



POTATOES

What is It?

- Potatoes were originally grown in South America, with the first evidence of potato cultivation dating back to 8,000 BCE. That's close to 10,000 years ago!
- Potatoes are part of the nightshade family with tomatoes and peppers.
- The edible part of the potato grows underground and is called a tuber. Tubers are not roots; they are part of the plant's stem that stores nutrients to help the plant regrow in the spring.
- Potatoes are the fourth largest crop worldwide, just behind corn, rice, and wheat crops. There are over 4,000 varieties of potatoes, making them the most abundant non-grain food product on earth.
- Washington is the second largest producer of potatoes in the United States.
- "New" potatoes are young potatoes that are harvested before they fully mature.
- Researchers are growing potatoes on the International Space Station due to their high nutritional content and ease of growing.



Potatoes in a field, credit: AVSDAA

Grow It

Potatoes make a great addition to Washington gardens. They can be grown directly in the ground, raised beds, or containers. Plant seed potatoes in the spring when daytime temperatures reach 60 degrees F. Be sure to plant only seed potatoes from a reputable source to avoid introducing blight or other diseases.

Potatoes do well in direct sunlight and well-drained soil. Seed potatoes should be chopped into 1-inch pieces with at least two "eyes" on them before planting. Seed potatoes must be sown deeply and have proper room to grow when planted both in the ground and containers.

Water heavily for the first 8 weeks, then begin watering regularly. New potatoes can be harvested seven to eight weeks after planting. Harvest mature potatoes once the green leaves and stems above ground have dried and turned brown. Potatoes are harvested by digging into the soil around the plant.



Make It

Be sure to follow local Food Safety rules and regulations. Learn more here: [Food Safety Rules and Regulations | Washington State Department of Health](#).

Recipe: Corn, Potato, and Cauliflower Soup Yield: 6 servings

Ingredients	Directions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 pound red potatoes • 1/2 medium onion • 2 garlic cloves • 1 1/2 tablespoons olive oil • 1 1/2 teaspoons Kosher salt • 1/2 cup cauliflower, chopped • 1/2 cup corn, fresh or frozen • 1 1/2 teaspoons fresh dried sage or thyme, chopped • 1 cup water or vegetable stock • 1/4 cup low-fat milk • 1/8 teaspoon ground pepper 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Roughly chop potatoes. Place in a large bowl and cover with cold water. 2. Trim, peel, and dice onions. 3. Trim, peel, and chop garlic. 4. Cook the onions, oil, and half of the salt in a large stockpot over low heat, stirring occasionally, until the onions are very soft, about 20 minutes. 5. Add cauliflower, corn, garlic, and sage (or thyme, if using) to the pot and stir to coat. Cook, stirring occasionally, for 10 minutes. 6. Drain the potatoes and add to the pot with water (or vegetable stock) and the remaining salt. Bring to a boil and cook, stirring occasionally, until the potatoes are fork-tender, about 20 minutes. Stir in milk and pepper. Keep warm until ready to serve.

Recipe source: [Healthy School Recipes](#).

Explore interactive taste test resources to encourage participants to try what you made!
[Taste-Testing Event Resources](#)



Food Anatomy —Where do Potatoes Come From?

Learn It

Grades 2–4

Objectives

- Students will be able to correctly identify the parts of a potato and diagram it.

Materials

- Diagram of a potato plant—[find one here](#) (page 29)
- White paper
- Graph paper
- Scissors
- Glue

Directions

Engage:

- Begin by asking students where potatoes come from. Ask students if they have eaten a potato, and how it was prepared (baked, fried, plain, mixed with other foods, etc.)
- Introduce students to potato plant vocabulary and facts using the following information:
 - The potato (*Solanum tuberosum*) is an herbaceous annual that grows up to 100 cm (40 inches) tall and produces a tuber, called a potato. The leaves and stems of the potato plant are toxic and should not be eaten.
 - Potatoes are so rich in nutrients that they rank as the world's fourth most prolific food crop, after corn, wheat and rice.
 - The potato belongs to the Solanaceae, or "nightshade," family of flowering plants and shares the genus *Solanum* with at least 1,000 other species, including tomato and eggplant.

Complete:

- Give each student a copy of the diagram of the potato plant. Point out the various parts of the potato, noting that the part we eat is called a tuber and is found underground.
- Give each student a piece of blank paper. Instruct students to cut their potato diagram into sections. Ask students to recreate their potato plant and glue it onto their paper.
- Give students a piece of graph paper and have them work with a partner to create a word search or crossword puzzle using the potato vocabulary terms on the potato diagram.



Food Anatomy —Where do Potatoes Come From?

Learn It

Directions

Summarize:

- Test understanding by pointing at a part of the potato plant and prompting students to label it.
- Review and the following key concepts:
 - Potatoes are also called tubers and grow underground. The leaves and stems of potato plants are toxic.
 - Potatoes are rich in nutrients and are an important food source around the world.

This lesson was adapted from www.coloradopotato.org.



Filling a potato storage shed, credit: WSDA



Eat It

Potatoes are starchy vegetables. Starch is a carbohydrate that our bodies break down into glucose to give us energy. They are rich in several other important nutrients as well, including B vitamins which help our cells grow and stay healthy, and fiber which is important for maintaining a healthy heart and digestive system. Potatoes contain vitamin C, which helps with healing and supports immune function, but new potatoes (those picked early in the growing season when they are still small) have higher vitamin C content than fully mature potatoes.

Potatoes also provide essential minerals, like potassium, a type of electrolyte that supports heart health, and iron, which is essential for making red blood cells and building muscles.

Read It

- Potato Pants!, by Laurie Keller
- The Couch Potato, by Jory John
- The Enormous Potato, by Aubrey Davis
- The Greatest in the World, by Ben Clanton

More About It

- Lesson for Preschool by South Dakota State University: [Potato - Preschool Lesson Plan](#)
- Lessons from Washington Agriculture in the Classroom
 - K–2nd grade: [Potatoes: More Than Fries](#)
 - 3rd–5th grade: [Powerful Potato](#)
 - 6th– 8th grade: [The Geography of Thanksgiving Dinner \(6-8\)](#).
 - 9th–12th grade: [The Geography of Thanksgiving Dinner \(9-12\)](#).

This resource was adapted for Washington state from Montana Harvest of the Month Classroom Bites: Potatoes
[Harvest of the Month - Classroom Bites for Potatoes](#)



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Washington Harvest of the Season: Potatoes