

## A Valentine's tradition

By Stephanie Suesan Smith, Ph.D.

*Feb. 14 is  
perfect time  
to plant  
potatoes in  
Hunt County*

Potatoes are traditionally planted on Valentine's Day in Hunt County. While potatoes are cheap to buy at the grocery store, planting your own allows you to grow interesting varieties that may not appear in stores.

In addition, a row of potatoes can grow a lot of spuds, so you get a lot of bang for your seed potato buck.

bands on either side of the hills and in a stripe under the area you are planting the potato pieces. Do not allow the fertilizer to touch the seed pieces directly as it will burn them.

Cut your seed potatoes into pieces with at least one good eye for each piece. A quarter of a potato per eye is adequate and ensures the seedling enough energy to grow roots and produce lots of potatoes. Wait about four or five days after cutting the potatoes into pieces before planting. This allows the potato cuts to heal and will prevent them from rotting in the ground.

Plant each piece with the eye up in a trench about three inches deep. Pieces should be about 12 inches apart. Push the pieces firmly in the dirt, then cover them with soil about three inches deep. As the potato plant grows, continue to hill soil around it, allowing only the top to show, so that there is enough soil to cover the potatoes. They will turn green and be inedible if they are not covered with soil.

One caution when planting potatoes is to be sure the ones you plant are from certified disease-free seed potatoes. The last thing you want to do is introduce potato blight or potato mosaic virus into your garden. Potatoes from the grocery store are a bad bet, too.

Potatoes grow best in hills of loose soil. Mound up hills that are a row long, about a foot wide, and about 6-8 inches high. Work 2-3 pounds of a 10-20-10 fertilizer into the soil in

Potatoes are ready to harvest when the top dies. Dig under the plants 8 to 10 inches so you do not spear a potato while digging. Raise the plants and shake off the soil. Carefully remove the potatoes from the roots. Bruising the potatoes will make them rot, so use bruised potatoes immediately and store only whole, unbruised potatoes. These may be stored in a cool, dark place for quite a while before eating as long as they are allowed to dry before storage. *903*

