

**FREE 16-PAGE VEG GROWING GUIDE**

★ GROW YOUR OWN ★  
**CHRISTMAS  
DINNER**

**CROPS TO  
HARVEST FOR  
SEASONAL  
FARE**

**WHEN  
TO SOW &  
AFTERCARE**

**Kitchen  
Garden**

**TASTY  
DISHES  
USING  
YOUR  
VEG**



**TOP TIPS ON CHOOSING VARIETIES ★ HARVESTING & STORAGE ★ COOKING IDEAS**

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# welcome

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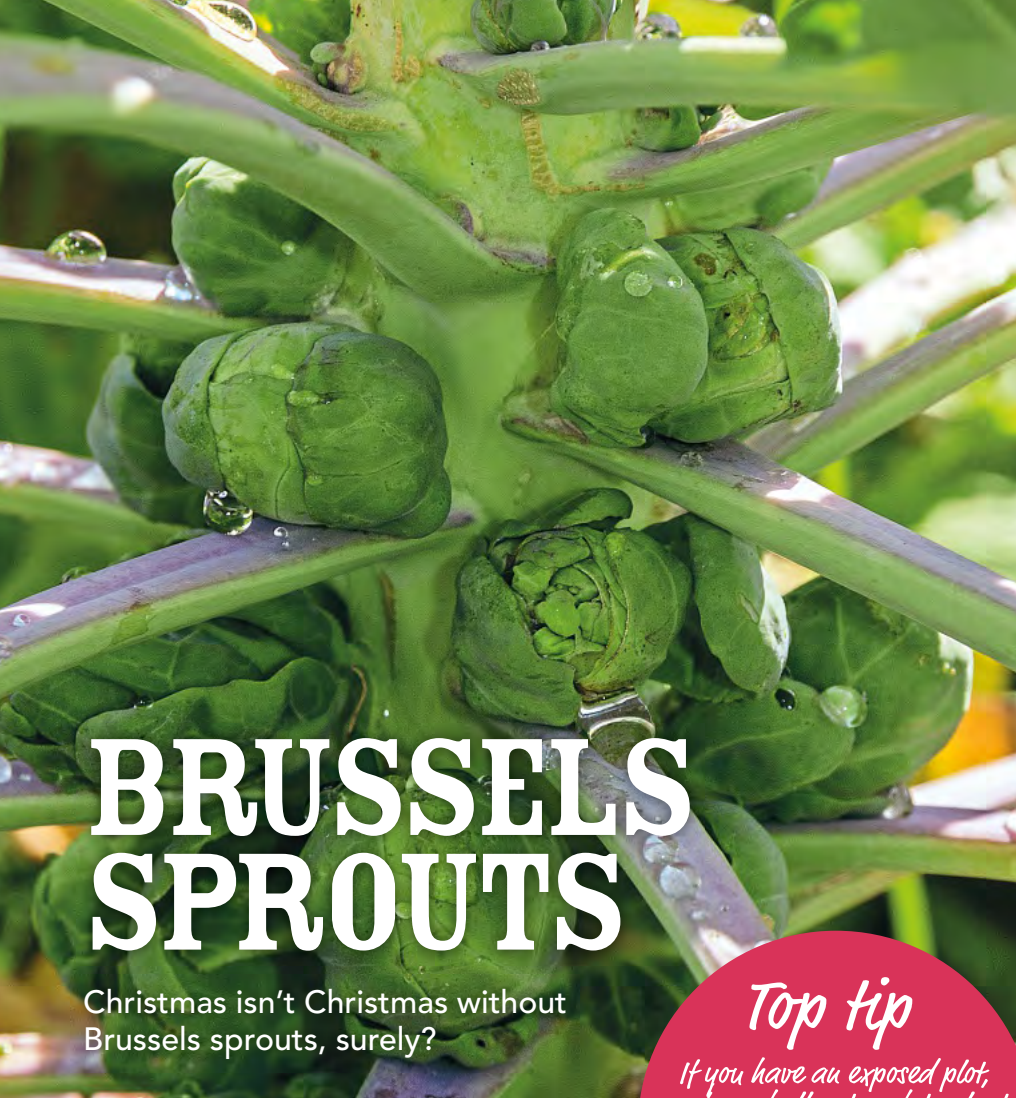
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Christmas dinner for many is a special meal but it can be even more special if every veg on your plate is home grown. It takes a bit of planning and a little bit of luck sometimes to get the right veg ready just for December 25 but it is possible. Many of the veg mentioned in this supplement need to be sown in spring but a few can be delayed until summer. This guide will help you plan when each crop should be sown and how to grow it on to reap the rewards at just the right time.

