



Mile of Potatoes Project

Help Sheet 2 – How to Care for Your Crop

Protecting Your Potatoes

In early spring, frost damage is the first thing you need to protect your baby spuds from. If frost threatens when shoots poke their head above ground, draw a little soil from the bed edges over them. As the plants begin to emerge, mulch your crop immediately (hopefully with some home-made compost!). Spreading this protective layer keeps the soil warm early in the season and cool as the weather warms. Mulch will also provide your offspring with plenty of nutrients and discourage weeds from growing.

Regular Care and Maintenance

After your youngsters have grown to about 20cm, hoe the soil between the rows into mounds around the plants, leaving a few centimetres still showing. Repeating this regularly increases the height of the mounds and shelters the plants from the sun.

Gently hoeing around your potato plants aerates and breaks up the soil. Do this regularly to allow your potatoes to develop evenly with a good shape. This regular exercise will also prevent weeds from taking hold. When they do appear, be sure to pull out the whole weed by its roots otherwise the plant will simply grow back from the pieces that remain.

Potatoes like moist soil, but if you give them large volumes of water all at once, then they will likely rot or be stunted. Instead, give them a light watering once or twice a day.



As your potato plants grow and develop, do not remove or 'stop' the foliage - it is supplying essential food to the tubers. However, it is good to remove any flower heads or buds which appear because these will produce potato seeds which divert energy from the potato tubers.

Pests and Diseases

The most common ailments to affect potatoes are potato blight, scab, slugs, and wireworm. There is little protection available that can effectively solve these problems. Potato blight has two phases - the first attacks the leaves, the second attacks the potatoes themselves. If your potatoes are attacked by the blight, there is no cure.

However, if you cut the foliage back to 5cm from the ground at the first signs of infection (dark blotches on the leaves) this will prevent the blight from getting to the potatoes themselves. With no foliage, the potatoes will not give of their best. However they will continue to grow for another month or so and be healthy enough to put on your plate.

To keep damaging insects and slugs at bay, try introducing habitats for beneficial insects and animals such as ladybirds and hedgehogs. Encouraging these delightful creatures to live in your garden will certainly help to minimise unwelcome guests!