

The favorite question from readers this month is, “Will you repeat the recipe for Ciscoe’s Potatoes in a Can?” Years ago Ciscoe Morris gave the Master Gardeners permission to spread the word about this easy method for growing tasty spuds.

Start with a clean garbage can or similar container. Plastic works great because it won’t rust out and you’ll use it year after year. Drainage is absolutely necessary. Drill several holes in the bottom. It also helps to drill some holes in the side about half an inch up from the bottom of the container.

Fill the container with about 4 inches of good potting soil. Mix in about a handful of slow release 14-14-14 organic fertilizer. Place whole seed potatoes into the soil leaving about five inches between potatoes. Don’t skimp on the potatoes. Cover with one or two inches of soil to completely cover each potato. Water the spuds in. After four weeks you’ll begin using a liquid organic fertilizer until the vines are well established in the garbage can.

Every time the potato vines reach four inches, cover them over with one-inch of compost or straw. When the vines reach the top of the container stop filling in with soil or straw. The vines will continue to grow and will eventually flower. Potatoes will grow along the buried vines.

Once the potatoes become big enough you can reach in and pick a few for dinner any time you want. These spuds are called “new potatoes.” They won’t keep long, so pick them and eat them. If you reach in and the potatoes seem too small just cover them back up. Keep the unharvested potatoes covered. After the vines die back at the end of the summer, the potatoes remaining are storing potatoes. You can pick them and store them as you normally would. They will keep well as long as they are stored in a dark, cool and relatively dry location.

All during the growing period make sure to provide adequate water. You don’t want to drown the plants but it’s also important that the soil at the bottom never dries out. In late summer your potatoes may need to be watered on a daily basis. Water with a sprinkling can to avoid wetting the foliage. Ciscoe says this method of growing spuds is really fun. You get lots of them without using much space and it amazes visitors to your yard.

Master Gardener Carl Dahlberg who tried Ciscoe’s potato secret said he mixed potting soil in with the compost as the container was filled. In his experiment using Ciscoe’s method of straight potting soil the water ran down the sides of the garbage can making the bottom too wet and the top and sides too dry. Carl recommends using a half and half mixture of potting soil and compost for best results.

Most local nurseries, Central Market in Poulsbo, Sacks Feed and many other garden and feed centers have seed potatoes now. You can also use organic potatoes from your local grocery. Don’t use non-organic potatoes which are sometimes treated with a non-sprouting agent so they won’t work for home gardening. Try Yellow Finn, Fingerling or Russet.

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