Happy Christmas veg growing!

*Emma*





# BRUSSELS SPROUTS

Christmas isn't Christmas without Brussels sprouts, surely?

## VARIETIES

**'EVESHAM SPECIAL':** A traditional 'heirloom', medium-sized plant. Heavy-cropping.

**'FALSTAFF':** This purple-red variety accords very well with the festive season bringing colour to the dining table.

**'REVENGE F1':** This hybrid has good disease resistance and can be harvested for Christmas but will carry on way into February.

## PEST AND DISEASE WATCH

**CLUBROOT:** Lime your soil if acidic, or add a dusting to the planting hole.

**CABBAGE ROOT FLY:** Put collars round the base of each plant, or cover with insect netting.

**CATERPILLARS:** Cabbage white caterpillars will feed happily on the leaves of Brussels sprouts, so protect them with butterfly netting or insect netting.

**PIGEONS:** Cover your plants with bird netting for the best protection, otherwise your crop could be destroyed.

## Top tip

*If you have an exposed plot, make a shallow trench to plant them in, then draw soil in around the base as they grow. This will encourage stronger roots and prevent them being blown over.*



## SOIL

These proud icons of the Yuletide period require a fertile and humus-rich soil so in the autumn, prior to sowing, dig in plenty of well-rotted manure and organic matter. If you have an acidic soil add a sprinkling of lime too as, like other brassicas, Brussels sprouts prefer a pH of 6.5-7.5.

## SOWING

You can start them off in March under cover in cellular trays or 7½cm (3in) pots or sow outside from mid-March to mid-April. Sow thinly to a depth of 1cm (½in) with 15cm (6in) between drills. When seedlings are about 2cm (1in) tall, thin them out to 7½cm (3in) apart.

## GROWING

Once they have reached 15cm (6in), they can be planted out 60cm-75cm (2-2½ft) apart either way. Add some general fertiliser to the surface around them and water in. Taller varieties may need cane supports.

## HARVESTING

Brussels sprouts generally take about 36 weeks from initial sowing. Pick the buttons from the bottom of the stalk upward when they are about the size of a cherry tomato. They tend to be sweeter after a hard frost, and don't forget that the top leaves ('sprout tops') of the plant can also be cooked.

## In the kitchen

### BRUSSELS WITH CHEESE & WALNUTS

Steam Brussels sprouts to al dente then place them in a grill pan. Sprinkle cheese over the top and grill till cheese has melted. Add chopped walnuts, and black pepper to taste.



# WINTER CABBAGE



High in antioxidants and fibre, winter cabbages are the perfect antidotes to all that festive chocolate 'n' stodge we inflict on ourselves each year. So go on and give yourself a proper Christmas treat!

## SOIL

As with all brassicas, cabbages like a fertile soil that has benefited from the addition of well-rotted compost in autumn or winter. If your soil is acidic, add lime to make it more alkaline as this will help prevent against club root.

## SOWING

Sow winter (and winter Savoy) cabbage seeds April-May, though you can start them off in modular cell trays or 7½cm (3in) pots first if you prefer. Sow thinly to a depth of 1cm (½in) with 15cm (6in) between drills. When seedlings are about 2cm (1in) tall, thin them out to 7½cm (3in) apart.

## GROWING

When the young plants have five or six leaves, plant them in their final position, 30cm (1ft) apart for compact varieties, 45cm (1½ft) apart for larger ones, with rows 60cm (2ft) apart. Do this late June to mid-July. Savoy cabbages, which can also be sown for winter picking, generally need the larger distances. Water during dry weather and hoe between plants and rows.



## Top tip

*Earth up soil around stalks to help prevent the plants rocking in the wind.*

## HARVESTING

Cabbages can be cut from November onwards. Savoy cabbages are more flavoursome if you pick them after a frost. Cut at the base with a sharp knife, cut off the outer leaves and there you have it.

## VARIETIES:

**'CELTIC F1':** A ball-headed variety with outer leaves like a Savoy. Withstands cold weather.

**'CHRISTMAS DRUMHEAD':** This is a dwarf, compact variety which you can harvest from October onwards. The dark green leaves have a crispy texture. A popular choice.

**'JANUARY KING 3':** A winter Savoy which produces blue-green crisp leaves with a red tinge. Very hardy against frost.

## In the kitchen SAVOY CABBAGE ROLLS

Use lightly boiled Savoy cabbage leaves to make rolls. Make the filling of your choice such as beef and rice in a tomato sauce.



## PEST AND DISEASE WATCH

**CLUBROOT:** Lime your soil if acidic, or add a dusting to the planting hole. You can also buy disease-resistant varieties.

