

Ordering Potatoes and Disease Prevention

By: Kelly Feehan, Extension Educator

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If you try to order seed potatoes and find the company cannot ship potatoes to Nebraska; try another company or plan to purchase locally. The reason the company cannot ship to Nebraska is likely based on where their seed potatoes originate from.

There is a quarantine on seed potatoes from certain states due to the Columbia root knot nematode. Either the company obtains its seed potatoes from one of those states, or they may have decided it is more feasible to not ship potatoes to certain states rather than sort out what can and cannot be shipped where.

On-line ordering is often the route taken when a specific variety of potato or other vegetable is needed and cannot be purchased locally. If this is the situation, check with other seed companies to see if they will ship to Nebraska.

As always, use certified disease free seed potatoes rather than using potatoes saved from your own garden or someone else's garden. This helps reduce disease issues. And potatoes from a grocery store produce section should not be used. Many have been treated to reduce sprouting.

Some diseases, once introduced into the garden, can remain in the soil for a number of years to cause infections each year. Preventing their introduction is a key step to managing disease.

As you plan the vegetable garden on paper, keep in mind crop rotation. This is another way to reduce disease issues in the garden.

For crop rotation to be most effective, rotation needs to be between vegetable families and ideally, a three year rotation works best. This is not easy to achieve in smaller home gardens, but annual rotation is better than nothing.

Vegetables from the same family are susceptible to the same diseases. Crops in the cucurbit family, such as cucumbers, melons, and squash, are related and should not be planted in the same location or follow one another in the same location each year.

Other vegetable families include the nightshade family of tomatoes, potatoes and eggplant. The cruciferous family includes broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage and kohlrabi. And some root crops like carrots and parsnips are related.

If you have an ongoing disease problem with one or two vegetables that you haven't been able to manage, it might be wise to avoid growing that crop for a few years and try something new.

Another way to manage garden diseases is selecting disease resistant varieties or cultivars. These will be labeled as such in garden catalogs, on seed packages, or on transplant tags. Finding and planting resistant varieties is worth the effort.

Other ways to manage garden diseases, to make plans for now, include staking or caging taller plants like tomatoes. Keeping the foliage out of contact with the soil and increasing air circulation around plants decreases the risk of infection.

When planting, allow enough spacing to allow for good air circulation and control weeds to also improve air movement. It is also important to thin crops to the recommended spacing after they emerge.

If overhead irrigation is used, consider changing to a drip irrigation system if feasible. If not, irrigate in the morning and not in the evenings. Foliage dries off quicker and pathogens have less chance to cause infection.