

South Harpenden Allotments and Gardens Society

Seed Potatoes 2020

Potato Diseases:

Blight: We get lots of questions in the shop at potato selling time about this serious disease of both potatoes and tomatoes. It is caused by a soil-borne fungus (*Phytophthora infestans*), the spores of which overwinter in UK soils. There are many strains of the fungus and no potatoes or tomatoes are entirely resistant to one or the other of them. It is not possible to kill off the fungus spores in the soil. Blight is a much greater menace to second earlies and – especially – main crop varieties of potato and to outdoor tomatoes, i.e. those crops that spend the longest time in the soil, than it is to the earlier maturing varieties. Blight CAN strike very early under the right conditions. If you want to keep up-to-date see: <http://www.blightwatch.co.uk>. At the time of writing, there is no product available to the amateur that will guard against blight or treat crops affected by it.

Eelworm/nematodes: Similarly, most potatoes grown in the UK are susceptible to some degree to these pests, of which there are many forms. Those with better than average resistance are shown in the notes. There is little you can do about eelworm/nematodes except to leave a gap of 3 to 4 years before you grow potatoes again in the same location. Earthing up is supposed to offer some protection but the evidence for this is poor.

Scab: The causes of potato scab are still the subject of debate. Although unsightly, the scabs are easily removed by peeling and the potatoes are edible. Control is best done by NOT liming the soil and by making sure that the crop is well-watered during tuber growth, i.e. about the last 6 to 8 weeks of the growing cycle.

Blackleg: is caused by the bacterium *Pectobacterium atrosepticum* and only affects potatoes. It is one of the earliest potato diseases to appear, sometimes as early as June, especially in wet years. You may see the following symptoms: as early as June the stems of potato plants appear stunted and pale green or yellow, leaves at the top of affected stems may be small, stiff and have margins curled inwards. At ground level, these affected stems appear black and rotted and if tubers form, the flesh may be grey or brown and rotten. Control is mostly by lifting and destroying any infected plants, by rotation of potatoes, by buying only certified seed. Some varieties, e.g. Charlotte and Vales Sovereign are noted for their resistance to blackleg. There are no chemical controls.

Spraing: is a disease that affects potato tubers and causes brown streaks in the flesh. Spraing is most commonly caused by two viruses, tobacco rattle virus (TRV) which is transmitted by nematodes, or potato mop top virus (PMTV) transmitted by the powdery scab fungus *Spongospora subterranea* (see above). Control of the disease is generally by ensuring that seed is disease free although the strain transmitted by nematodes can be controlled to some extent by the use of nematicides.

The Shop: We shall be selling the following varieties in the shop in 2020. Supplies are limited so if you want something specific, come early. Once they are sold out, we cannot get any more.

FIRST EARLIES: The rough (very rough) rule of thumb is that these will be ready to harvest from about 90 – 100 days after planting.

***Arran Pilot:** a white-flesh potato that is regarded as particularly tasty and can be a heavy cropper. Oval white-flesh tuber that is widely used as a salad potato as well as for boiling/mash. **Has good resistance to scab.**

***Epicure:** produces a good yield of round, white-skinned tubers with deep eyes and a white, floury flesh. It is known for its resistance to withstand frost damage to foliage. Tests show low resistance to potato cyst nematodes of all kinds.

***Foremost:** an oval, white-flesh potato that often produces larger than average tubers, but yields are generally moderate. Often grown as a salad potato but also for boiling/mash.

***Lady Christl:** is a high-yielding variety that produces numerous uniform attractive tubers. Excellent cooking qualities. It shows good resistance to bruising, splitting, common scab and potato leafroll virus. It is susceptible to foliage blight.

***Pentland Javelin:** can be high yielding but bulks-up late in the season to produce short, creamy tubers. Has **high resistance** to some potato viruses and to some potato cyst nematodes. **Moderately susceptible to tuber blight.** Cooks well, particularly when boiled.

***Rocket:** a round, white-flesh potato, which crops well. One of the earliest to mature. Often grown as a salad potato but also good for boiling/mash. Will do well in a polytunnel or under cloches. **Has some resistance to nematodes.**

***Sharpes Express:** an oval, pale-cream-fleshed potato with a rather 'floury' texture and regarded as having a good flavour. Can be grown as a salad potato but also good for roasting and boiling/mash.

***Ulster Prince:** produces long, oval tubers with white flesh. Like most potatoes it is susceptible to blight (leaf and tuber).

'SALAD' POTATOES

Salad potatoes are often thought of as the earliest to mature. Most are, in fact, second earlies or main crop varieties so can thus be left in the ground well into the Summer. Some first earlies are also grown as salad or new potatoes (see above). If you want small (new) potatoes, then – clearly – you dig them up earlier but yields can be small in terms of weight. Like first earlies, ready from about 90-100 days after planting.