**CABBAGE ROOT FLY:** You can protect your cabbages by fitting collars around the stem, or cover with insect netting.

**CATERPILLARS:** Cover your cabbages with insect or butterfly netting to prevent cabbage white butterflies laying their eggs.

**PIGEONS:** These can devastate your cabbages so bird netting is the most sure-fire method of protecting your plants.





# CELERIAC

Easier to grow than celery, but with a similar taste, this hardy veg deserves to be more widely grown.

## VARIETIES

'PRINZ': Good resistance to bolting.

'MONARCH': Award-winning variety with a good flavour.

'BRILLIANT': Large, smooth roots. Stores well.

## PEST AND DISEASE WATCH

**CELERY LEAF MINER:** Pick off individual leaves or cover plants with netting.

**SLUGS:** Use your favourite form of slug control, such as pellets, barriers or traps.

**CELERY LEAF SPOT:** Spray with Vitax Organic 2 in 1 (fish oils).



**CARROT FLY:** Consider covering the crop with Enviromesh, Veggiemesh or similar after planting if this pest is a problem in your area.



### Top tip

Use celeriac as you would potatoes. They make great low calorie chips for those on a diet. The leaves are edible too and can be used to impart the flavour of celery in many dishes.

## In the kitchen

### CELERIAC & POTATO MASH

Cut 900g of potatoes and 1 large celeriac into cubes and boil with a clove of garlic until tender (20-25 minutes). Mash with butter and a little double cream. Season to taste and serve with a knob of butter.



## SOIL

Like its cousin celery, celeriac needs a fertile moisture-retentive soil. Choose a spot which has had plenty of well-rotted organic matter dug in during the previous winter. Give the soil a dressing of Growmore or pelleted chicken manure at the rate of 56g per sq m (2oz per sq yd) and rake in a week before planting.

## SOWING

This crop does need a long season in order to produce nice big 'bulbs' (it is really a swollen stem). Sow in March in cell trays or seed trays filled with fresh multi-purpose compost and place in a heated propagator set at 18C (65F). If started in seed trays prick the seedlings out as soon as they are large enough to handle and move into small pots or cells. Harden off before planting out in late May. Alternatively buy in young plants from specialists.

## GROWING

Plant out your young plants 30cm (12in) apart and allow 38cm (15in) between rows. Dig a suitable sized hole with a trowel and pop the plant in. Firm well, keeping the crown just above the soil surface and water thoroughly. It is essential that your plants receive plenty of water during dry spells right through the growing period to avoid any checks in growth which may lead to bolting. Keep the rows weed free.

## HARVESTING

Harvest the 'roots' from October onwards when they reach at least 8cm (3in) in diameter. Much of the weight is put on by the roots late in the season and being quite hardy they can be left in the ground to develop until needed. Cover with fleece or straw to protect them from the winter cold or lift, trim off the leaves and store in boxes of dry peat or sand.

# KALE

Rich in vitamins K, A and C, this easy to grow vegetable has recently gained almost cult status as something of a superfood. So why not serve it up on Christmas Day and give your system a nutritional boost?



## SOIL

Kale is less fussy about soil than other brassicas, though it's always a good idea to dig in well-rotted manure in the winter and add lime if your soil is a little acidic.

## SOWING

Sow kale seeds April-May, though you can start them off in modular cell trays or 7½cm (3in) pots first if you prefer. Sow thinly to a depth of 1cm (½in) with 15cm (6in) between drills. When seedlings are large enough to handle, thin them out to 5cm (2in) apart.

## GROWING

When the young plants are 12-15cm (5-6in) tall, move them to their final position, 45-60cm (1½-2ft) apart depending on variety, late June to early August. Apply a general fertiliser soon after planting, water well in dry periods and hoe regularly between plants and rows.

## HARVESTING

Cut leaves when young and tender from the crown of the plant as this will encourage side shoots. Alternatively, you can cut the whole plant if you prefer. Kale is a very hardy plant and will withstand much of what winter can throw at it. Tall varieties may need staking in with a bamboo cane.

## VARIETIES

You can choose a loose leaved or curly leaved variety, or why not grow both?

**'DARKIBOR F1':** This produces dark leaves, finely curled. A very hardy variety.

**'DWARF GREEN CURLED':** This is a good option for small space gardening. It produces dark leaves in tightly curled frills. Very hardy.

**'NERO DI TOSCANA':** This variety originated in Tuscany. Dark, Savoy-like leaves with a peppery taste. Good cooked but also good in salads if picked young.

## PEST AND DISEASE WATCH

**APHIDS:** These feed on the sap of the plant and excrete honeydew, which then causes a sooty mould. Insect netting will keep these out.

