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Sweet Potato Planting & Harvest

1. Loose, freely-worked soil will give the potatoes a chance to become large and smooth. Fertilize prior to planting and 3-4 weeks after, as it will increase yield.
2. Plant potatoes in rows spaced 3 ft. apart and plants 10-18" apart, on a hill 12" high (the higher the row the more space for the potatoes to develop).
3. Keep the soil worked to a fairly "loose" condition and "hoe" or pull out weeds until the plants produce enough vegetation to smother out most weeds. Cultivate to keep vines from rooting where they touch the ground.
4. **Optional Black Plastic Method**- you can speed up the development and increase the yields by heating up the soil. After preparing bed for planting, lay black plastic down, anchor edge with soil, and cut an "X" where you plan to plant the plants.
5. **Potato Bag**- another option is to try planting in a potato bag which will keep soil warmer.
6. Maturity is hard to determine as some people like a small "baby baker," others desire the potatoes to grow to "jumbo" size. Simply examine an average hill and dig the rest when they approach the size you desire. Sweet Potatoes are a long crop (90 days), so estimate harvesting after September 1. Harvest immediately if nipped by frost in fall.
7. **Harvesting**- Use care in "digging" your potatoes being careful not to cut or bruise them. A shovel or large pronged fork is ideal. With a loose row just pull the dirt away with your hands and gently place potatoes in storage basket or crate.
8. The rich, black soil of some gardens may cause discoloration on the outside skin of some potatoes. Don't be alarmed, storage life and taste have not been affected.
9. **Storage**- place ventilated crates or baskets of freshly dug potatoes inside a building. Let them "dry out" or "air" 8 to 10 days at 85°F and 90% humidity. This helps to heal cuts and the bruises that may occur and toughens the skin for winter storage. After potatoes are dried out, place them in a permanent storage area where the temperature ranges from 55-60°F and 85% humidity. While in storage, avoid unnecessary handling.