

- Speaker 1: [00:00](#) Welcome to the old fashioned on purpose podcast. Out of all the vegetables I'd grow and I grow quite a few, potatoes are my favorites, not just because I was born and raised in Idaho. You do know it's the potato state, right? It even has famous potatoes on the license plate and not just because I could literally eat them for every meal and never get tired of them. But I actually love growing potatoes because when you harvest them, it's like digging for buried treasure. You never know what you're going to get. Keep listening for tips so you know exactly when to harvest your potatoes this year and how you can store them so they last as long as possible. I'm your host Jill winger and for the last 10 years I've been helping people just like you who feel disenchanting by modern life. I'll show you how to create the life you really want by learning how to grow your own food and master old fashioned skills.
- Speaker 1: [01:08](#) Even though potatoes are crazy simple to grow, I remember my very first year when I started growing them and I found myself with quite a few questions on what the heck to do with those things. I'm guessing that if you're new to gardening or new to potatoes, you might have some of these same questions. I want to start off by giving you some of my best potato harvesting tips and how to know when to harvest them and then we'll dive into some storage techniques to make sure you have potatoes well into the winter. Okay. First thing's first harvesting. It's a little tricky because we have the green part of the plant that we see all summer long and we don't really know what's going on under the surface. So the concern is is if we start to dig the potatoes too early, we're going to hurt the plants and ultimately decrease the harvest that we could have gotten.
- Speaker 1: [02:13](#) You'll know when your potato plants are ready for digging. When the, green part, the leafy part of the plant turns Brown and Withers. So for us, this is usually September, October. When this starts to happen, you can pull out potatoes while the foliage is still green, and I actually did this a couple of weeks ago. I needed some cute little new potatoes for supper. I gently pull back some soil, plucked a few potatoes from around the edges of each of the plants and covered everything back up so you can absolutely do that. But for your final largest harvest, you want to wait until the foliage is Brown and then even after it turns Brown, as long as I don't have any hard frosts on the horizon, I will still wait a couple of weeks before I get to digging. This is just gonna help the plants put their very last bit of energy into growing the potatoes and it also helps the skins to toughen up just a bit more.

Speaker 1: [03:22](#) So they last longer in storage. Now after this happens, everything's Brown. You're getting ready. You want to watch the weather now, you definitely want to have everything out of the ground before it freezes. If you do get frosts in your area, but if you can, it's best to do your digging on a warm, dry day after a few days where there has not been rain and you can even, you know if you have automatic waters or sprinklers on that portion of your garden. Like I shut off my sprinklers for the potato beds when I know that the harvest is coming. You know obviously they don't need water if they're starting to turn Brown and it just keeps the harvesting process a little simpler because everything isn't wet and mucky. If it does rain in the middle of your waiting period, just see if you can give it a few more days before you start harvesting. Although there has been more than one year where I have found myself furiously digging potatoes out of the garden when a snow storm is rolling in. So if worst comes to worst, just get them out of the ground, whether it's wet or dry or cold or warm and they'll probably be okay. It's better to pull them out, then leave them in and let them get frozen cause then they won't be any good at all.

Speaker 1: [04:46](#) Now for the actual digging, there's something called a potato fork, which actually looks like a Pitchfork with thick tines. So you can use one of those. Or even just a regular Pitchfork or a shovel. I have found I have an incredible ability to stab potatoes with any sort of garden implements, no matter how hard I try not to. So what I will generally do is just use my hands. It's a little tough on the old fingernails. Especially if your ground is hard. But when I use my hands to uncover and clean and did the potatoes out, I usually have less potato fatalities. Now if the ground is just way too hard for you to dig with your fingers and that has happened to me some years, then I will use a shovel very carefully and I'll kind of position the shovel away from the base of the plant and just start loosening it to see if that helps me determine where the potatoes start and end. It's inevitable that you're probably gonna impale a potato at some point through this process. So if that happens and it probably will just separate that particular potato out from the rest and plan on eating it within the next few days, it's not going to be completely ruined. It just won't store as well in your basement or your root cellar or wherever you're keeping your spuds.

Speaker 1: [06:16](#) My last little tip for you as you harvest your potatoes is to resist the urge to clean them off. Now I know this seems counterintuitive because when we bring food out of the dirt, we want to wash the dirt off, but washing them with water before storage is going to cause them to go bad so much faster. They'll get mold and rotten and you just don't want to deal with that.

So you can brush off the big chunks of dirt and as they dry it's going to come off even easier. But there's no reason at all that they have to be completely clean or washed or 100% dirt free before they go into storage. A little bit of dirt never hurt anybody. And then as you bring them out to use them, that's when you can wash them individually. That won't hurt them, but just don't do it before they go in the boxes.

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Okay. If you plan to store your potato harvest throughout the winter, you will need to cure them for about two weeks. And this is totally worth the little bit of extra effort. That curing process is going to help toughen up their skin and also can help heal any little cuts or bruises that they might have that you want to be having those sealed up before they go into a box. So if you just have a few potatoes, you don't need to cure them, but like a large quantity that's going to be stored. Definitely plan this into your schedule. In order to cure your storing potatoes, you just need to have them laid out in a single layer on a table or tray or in a box. So for me, what I'll do sometimes if I know it's not gonna freeze, I will stick the potatoes out on the work bench in my husband's shop.