***Charlotte:** a second early, much favoured as a salad variety, but also a good general purpose potato. Tubers are strikingly long, with pale skins and pale yellow flesh with a waxy appearance. Better if left to get slightly bigger than 'new potato' size. Some society members have reported poor boiling qualities but other members have NOT found this problem.

***Pink Fir Apple:** a main crop potato very commonly grown as a salad potato. This is the famously knobbly potato and can be a prolific cropper. Can also be left in the ground well into the Autumn when the tubers can get surprisingly large. Many people describe it as the tastiest of potatoes. Others find the task of getting every last knobbly bit out of the soil (very necessary if you don't want potatoes everywhere in the following year) and the labours of cleaning the tubers are great deterrents (you have been warned !!!). Distinctly creamy flesh.

***Nicola:** a second early. Again long, oval tubers with yellowish flesh and can be a prolific cropper. Best as a salad or boiled potato and a good alternative to Charlotte. **Has some resistance to eelworm.**

SECOND EARLIES: Again, as a very rough rule of thumb, these are ready between about 100 to 120 days after planting.

***British Queen**: an old variety (1894). It produces moderate to high yields of white-skinned, oval tubers with a white, **floury** flesh. It has low resistance to nematodes.

***Estima**: an oval potato with pale yellow flesh. A heavy cropper that can yield large potatoes; particularly suitable for roasting and baking. **Moderate resistance across a range of diseases (but not blight).**

***Maris Peer**: a smallish, oval potato with white flesh. Good general purpose potato which crops well. A compact variety that could be grown in large containers.

***Wilja**: often grown as a main crop. Long, oval tubers with a pale yellow flesh. Good cropper suitable for all potato uses. Stores well. **Good resistance to scab and eelworm and one of the better ones for blight resistance (but still only moderate).**

MAIN CROP: Ready, roughly, 120 days or more after planting. You can often leave these varieties in the ground until late September.

***Blue Belle**: a short, oval potato with striking, irregular purplish patches which are only skin deep. It is a moderate to good cropper (shares parentage with Cara (below)) and produces white-fleshed tubers. Plants have low resistance to nematodes and late blight.

***Cara**: a short oval potato with white flesh. Looks a bit like a King Edward. Can be a prolific cropper (came out best in a trial at Piggottshill Site – see earlier Newsletter). Suitable for all potato uses although a bit small for chips. **One of the potatoes most resistant to eelworm, and the tubers have good resistance to late blight.**

***Desiree**: long oval tubers with white or pale cream flesh and a strikingly red skin. A tasty potato. Has good drought resistance. A very heavy cropper on our sites and can produce very large potatoes. Suitable for all uses, especially baking for the large ones. Stores well. **Good resistance to scab.**

***Kerr's Pink**: Short oval, pink tubers with cream flesh. Late foliage maturity. Moderate yields. Tests show susceptibility to skin spot and most potato cyst nematodes.

***King Edward**: an oval potato with creamy-white flesh. Moderate cropper, and tends to crop late into the growing season with lots of moderately-sized tubers. Widely regarded as a very tasty potato and particularly good for roasting. **Can be susceptible to drought, but has good resistance to scab and reputedly good resistance to slugs (there seems to be no reliable evidence for this).**

***Maris Piper**: Oval tubers with white flesh. Tends to be a heavy cropper with uniform tubers. Good all-round cooking potato. Stores well. **Has some resistance to eelworm.**

***Majestic**: long oval tubers with a white, waxy flesh. A good general purpose potato, which tends to be a heavy cropper early in its growing season.

***Pentland Crown:** Potentially high-yielding, oval white tubers with white to cream flesh. Susceptible to foliage blight and spraing. Some resistance to blackleg, common scab, leaf roll virus and virus yellows. Susceptible to most potato cyst nematodes.

***Picasso:** Medium-sized, oval, yellowish to white-fleshed tubers with pink eyes. **Susceptible to powdery scab and some nematodes.** Resistant to common potato viruses and common scab. Can give very high yields in a good year. Can be grown as a second early.

***Sarpo Mira:** one of the newer varieties bred for **good resistance to foliage and tuber blight** but has low resistance to nematodes. Tubers are long, oval and red-skinned with white flesh.

***Valor:** produces high yields of white tubers of good all round cooking quality. It has very high tolerance of heat and drought. Some resistance to late blight on tubers, bruising and splitting. Mixed resistance and susceptibility to eelworm(s) and nematodes (dependent on species).

There is more information via the SEARCH facility at: <http://varieties.ahdb.org.uk/varieties/view/>

Please be aware that this 'legacy' site is due for 'migration'. The website does not say when this will happen or where the site will be migrated to.