**CATERPILLARS:** Cabbage white caterpillars are partial to kale so cover your plants with butterfly netting or check leaves regularly and destroy eggs.

**CABBAGE WHITEFLY:** These are a sap-sucking insect that flies up in a cloud when you touch the plant. Insect netting will help protect kale from this pest.

## Top tip

*Before transplanting into their final position water the soil well, and add more around the base of the plant straight afterwards.*

## In the kitchen

### KALE CHIPS

Tear kale leaves into chip-sized strips. Add a drizzle of olive oil and a sprinkle of salt. Bake in oven until brown (about 10-15 minutes) with oven on 175°C (350°F).





# LEEKS

You do need a little patience with leeks as they have a long growing period to full maturation but they are very winter hardy and can be picked for Christmas dinner



## SOIL

Leeks will benefit from well-drained soil that has been manured the previous winter with the addition of plenty of organic matter too. The application of a general fertiliser (60g per m<sup>2</sup>/2oz per yd<sup>2</sup>) a week before sowing will also help provide a good growing foundation.

## SOWING

In spring sow seeds thinly in a prepared seedbed, 1cm (½in) deep in drills 15cm (6in) apart, or in seed trays.

## GROWING

Young plants can be transplanted in June when they are about 20cm (8in) tall and pencil thick. Use a dibber to make holes 15cm (6in) apart and 15cm (6in) deep. Set rows 30cm (12in) apart. Drop the leeks down into their holes and then water in – there's no need to fill the holes with the soil as the action of watering in will provide sufficient cover for the roots and base of the plant. Hoe between plants and make sure they are watered thoroughly in dry weather. In autumn, earth up dry soil around the base a little as this will result in greater blanching of the stem.

## HARVESTING

The great thing about leeks is that you can just leave them in the ground during the winter until you are ready to lift them. You can also pick baby leeks too before then for use in salads and stews.

## PEST AND DISEASE WATCH

**LEEK MOTH:** These can be quite destructive to a crop of leeks. The pale green grubs of the moth burrow into the stem and leaves, causing the leeks to rot. If this happens, remove infected leeks and burn them. Covering leeks with insect netting will offer protection.

**RUST:** This is quite common with leeks and other members of the onion family, and more so if the ground is high in nitrogen. Orange spots will appear on the leaves. Unless it's a very severe attack, leeks tend to get by, though crops can benefit from the addition of sulphate of potash in early summer.

## In the kitchen

### LEEK & POTATO SOUP STARTER

Add two chopped leeks to melted butter in frying pan and cook till leeks are soft. Add 225g (8oz) peeled and cubed potatoes and cook till soft. Add 1.2l (2pts) vegetable stock and then simmer for 15 minutes. Mash or blend, then garnish with chopped chives.

### Top tip

*For a delicious side dish of leeks, try them until soft and then add a dash of single cream and a sprinkling of grated Cheddar cheese. Stir until melted and serve.*



## VARIETIES

**'BLEU DE SOLAISE':** A traditional French variety that produces long stems and blue-grey leaves.

**'MUSSELBURGH':** A popular variety. Thick-stemmed, very hardy and mild flavoured.

**'TOLEDO':** Attractive blue-green foliage, long stems, very hardy.





# ONIONS

They might make your eyes water but we wouldn't want to be without this most versatile of veg and such a long-standing stalwart in the Christmas kitchen

## SOIL

Onions can be sown either from seeds or 'sets' (immature bulbs). They do best in a sunny, sheltered spot that has well-draining, fertile soil. Add well-rotted compost a few months previously but do not sow into freshly manured soil.

## SOWING FROM SEED

Seeds can be sown January to February indoors in modular trays for transplanting in March/April, though to get them started you will need to maintain a temperature of 15°C (60°F). Otherwise, they can be sown thinly outside directly in March/April. Water compost or soil then sow seeds 1cm (½in) deep which can be later thinned out to 10cm (4in) apart with 23cm (9in) between rows when the seedlings start to establish themselves.

## SOWING FROM SETS

A less fiddly alternative is to grow from sets. These too need to be planted 10cm (4in) apart and 23cm (9in) between rows with the tips of the bulb just showing above the soil. Overwintering varieties can be planted in autumn; otherwise March to April is fine.

## GROWING

Onions are great because they need very little maintenance once they're established, apart from watering during dry spells and regular weeding. It's a good idea to mulch around the plants to keep down weeds and retain moisture in the soil.