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It's not heated or climate controlled. But it keeps them out of the sunlight, direct sunlight out of the weather. And as long as it's not freezing cold, they're not gonna, they're not gonna freeze. In a perfect world, you want your curing temperatures to be between 55 and 65 degrees Fahrenheit with a humidity level of 85% but I'm guessing like very, very few of us, definitely not me, are going to have this perfect ultimate potato curing climate. So just do the best that you can. The very least just make sure you have a mostly cool spot for them and then cover the layers of potatoes with a towel or even, you know, just anything that's going to cover and keep the light off of them. You still want the air to circulate but the light off and you'll probably be just fine. So after this two week curing process, you're going to check the potatoes again.

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You want to take out any that are bruised or look a little smushy or shriveled cause they're just not going to last throughout the season and you can eat those guys right away and now it comes time to transfer them into storage. So I get a lot of questions about storing vegetables. And honestly it can be a little tricky if you don't have a legit root cellar and I don't have one. So I have to get creative. We have an unfinished room in our basement that has concrete walls. It is not perfect but that's where I generally store my root crops. And if I put my potatoes in there, I usually put them in cardboard boxes with the flaps closed so

they cannot get light. And there's not a lot, a lot of light on down there anyway cause we're not in that room a whole lot.

Speaker 1: [10:03](#) But I want to keep them dark. And if I do that, they'll usually last well into January or February. You could also store your potatoes in your garage. Um, if you don't have a root cellar, that's another option. Just make sure they don't freeze. So if your garage is completely unheated or separate from your house, the frozen storage potato is a dead storage potato. So make sure it doesn't freeze and keep those temps lower than 40 degrees and higher than 32 degrees Fahrenheit. Anything higher than 40 degrees is going to cause them to want to sprout and shrivel more quickly. So this sounds really technical and I don't want to discourage any of you because here's the deal. Even if you don't have the perfect setup, it's a little bit warmer. It's a little bit cooler. As long as it's not freezing right or it's not as dark or not as damp as you'd like, you can still store some potatoes for a good couple of months.

Speaker 1: [11:00](#) So give it a try your first year, then see what happens and adjust accordingly. But don't let this discourage you from trying because it doesn't have to be exactly perfect. I just wanted to give you some of the specifics. So you just have an aim that you can shoot for. As the potatoes are in the boxes or whatever, you're storing them in crates, cardboard, you name it, it'll work. Make sure you are checking them often. If sprouts begin to form on the potatoes, you want to knock those sprouts off and also remove any smooshy potatoes or ones that are starting to get robbed. You know the, the sayings about one bad Apple ruins the bunch. It's the same with a potato. You get one rotten one, it's going to quickly infect all the good ones, so get them out of there. If they're just squishy, you can eat them. Obviously tossed the rotten ones, but as long as you're checking, it's to help the whole lot last longer.

Speaker 1: [11:58](#) From there it's just really an occasional check and remembering to use them for your dishes. That's probably the hardest part for me. I often forget they're down there out of sight, out of mind, and more than once, you know, I'll be down there, come March and I will have giant potato sprouts peaking out of the cardboard boxes. Not ideal, but it does happen if you have some shriveled up potatoes by the end of the season that you don't really want to eat, but they're not super duper sprouted, you can use those as seed potatoes for your garden the following year. Now like I said, if they're really, really long sprouts, some of mine have been Epic, like a foot long or more. Those guys are probably not gonna make great seed potatoes, but little ones will work just fine. All right, wrapping up here, I

wanted to give you a few more tips for storing and keeping potatoes, just to keep in mind as you plan your garden for next year.

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There are different potato varieties that do better in storage than others. So for example, red potatoes, which are my favorite, those in Yukon gold, love them. They don't keep as well as the thicker skinned varieties like a russet. So those good old baking potatoes are probably going to be the ones that last the longest in storage. You also want to make sure you keep your potatoes away from apples or onions because those apples and onions can release some gasses that will make your potatoes spoil more quickly. And lastly, just remember to keep them dark, dark, dark. When a potato is exposed to light, that's what makes them turn green, right? It's a chemical called Solonin and that's what makes the little peels green. And if you eat a large amount of Solonin, it can make you a little bit sick. It's not going to kill you.

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So it's just, but it's just not ideal. So we don't want green potatoes. If you have a few green spots, you can just trim it off. No big deal. I've done that many, many times. But if the entire potato is green, it's probably best to toss it and I wouldn't give it to your chickens either. So I cannot wait for you to try growing potatoes if you haven't already. They are so satisfying, so delicious. And it's like searching for buried treasure in your garden each and every year. If you are ready to finally do this homesteading thing, but you're feeling a little bit unsure of where or how to start. Well, I've got you covered. I just so happened to have an entire library of resources. I've put together for homesteaders just like you, and you can get complimentary access to this library over at [theprairiehomestead.com/grow](http://theprairiehomestead.com/grow). We'll leave a link in the show notes if you want to go click over and check it out, and that's it for today. Thank you so much for listening. If you have a minute, I would be so appreciative if you would hit subscribe and leave a quick review so more people can find this podcast and bring home setting into their lives. I will chat with you next time on the old fashioned on purpose podcasts.