

# Tips to Be a Successful Potato Farmer

Potatoes are highland crops that grow well in most parts of Kenya. Most common types of Irish potatoes are red and white. The red ones have a longer shelf life and the whites are better for cooking.

Conditions for potato farming: find land in high production areas that is easily accessible and has reddish soil. Avoid land that is close to a river to minimize chances of frost bites. Avoid land with a bad history in potato production. Buy seeds from certified seed companies and not from fellow farmers. Dig up furrows of at least 15cm to 40 cm and place the required fertilizers prior to planting. 12 to 16 cm when sprouts appear gently fill the trench with 3 to 4 inches of soil and repeat in several weeks.

## Potato production

Potatoes contain buds or eyes that sprout and grow into plants. Cut the seed 5-6 days before planting and hold the seed in a well ventilated spot to prevent rotting when planting.

Plant in loamy and sandy soils that are drained, aerated and rich in organic matter. Most popular varieties are Tigoni, Kenya mavuno and Shangi. When sunlight falls on the tubers they turn green. Add organic mulch between the rows to conserve moisture, weed control and cooling the soil.

## Pests and diseases

Scout for pest and diseases during the vegetative phase. Root knot nematodes are microscopic parasites that feed on the roots and infests the tuber resulting to the development of

swelling.

Aphids and white flies spread viral diseases. Aphids and caterpillars can be controlled by applying recommended pesticide. Potato blight affects both the leaves and the stems and will have water soaked lesions.

## **Controlling pests and diseases**

Control perennial weeds in the field by ploughing or applying the recommended herbicides or use cultural methods such as removing the roots and tilling the soil to minimize root knot nematode.

During harvest, the vines should be removed 1 to 2 weeks before digging up the tubers. Leave the potatoes buried on the ground to allow the skin to thicken to prevent shrinkages due to water loss and storage pathogens. Potatoes need good air movement during storage to help them dry and cool.