## HARVESTING

Onions will be ready June to August, when the bulbs have swelled and the stalks have started to turn yellow and bend over. At this stage, move soil away from the base of the bulbs to expose them to the sun and then leave them for a couple of weeks to let the stalks dry out. Then ease them out of the ground gently with a fork. Leave them to dry out on wooden trays for a couple of weeks, outside if possible, and then rub off any excess soil. Tie or weave the stalks together and hang in a cool, dry shed or similar.

### Top tip

*Cut off the top papery skin of bulbs before planting to make them less obvious for birds to pick at*



## VARIETIES

**'BEDFORDSHIRE CHAMPION':** A very popular variety with a reputation for heavy cropping. One to grow from seed.

**'SENSHYU':** One for autumn planting, this Japanese variety produces flat-bottomed, straw-coloured bulbs for harvesting in late June onwards.

**'PARIS SILVERSKIN':** This small, very white onion is grown from seed. Good for pickling in time for Christmas snacking. Fast-growing.

## In the kitchen ONION SOUP STARTER

Fry onions gently in butter till soft; add 1 tsp of sugar till onions are caramelised. Add chopped garlic then continue to cook, adding 2 tbsp of flour first followed by 250ml (8½fl oz) white wine and one litre of beef stock, stirring all the time. Serve with toast and melted cheese (optional).



## PEST AND DISEASE WATCH

**ONION WHITE ROT:** This disease is pretty devastating, showing itself as a fluffy white fungal growth with distinctive dark bits within it around the base of the bulb. If this happens, you shouldn't grow any members of the onion family in this same place for at least five years, or even more.

**ONION FLY:** Little maggots will burrow into the bulbs which will cause the stalk to wilt, and eventually the whole plant will rot. Covering your plants with insect netting is one form of protection as is crop rotation to prevent an accumulation of the pest year on year.



# POTATOES

It's hard to believe that the potato is native to South America and when it first came to Europe in the 16th century was not well-regarded. But for many now it surely is a must-have Christmas veg

## VARIETIES

**'SARPO MIRA':** This late maincrop variety is blight resistant, gives high yields and stores well.

**'CARA':** Good blight resistance, producing red-eyed tubers. Good for roasting.

**'CHARLOTTE':** Yellow-skinned, waxy second early does well in containers. This variety can be harvested in December if planted in August.



## PEST AND DISEASE WATCH

**BLIGHT:** This fungal disease, more prevalent in wet and warm summers, is usually devastating. The leaves will turn brown and spread downwards, ultimately causing the tubers to rot. A good range of blight-resistant varieties are currently available.

**POTATO BLACKLEG:** This is another fungal disease which causes stems to turn black and rot. Infected foliage should be removed and burned.

**SCAB:** Scabs form on the skin of the potatoes, but are usually only skin deep. The tubers are still edible but a bit unsightly. Avoid lime.

### Top tip

Help retain moisture around your plants by covering the soil with grass clippings as a mulch



## SOIL

Potatoes like a sunny position in a fertile soil which has benefited from a good digging-in of well-rotted manure in the autumn or winter prior to planting. For Christmas potatoes a 'maincrop' (rather than 'first early' or 'second early') variety should be planted in the latter half of April and harvested September-October for storing over winter.

## SOWING

Potatoes are grown from 'seed' potatoes which can be bought online or from garden centres. Sow 38cm (15in) apart, in rows 75cm (30in) apart, and in trenches 13-15cm (5-6in) deep. Make sure you plant with the 'eye' (little indentations in the potato) facing upwards as best you can.

## GROWING

When the stems are about 23cm (9in) in height, earth up the soil around them by drawing soil from between the rows over the haulms (or stems). However, do watch out for late frosts and cover your plants with horticultural fleece if cold weather is forecast. Frost will blacken the foliage of your plants and seriously set them back.

Continue to earth up around your plants until the ridge is about 25cm (10in) high. Water regularly, especially in dry spells, to prevent scab forming on your tubers (the potatoes).

## HARVESTING

When the foliage has died back on your plants, it's time to harvest. Dig up your potatoes with a fork or dig deep at a 45° angle with the aim of lifting the tubers from beneath rather than slicing through them. Rub off any soil and leave them to dry for a few hours. After this they can be stored in paper or hessian sacks.

## In the kitchen ROAST POTATOES

To give more flavour to your roasties add herbs such as thyme or rosemary and a few cloves of garlic.



# SPINACH

Rich in Vitamin K (which is good for bones) and iron, spinach is considered something of a wonder veg which is relatively easy to grow.

## SOIL

Spinach really needs a well-manured soil rich in organic matter which will therefore retain moisture well. If your soil is acidic, add lime to increase alkalinity, and add a general fertiliser a couple of weeks before sowing.

