

potatoes.

Sow: For an early crop, 'chit' (sprout) potatoes by placing in egg boxes, end with most eyes facing upwards, in a warm, light room until sprouts are 1in long. Plant in comfrey-lined trench 6in deep, end with most eyes facing up. Space early (new) potatoes 12in apart, and maincrop 15in apart.

Soil: Great for improving the soil in a new garden: manure heavily the previous autumn. Warm ground by covering with black plastic sheet or old carpet.

Grow: Once plants have reached 8in high, draw up soil around the stems to prevent greening of tubers and increase crop. Once flowers appear, start watering well (unless weather is already humid) to swell tubers.

Harvest: For earlies, tubers are normally a good size once plant has been flowering two or three weeks: dig down under the plant to check. Harvest maincrop potatoes towards the end of the summer as the foliage dies back. Store in hessian sacks.

Problems: Potato blight is the most serious disease caused by humid conditions: black patches appear on leaves and stems with white furry patch on underside of leaf. Avoid by spacing plants well. Cut infected foliage down to prevent spores washing into the soil and do not grow tomatoes or potatoes nearby. Potato eel worm can move in if you fail to rotate the crop effectively.

For more advice on growing and cooking potatoes, visit the Stylish Gardening Blog: fennelandfern.co.uk