

# **Growing Potatoes in the Alaska Garden**

spreading disease. If a diseased potato is cut, the juices left on the knife or cutting surface can transmit the disease to the seed pieces cut afterward. Choose a hard but easy-to-clean surface on which to cut the potatoes. Between batches of potatoes, clean the cutting surface with bleach water or soapy water by submerging the cutting board or pouring some of the water over the area being used for cutting. While cleaning the cutting area, soak the knife being used in the water. An alternative method is to cut the seed potatoes on several layers of clean newspaper, replacing the top layers with clean newspaper after every batch. When using the newspaper method, it is still important to wash the knife frequently in bleach water or soapy water.

- 2) Each seed piece should be 1.5 to 2 ounces (about 1.5 to 2 inches in diameter) and contain

sure that the developing potatoes remain covered with soil. When creating multiple potato mounds, make sure there are at least 6 feet between mounds, so the foliage has room to grow.

### **Watering**

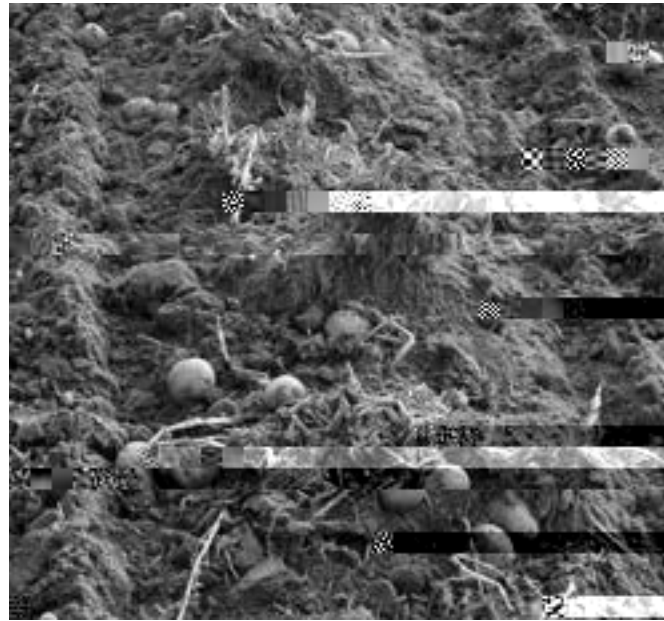
Across the Southcentral and Interior regions of Alaska, supplemental watering during dry weather increases yields and improves tuber quality. If the garden soil is very dry at planting, the seed pieces may benefit from a light, ½-inch watering; dry, peat-based soils will need more than ½ inch of water to adequately moisten. Once the potato plants are taller than 6 inches, they will benefit from an inch of water per week through a combination of rain and irrigation; peat-based soils may need additional water to adequately moisten. When watering by hand, try to minimize wetting the foliage because wet foliage increases the chance of foliar disease. When using a sprinkler, water early in the day so the foliage has a chance to dry before the cooler evening temperatures arrive. The sooner the leaves dry, the less susceptible they are to disease. The most crucial time for the potatoes to receive adequate moisture is when they are flowering, since this is also the time that the new potato tubers are enlarging, or “bulking up.” Decrease supplemental irrigation several weeks before harvest so the soil has the chance to dry out. Drier soil makes it easier to harvest the po-

and the potato skins have toughened. In Alaska, with its short growing season, potatoes are harvested before they are fully mature and while their skins are still very delicate. Cutting back the vines one to two weeks before harvest is recommended to toughen the tuber skin before storage. If the threat of frozen soil doesn't allow time to cut back vines ahead of time, dig the tubers carefully and let the delicate skins toughen naturally in storage.

The easiest way to harvest potatoes in the garden is to dig them up with a shovel or a garden fork, being careful not to damage the tubers in the process. A good way to avoid damaging any potatoes is by digging 8 to 10 inches or more away from the stems, and at least 8 to 10 inches deep. Each variety produces potatoes in different locations under the soil. Some will be shallow and close to the stem, while others will have spread throughout the hill. Carefully digging up the first plant will help to determine what to expect with the other plants of that variety. If any potatoes are damaged during the digging process, those can be eaten right away but should not be stored for winter.

### Storing

While the optimal storage condition for potatoes is a dark, cool, high humidity area, most homes are not equipped to meet the exact storage standards used by commercial producers. Simply storing your potatoes in a cool place where they are not exposed to light or at risk of freezing will suffice for a few months. If the potatoes freeze, they will fall apart once they are thawed and become inedible. A few examples of ideal places to store potatoes are a root cellar, a garage or a slightly heated shed. Try to keep the temperature between 33° and 50°F and shield the potatoes from both natural and artificial light as much as possible. Potatoes that are beginning to sprout are still edible; however, once they begin to shrivel they should be discarded.



If there is no specific way the potatoes will be prepared, the above guidelines for storage are adequate. Store potatoes that will be fried, boiled or saved for seed at slightly different temperatures. Potatoes that are meant for frying should be stored around 50°F, because lower temperatures promote the conversion of starches to sugars, a process that can cause browning of the potatoes when fried,

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## Varieties of potatoes for Alaska\*

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