## SOWING

Sow winter spinach July-September direct into the place it is to grow. Sow thinly to a depth of 2cm (1in) in rows 30cm (12in) apart. As soon as the seedlings are large enough to handle thin to 7.5cm (3in) – these can be used as baby leaves for salads.

## GROWING

Spinach will benefit from regular watering, especially during dry weather. Weeding will improve ventilation around the plants and help prevent fungal diseases such as downy mildew. Give a high nitrogen liquid feed (such as nettle tea!) once the plants are established.

## HARVESTING

Winter spinach can be harvested as a baby leaf at 5cm (2in), as a cut-and-come vegetable at 10cm (4in), or as a whole plant October-January. Depending on how severe the winter is, you may need to cover your plants with a cloche or fleece.



## VARIETIES

**'GIANT WINTER':** The leaves of this variety are large and dark green. This is a very hardy type and can be left in the ground until ready for picking.

**'PERPETUAL' (SPINACH BEET):** Good resistance to bolting. A prolific and hardy variety.

**'TIRZA':** Thick green leaves, with good disease resistance. Fine as baby leaf or cooked.

## In the kitchen BAKED PASTA WITH SPINACH

If you fancy a vegetarian option for your Christmas dinner try this one. Boil 100g (3½ oz) pasta shells in salted water until al dente. Boil 250g (8oz) spinach in shallow water till soft (a few minutes). Whisk three eggs, a cup of breadcrumbs in a bowl and add spinach, pasta and toss. Add a jar of creamy pasta sauce to bottom of baking dish, add pasta mix and add the other half of pasta sauce over the top. Add grated cheese and bake in oven (180°C/Gas 4) for 45 minutes until light brown.



## Top tip

*Spinach benefits from partial shading (prevents bolting) so grow between taller crops.*



## PEST AND DISEASE WATCH

**BOLTING:** An infrequent watering regimen will cause plants to bolt (send up flower shoots), so water regularly, especially in dry spells.

**DOWNY MILDEW:** The leaves will develop discoloured patches with a grey mould on the underside. To prevent this, provide adequate ventilation so don't sow your plants too close together and weed regularly.

**SLUGS:** Young plants can be ravaged by slugs so offer them some protection with your preferred deterrent.



# SQUASH

Few vegetables are more colourful and fun to grow. Kids love to sow the big seeds, watch them grow and harvest the strange fruit. In the kitchen they are versatile and nutritious

## Top tip

*After cutting winter squashes leave them on the surface of the soil for the skins to cure for a few days before moving them under cover.*

## SOIL

Squashes are greedy feeders and require a deep, moist, fertile soil, so dig in plenty of well-rotted farmyard manure or garden compost in the autumn before planting. Then, a week before the young plants are planted out into their final positions, apply two good handfuls of general fertiliser and rake in well.

## SOWING

Squashes are tender plants and will not tolerate frost. Get them off to a good start by sowing in April in individual pots, one seed per pot, filled with multi-purpose or sowing compost. Place in a heated propagator set at 18C (65F) and cover until germinated.

Uncover as they emerge and reduce the heat to 10-15C (50-60F). Give the plants as much light as possible and depending on type you may wish to give each plant a short cane – i.e. for climbing squashes such as cucumbers and melons.

## GROWING

Your plants can be planted out once all frosts are over and they have been hardened off thoroughly for a week to 10 days to acclimatise them to outdoor conditions. Plant on a mound of 50:50 soil and more well-rotted manure or garden compost. Plants grow rapidly and may require regular watering during dry spells, also regular feeding using a high potash tomato feed throughout the season.

## HARVESTING

The fruit of summer squashes such as ridge cucumbers and courgettes should be ready to harvest in as little as three weeks after planting with marrows and spaghetti squash following closely behind. Winter squashes such as pumpkins, Turk's turban and butternut squashes can be harvested in September and October and stored for many months.

## PEST AND DISEASE WATCH

**SLUGS & SNAILS:** These pests love to nibble at the plants and developing fruit from under the dense canopy of foliage. Use your favourite form of slug control to keep them in check.

**STEM ROT:** The base of the stem of all types is vulnerable to rotting so keeping this part as dry as possible and also undamaged is essential. Take care when tying the stems of climbing types not to damage the stems.

**POWDERY MILDEW:** All squashes are vulnerable to this disease and will often suffer attacks late in the season. Plants are especially vulnerable if dry during the summer and should never be allowed to wilt. Maintain watering and remove badly affected leaves promptly and spray with a mixture of 30:70 milk to water as a preventative every 10 days before the first sign of damage.

