This is about basic planting and harvesting of potatoes which I learned from my parents while growing up on a farm in Northwest Kansas. My Mother was of Irish descent so we always planted potatoes on St. Patrick’s day. I still tend to plant my potatoes on that day and have had success doing that, however, you can actually plant potatoes about two weeks or more before the last killing frost. Literature about potatoes indicated the soil needs to be about 45 to 50 degrees.

Potatoes like a loose, rich soil so if you have clay soil you will need to add generous amounts of organic matter. I also add organic matter like leaves and grass clippings to improve the soil even though I have very loose sandy soil.

You need to use “seed potatoes” that are purchased from nurseries, farm stores, etc. The potatoes in grocery stores are usually sprayed with a growth inhibitor to keep them from sprouting. I usually plant red potatoes because I harvest them as they grow rather than waiting for them to mature. Red Pontiac is the one I prefer when I can find it but I have planted white russets, purple, etc. and they all seem to grow in our area. You need to cut seed potatoes into good sized pieces making sure they have at least one “eye”. I usually cut them in larger chunks just to make sure they will grow. I let the cut pieces dry so they heal over so they won’t rot in the soil, you can use a fungicide on them but I have never done that and have been successful. Place them cut side down.

You need to plant potatoes about 4” deep and about 12” apart. You will need to put dirt or compost around them when they are about 6” tall or so to cover the tubers that may push above ground or they will sunburn and turn green which causes a very bitter taste. The only insect I have ever had on my potatoes was the Colorado potato beetle and that was many years ago.

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I sometimes fertilize the potatoes but not always depending upon how rich my soil seems to be. New potatoes are ready to harvest about the time the plants come into flower. Just dig gently around the base of the plant to find the small potatoes and you can enjoy them long before the plant fully matures. When the plant dies to the ground the potatoes are mature and you can then dig them for storage.

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Potato in flower  
Pushing out of ground  
Cover with soil/compost  
More flowers….  

This variety of potato is  
Cherry Red  

Immature potatoes  
Ready to scrub & eat!!!  

~~all photos by Shirley Cogburn~~