



# Teacher Resources

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## **Growing Information**

The potato (*Solanum tuberosum*) is an herbaceous annual that grows up to 1m tall and produces a tuber also called a potato. So rich in starch, the potato ranks as the world's fourth most important food crop, after maize, wheat and rice. The potato belongs to the Solanaceae or Nightshade family of flowering plants.

There are many varieties of potato which mature at different times of the year and have different cooking and storage properties. Jersey is famous for the Jersey Royal new potato which is a very early, flavoursome variety.

## **Growing your Jersey Royal Potatoes**

Plants need light, water, food, space, air and the correct temperature to grow well.

- **Light:** Plants need light to grow, so be sure to place your container in a well-lit area with good air movement and space.
- **Water:** Potatoes need water to grow, but make sure you do not over water or they will go mouldy. Ensure that the soil is damp – water every 3 – 4 days.
- **Food:** Potatoes need food to grow – this comes from nutrients in the compost. You may wish to add some extra plant food, if you do read the instructions carefully.
- **Temperature:** The ideal temperature for growing potatoes is 10-15°C.

The Genuine Jersey Products Association supplies you with a container with drainage holes, compost, some specialist potato fertiliser and two sprouted seed Jersey Royal potato tubers.

Fill the container a third full of compost. Mix in the fertilizer. Place the two tubers on top of the compost and cover with more compost. Water the compost so that it is damp and not wet. (The potato does not need much water until the top is growing.)

Place the bucket in a warm sunny spot. The plants will need light; this can either be inside beside a window or outdoors.

The potato needs to be protected from frost so either bring the bucket indoors or cover with bubble wrap if frosty weather is forecast.

Once the shoots emerge, keep the soil damp but not wet. If the potato does get over-watered, place it in the sun so that the compost can dry out a bit. Over watering inhibits growth.



## **Sources of Information**

We recognise that there is a broad range of classes that take part in our competition with varied teaching aims. We have identified a few websites offering quality educational information to assist you in achieving your goals when participating in the Genuine Jersey Royal Potato Growing Competition.

The Jersey Royal potato has its own website [www.jerseyroyals.co.uk](http://www.jerseyroyals.co.uk). There is a wealth of information, in particular under the heading 'About Jersey Royals', that includes the history of our famous potato, production data and health benefits.

The British Potato Council has revamped its information based on the 2008 Year of the Potato and has some excellent worksheets for identifying the parts of the potato plant and some super drawings for colouring in. They also have some good information on different varieties of potato and their use in cooking.

[www.growyourownpotatoes.org.uk/pc67/Teacher-resources](http://www.growyourownpotatoes.org.uk/pc67/Teacher-resources)

Potatoes New Zealand has some very good information with a strong emphasis on Nutrition [www.potatoes.co.nz/schools](http://www.potatoes.co.nz/schools).

## IN THE FIELD

**J**ersey Royals are unique, there is no other early potato on the market that can be called a true Heritage variety.

The seed potatoes planted today have the same genetic fingerprint as the original parent that Hugh de la Haye cut into segments and planted on his còtils in Bellozanne valley in 1878. Some of the very first varieties bred in the mid 18th century were kidney-shaped and in the mid-1870s the International Kidney came from a seedling raised by Fenn in England.

This was the potato that by sheer chance de la Haye came across, a kidney-shaped, very tasty, thin-skinned potato which developed as the mainstay of potato production in the Island. Sadly, de la Haye did not become rich and famous having introduced the Royal Jersey Fluke, as it was known initially - Jersey's most lucrative crop, which has maintained the agricultural industry for over 130 years. His fellow farmers did honour him with an illuminated address and a purse of gold sovereigns, however, by the time he retired from farming due to ill health he had little income left.

In the 1980s the unique qualities of the Jersey Royal were awarded European recognition protecting its designation of origin (PDO) something similar to a good wine's 'appellation contrôlée'. This was a first for the Island and a first for a vegetable in Europe.

The quality of soils in Jersey is the envy of all, especially when compared to the majority of potato growing areas on the mainland. It is light, free draining and easily worked with very few stones to damage the developing tubers. The majority of the crop is carefully planted by hand and the attention to detail is carried through to harvest by the dedicated local farmers. In addition the innovative Jersey farmers have for many years taken advantage of planting on 45° south and east sloping fields, facing the warmth of the early spring sun. Though in some years, snap April or the occasionally early May frosts can wreak havoc with the timing of the first digging which aims to reach the customers and realise that prized £1 a lb. Sometimes even more from the discerning Harrods clients!

The 1980s saw the introduction of polythene to cover the earliest crops with a transparent film to warm the soil and encourage earlier emergence so that the crop could reach market before competition from Cornwall. In 1979 just 37 vergées were covered with polythene, but by 1994 over 50% (some 9,580 vergées) of crops were covered. Despite a popular myth polythene does not destroy the taste of the Jersey Royal, which was demonstrated by Campden and Chorleywood Food Research Association, the acknowledged authority on flavour testing. Over a period

of four to five years replicated results indicated that polythene had a positive affect on flavour, as did the use of vraic and slurry. Thankfully, there are still some fields receiving an autumn application of vraic but it has become an increasingly costly exercise for the farmers.



Potatoes have been exported from the Island since the 1860s, with an Annual Report of the Royal Jersey Agricultural Society and Horticultural Society stating that a considerable revenue was realised by some 4,000 tons with good demand and high prices. The trade flourished with the arrival of the 'Jersey Royal', and by 1896, despite violent hail showers at the end of March, some 64,583 tons were exported realising £435,192, equivalent to £36,089,851 in today's prices.

During these early years farmers arrived by horse and cart at the Weighbridge with their wooden barrels of potatoes to be weighed and exported by some thirty or so merchants who had links to Covent Garden and many of the regional markets on the mainland. Today the UK demand for the distinctive and flavoursome early potato remains high. Marketing to supermarkets and a range of outlets is efficiently organised by just two organisations and a handful of resourceful independent farmers. While some people may not like the sight of Jersey fields covered by polythene, looking like snow for a few short weeks of the year, it cannot be denied that the Island has a rich heritage in this unique potato appreciated by Royalty and many connoisseurs of such a quality and niche product. **█ Rosemary Collier**





### **Significant potato dates**

- 1570 The potato arrives in Europe from Peru.
- 1609 European sailors take the potato to China.
- 1719 Potatoes arrive in USA.
- 1801 First chips served in America.
- 1845 The Irish potato famine.
- 1878 Hugh De la Haye grew the first Royal Jersey Fluke in Bellozanne valley.
- 1896 64,000 tons of Jersey Royals exported from Jersey to England.
- 1930 2,800 local people worked on the potato crop of which 881 were women. Potatoes were auctioned at The Weighbridge.
- 1947 Campaign to eradicate the Colorado beetle which the German occupying forces had brought to the Island.
- 1952 Mr Potato Head toy invented.
- 1961 Auctioning potatoes at the Weighbridge ceased.
- 1970's First supermarket contract signed in Jersey.
- 1981 Disastrous outbreak of potato blight Jersey.
- 1995 The potato is grown in space.
- 1999 19,000 verges grown with export value of £28m.
- 2000 China is now the biggest potato producer.
- 2008 United Nations International Year of the Potato