## In the kitchen PUMPKIN WEDGES

The sweet taste of pumpkin adds a lovely contrast to a traditional Christmas dinner and is the perfect partner for your roasted potatoes and parsnips. Begin by cutting the pumpkin into wedges or chips, sprinkle with a little vegetable, olive or rapeseed oil, plus a little cumin and mustard powder to add spice. Add some freshly picked, chopped rosemary and mix well to thoroughly coat the wedges. Roast in a preheated oven at 180C (350F) for 45 minutes or until cooked, turning once or twice.



## VARIETIES

**PUMPKIN 'DILL'S ATLANTIC GIANT':** The

one to use for that record-breaker – but

bear in mind the record stands at well over 2000lb! (Picture below.)

**COURGETTE 'ONE BALL':** Distinctive round yellow fruit. Very heavy yielding and ideal for stuffing.

**MARROW 'TABLE DAINTY':** Small fruits that are more manageable than some of the large fruited types.

**BUTTERNUT 'BARBARA BUTTERNUT F1':** Unusual large, striped fruit with a very small seed cavity and tasty, orange flesh.



# CARROTS

The humble carrot is a real favourite so no Christmas dinner is complete without a dish of these. Later sown ones can produce carrots for autumn and with correct storage will provide tasty roots for the Christmas period.

## SOIL

Carrots like a good well-drained soil and a sunny site. Avoid growing in heavy clay or very stony soil. A raised bed or pot may be better if you have these conditions. Avoid sowing carrots on land that has recently had manure applied as this may cause forking.

## SOWING

Carrots can be sown from March in the south but April onwards is best for most areas. Sow 13mm (½in) deep in rows about 30cm (12in) apart. Sow reasonably thinly about 5mm between seeds. This just allows for some losses but also means you don't have to thin the seedlings out so much. Late sowings in July to early August should provide carrots for the Christmas table.

## GROWING ON

We can occasionally get dry springs in some parts of the country and if sowing in April it helps to keep the soil moist after sowing to prevent germination failure. Once the carrots are established watering is not such an issue for carrots growing in the open ground as they have a long tap root. If growing in containers this is different. As they grow remove some carrots to leave a little space between each one. The thinning can be eaten in salads.



### Top tip

*If growing in containers make sure you thin out seedlings and have space between plants or you will only get tiny roots.*

## VARIETIES

**'AUTUMN KING':** A tried and tested variety that is ideal for later sowings and harvesting into winter. The roots can be left in the ground without splitting.

**'ESKIMO':** This is a very cold tolerant carrot so ideal for later sowings and overwintering as long as the ground is not too heavy.

**'KELLY':** A new variety that has lovely long tapering roots. A good variety to be harvested in autumn and early winter.

## IN CONTAINERS

Choose a short-rooted variety such as 'Parmex' or 'Mini Finger'. Sow these in large containers in a cold greenhouse or mini greenhouse in September for some small baby roots for Christmas.

## HARVESTING

Simply lift a carrot or two to give you an idea of when they are ready. Late sown carrots that you wish to keep ticking over until Christmas can be left in the ground and covered with straw before the frosts start. If you want to be extra careful you could lift the roots and store them for up to four months in boxes of slightly damp sand in a cool, frost-free place.

