

Fertilisers for growing Potatoes

Seed potatoes need to produce strong roots and leaves, before they can develop tubers. Nitrogen is required to encourage the leaf growth, with Phosphorus and Potassium to boost root formation. Until there are enough leaves to promote root growth, the plant will not have the strength to produce a good crop of potato tubers. Green leaves produce the starch by photosynthesis to feed the tubers. It is usual to dig in rich compost or manure prior to planting the potatoes - this increases the nitrogen. If the manure was dug in months before, most of the nitrogen will have washed out. The addition of pelleted chicken manure (N:P:K 4:2:1) or Growmore (N:P:K: 7:7:7) at planting time gives a good balanced feed. Apply these at 200gms /m².

Once the leaves (haulms) are visible and growing well, the addition of potassium will increase the tuber development. Commercial potato fertilisers have reduced nitrogen and increased potassium for this reason. For First and Second Earlies, tubers are required in 12 weeks, so 20gms/m² of Potassium Sulphate (Sulphate of Potash) should be added around the roots once the haulms have developed. Main crop can take 20 or more weeks, so Potassium Sulphate can be added at 200gms/m of row once the haulms are big enough for the leaves to be touching the ground.

Farmers and commercial growers tend to use a higher potassium fertiliser at planting time, to save having to do it later. They will have tested their soil and prepared the field with a nitrogen balance prior to planting. Potassium and Phosphorus do not leach out of soil as quickly as nitrogen.