

# The Tater Tire-Tower

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*January 1998*

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Okay, enough of the lawyer talk. Plant those taters!

## 1. Introduction

Potatoes are great food. The Irish lived on them for years; and if there's one vegetable that provides more nourishment for the effort to raise them, I can't think of it. You can store potatoes for quite a while in a root cellar, and they are pretty low-maintenance plants to grow.

Two disadvantages of these tubers is that they are often damaged when harvesting, since growers typically use a potato-fork (which is a sort of blunt-edged pitchfork) to harvest them, and that often splits the potatoes; and, they take up a lot of room in the garden.

The tater tire-tower is a way to solve both problems, as well as to cut down on weeding.

## 2. How to Do It

You'll need three or four old tires of the same size – I've used ones from light trucks or full-size cars. If the tires are NOT steel-belted radials, you can cut the sidewalls off with an electric keyhole saw to get a bit more production, but it's not absolutely necessary. If you live in a hot area, you should paint the tires a light color to reflect the sunlight and keep the soil a bit cooler. Even if cooling the soil were not a problem, I'd paint the tires just to make the tower look better.

Clear a flat area about four feet in diameter, removing all weeds. Lay a tire flat, and fill it up with good soil, including the amendments you'd usually use for roots and tuber crops. Plant the potato-eyes or already-sprouted plants at the appropriate depth. When the plants are a couple of inches high, stack a second tire on top of the first one, and gently fill it with dirt, too. Of course, you'll cover up the newly-sprouted plants, but that shouldn't be a problem. It might be best to have someone hold the sprouts straight up, so they won't have to put forth as much effort to grow up through the new soil.

Now, plant more potato-eyes or already-sprouted plants in the new soil. The new plants and the old ones should clear the surface at about the same time. Of course, by now there'll be twice as many plants competing for light, so make sure they get enough sun. When the plants are a couple of inches above the new layer, repeat the process with the third and (if you choose) the fourth tire.

When harvest time comes, dismantle the tower (you might need a helper for this, since the dirt-filled tires will be pretty heavy) one tire at a time, and the potatoes will just roll out. Gently brush the dirt off the taters and store them on layers of straw in a cool, dark place. They'll keep for quite a while, as long as they're not bruised or cut.

Remember that the soil should be added gently to the second, third, and fourth layers. This helps keep the newly-buried shoots from getting crushed, and also allows good irrigation (remember, those first-generation taters are in pretty deep, and you need to make sure the water percolates down to their level). You might also want to bore a couple of holes in the side of the tater-tower near ground level, so the water doesn't collect in the bottom and rot the taters.

The first time I tried this, I got almost a bushel of taters from four truck tires. Neighbors would run in fear whenever I appeared at their door with my crop. It's almost like zucchini (except that you can do a lot more with taters than you can with zucchini)!

I have only grown Idaho potatoes this way, but I see no reason why red potatoes (or even sweet potatoes and yams) wouldn't work.

Good luck!