

## POTATO CHITTING FAQs

Chitting is the name for the process which encourages strong short green chits (shoots) to develop on the potato tuber before planting. These will develop into the leafy stems of your potato plant.



When you buy your tubers, they will be dormant or just starting to sprout. Get them out of their bags and put them in egg boxes/ seed trays etc with the sprout end (the rose end) upwards. Put them in a cool, dry, light, frost free place (e.g. the window sill of an unheated room such as a porch). The warmer the room the quicker the shoots will develop. After several weeks you will see short stubby green / purple shoots appearing. Rub off all but 3 or 4 of the shoots to maximise the size of your potatoes (this will reduce the number you get.)

### What is the problem with long spindly pale shoots?

If left in the dark (in a bag), pale spindly 'bean sprout like' shoots will develop. This sprouting is a natural sign that your tubers are breaking dormancy. The pale shoots get longer and more brittle the longer they are left in the dark and so are in danger of breaking off when planted. Breaking off the sprouts will slow growth down as the potato will have to expend valuable energy trying to form new shoots. This could reduce yield.

### Why chit?

Put simply, it gives the potato a quicker start and crops will be of a useable size slightly earlier.

### Is it worth doing?

- Chitting will certainly be worth doing for 1<sup>st</sup> Early potatoes. The development of short green stubby shoots before planting out in March should give the plants a head start.
- It doesn't really help the later types much, but you will have a hard job to actually stop it happening in the weeks before you plant out your potatoes. So keep your mains in a very cool light place to slow the process down. And make sure the shoots are short and green and strong.
- Chitting is useful for blight prone main crop varieties such as King Edwards and Pink Fir Apple. Because it helps them grow faster they can be harvested earlier and *perhaps* escape the worse of the blight in August.

### Why are there no sprouts on some potato varieties (e.g. Sarpo Mira)

Sarpo Mira is an odd one. This strain has little or no biological clock to affect senescence (the process of deterioration with age ) and has very good dormancy. It produces very few chits even if encouraged to do so. Which makes it a great one for storage.

### A bit more

The technical trade description of chitting is 'premature aging'. Chitting does speed things things up at the beginning but it also speeds up the onset of senescence and this may mean a reduction of potential yield.