenever it is dry within an inch below the surface to keep it evenly moist, and continue adding soil each time the potato plants put on a few inches of new growth until there is no more room in the bucket.
8. Supply weekly nutrients in the form of a low-nitrogen fertilizer or a weak compost or manure tea. Adding good solid compost instead of soil when covering the growth also provides nutrients to the growing plants.

Things You Will Need

- Drill
- 1/4-inch drill bit
- Stones or broken clay pots
- Potting soil or compost
- Knife (optional)
- Watering can
- Low-nitrogen fertilizer or weak compost or manure tea
- Straw or sawdust (optional)

Tip

- Potatoes prefer a fertile, well-drained sandy-loam soil with a pH of 4.8 to 5.4 for optimal growth.
- Harvest new potatoes within 30 days. Harvest mature potatoes when the plants turn brown and wilt with age – usually in 90 to 120 days, depending upon the potato variety.
- Collect the entire crop at once by gently turning the bucket over and dumping the contents out. If you want both new and mature spuds, gather the smaller potatoes by carefully feeling around in the bucket with your fingers to avoid damaging the plant and save the bulk of the potatoes to grow larger. This is easier when you use a dirt substitute such as straw.