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The Humble Potato

How many uses does this tuber have?

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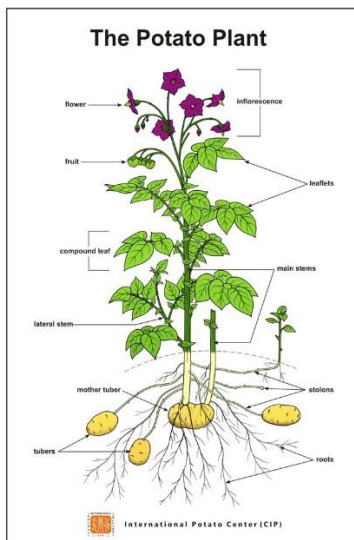
What is a Potato?

The **potato** is a [starchy](#) food, a [tuber](#) of the [plant](#) *Solanum tuberosum* and is a [root vegetable](#) native to the [Americas](#). The plant is a [perennial](#) in the nightshade family [Solanaceae](#).¹



¹ This section was found in [Wikipedia](#).

History



Wild potato [species](#) can be found from the southern [United States](#) to southern [Chile](#).^[4] The potato was originally believed to have been domesticated by [Native Americans](#) independently in multiple locations,^[4] but later genetic studies traced a single origin, in the area of present-day southern [Peru](#) and extreme northwestern [Bolivia](#). Potatoes were [domesticated](#) there approximately 7,000–10,000 years ago, from a species in the [Solanum brevicaulle](#) complex.^{[5][6][7]} In the [Andes](#) region of South America, where the species is [indigenous](#), some close relatives of the potato are cultivated.

Potatoes were introduced to [Europe](#) from the Americas by the Spanish in the second half of the 16th century. Today they are a [staple food](#) in many parts of the world and an integral part of much of the world's [food supply](#). As of 2014, potatoes were the world's fourth-largest food crop after [maize](#) (corn), [wheat](#), and [rice](#).^[8] Following millennia of [selective breeding](#), there are now over 5,000 [different types of potatoes](#).^[6] Over 99% of potatoes presently cultivated worldwide descend from varieties that originated in the lowlands of [south-central Chile](#).^[9] The importance of the potato as a food source and culinary ingredient varies by region and is still changing. It remains an essential crop in Europe, especially Northern and Eastern Europe, where [per capita](#) production is still the highest in the world, while the most rapid expansion in production since 2000 has occurred in [southern](#) and [eastern Asia](#), with [China](#) and [India](#) leading the world in overall production as of 2018.²

Pop Culture

In American culture, potatoes have certainly played their part. Playskool's Mr. and Mrs. Potato Head's brought smiles to many faces with their interchangeable parts that at times would defy logic, i.e. hand-nose. And who could forget all those "sols" Mark Watney's potatoes, with or without Vicodin, were his only source of nourishment—they literally saved his life. Then there's the bit about Robert Pattinson...eating only potatoes for two weeks? That's dedication. One of the biggest contributors would have to be the

² This entire section was found in [Wikipedia](#).

“Loaded Potato,” a spud carrying eighteen-wheeler with a four-ton potato. While not real, it’s still a sight to see.

Outdoor Uses

Besides growing them of course, potatoes have several non-agricultural purposes.

- ☞ Rust: Finding that your garden tools are rusty? Cut a potato in half and rub it on the rusty surface. The acids will help lift the rust. Scrubbing will still be required but not as much.
- ☞ Windows: Rub a cut potato on a window’s surface. While it will leave a starchy film, the potato will help remove dust and debris. Rinse with water, and voila!
- ☞ Compost: Potato skin is rich in nutrients and a fantastic addition to any compost collection.

Indoor Uses

While cooking might come to mind, the potato has many uses inside the house that aren’t necessarily in the kitchen.

- ☞ Cast Iron Skillet: With a little olive oil, sea salt, and a cut potato, you can rub the grime and rust away.
- ☞ Homemade Stamp: Cut a potato in half and using a paring knife cut in a design. With simple paints or dyes, the stamp can be used on anything from shirt designs to homemade cards.
- ☞ Broken Bulb Removal: With the power to the light off, cut a potato in half and dry off the excess liquid from the potato before pressing it into the bulb and unscrewing it from the socket.
- ☞ Clean Silverware: Boil potatoes, save the water. Submerge silverware completely and remove once they’ve regained their shine (anywhere from a few days to a week depending on tarnish level).

Culinary Delights

Baked, fried, cut, dices sliced, chipped, smashed, mashed, boiled, stewed or steamed, there are many ways to serve up this tuber. *Though raw is in option, it’s likely to cause gastrointestinal distress due to its type of starch and compounds solanine and chaconine which are considered toxic in large quantities.*

And they are a kitchen helper. Too much salt in your soup gravy or stew? Just add a few potatoes that will absorb the excess salt.

Medicinal/Cosmetic Applications

Potatoes are known for their anti-inflammatory properties as well as their ability to brighten skin and lighten dark spots.

- ☞ Puffy Eyes: Place thin slices on eyes for up to twenty minutes for a reduction in puffiness and dark circles.
- ☞ Facemask: Using a food processor, blend half a potato (with skin) in a food processor with juice of half a lemon and four tablespoons of baking soda. Apply for up to ten minutes for best results.
- ☞ Hot/Cold Compress: Either bake/boil a potato or cool it in the refrigerator for a hour then wrap it in a clean cloth and use it as needed.

How to Grow Potatoes



1) Two weeks after the last frost, go to your local nursery and find several potatoes with multiple eyes (above).



2) Cut each potato so that each section has 1 to 3 eyes (above), unless the potato is the size of an egg (these can be planted whole). Wait 2 days before planting (or long enough for the skin to dry up but not the buds).



3) In soil that drains well mix in compost/manure/leaves or nursery recommended garden enrichment mixture, making sure the soil is loose.



4) Dig a trench (ideal) or holes 6-8 inches deep. For larger output, trenches should be spaced three feet holes and 12 inches apart.



5) Plant your spuds with the eyes up, no closer than 12 inches.



6) Cover with 4 inches of soil, water and wait. Potatoes need one to two inches of water per week.



7) After sprouts have emerged, continue to mound soil around the base (to keep the new potatoes from developing toxic compounds from being exposed to the sun, turning them green).



8) About 3 to 4 months after planting, get ready to harvest!

References and Online Sources

***Not very well cited or sourced as it was for a HW assignment on templates.

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