## In the kitchen

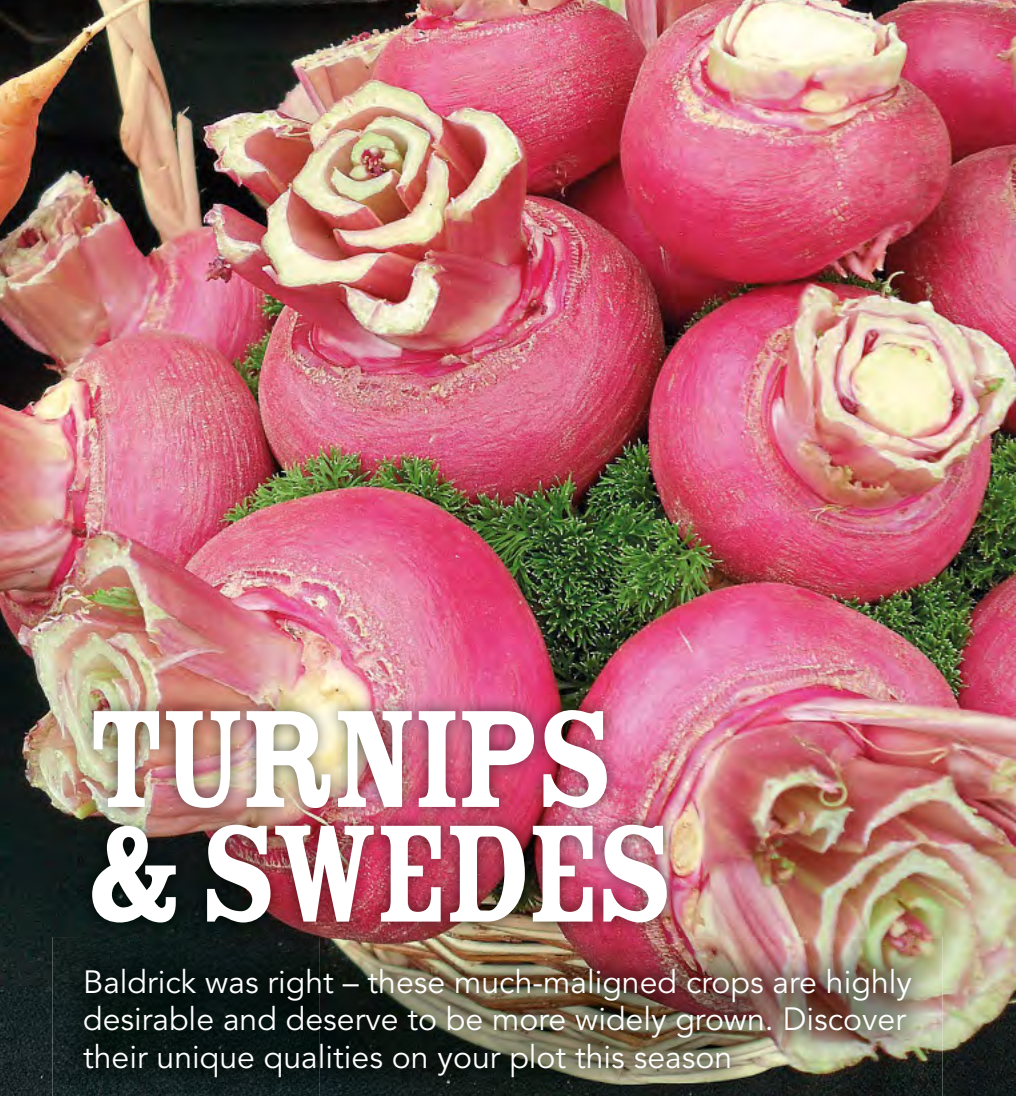
Carrots can be used in so many different ways. After boiling drain and add butter, a little brown sugar, dill and salt and pepper. Alternatively after cooking drain water and pour orange juice over the carrots and simmer over a medium heat for five minutes. Drain again and stir in a little brown sugar, butter and salt and pepper.



## PEST AND DISEASE WATCH

**CARROT FLY:** This is a really troublesome pest and causes tunnelling in the roots and subsequent rotting. Surrounding your crop with fleece immediately after sowing is the best method of control as long as you operate some crop rotation on your plot.

**SLUGS:** The other main pest that can devastate a row of carrots overnight. Take precautions against this pest using your preferred method of control – a biological control such as Nemaslug or traps or slug pellets.



# TURNIPS & SWEDES

Baldrick was right – these much-maligned crops are highly desirable and deserve to be more widely grown. Discover their unique qualities on your plot this season

## In the kitchen

Swedes generally have a sweeter taste than turnips and are traditionally mashed with potatoes (neeps and tatties) or mashed and served alone. However they are also great roasted – try them cubed and roasted with honey, chilli and cumin and add to your roasted veg selection on the Christmas table. Salad turnips can be grated and eaten raw in salads or pickled. Maincrops are often boiled, roasted or mashed as above with potatoes. Try in soups and stews, too.



### SOIL

Choose a sunny, well-drained site preferably on land which was not manured in the autumn prior to sowing. Both prefer a pH of around 6-7 and this will help to deter club root disease. Firm soil is important, so after raking in 56g (2oz) per sq yd of general fertiliser 10-14 days before sowing, firm the soil with your feet before making the seed drills.

### SOWING

Salad turnips can be sown from February (under cloches) to June, but sow maincrop types for eating with your Christmas dinner during July and August.

Swedes are usually sown in May or June direct into the soil where they are to grow, but can be sown in cell trays first.

Make your seed drills 1cm (½in) deep and allow 30cm (12in) between the rows (turnips) and 38cm (15cm) for swedes. Water the bottom of the drills before sowing thinly, covering and firming gently with the back of a rake. Water thoroughly.

### GROWING ON

Thin the seedlings when 2.5cm (1in) high allowing 8cm (3in) between each plant, then to 15cm (6in) – 23cm (9in) for swedes. Keep the rows weed free. Watering is the key to success in order to keep the plants growing and to help prevent bolting (running to seed).

### HARVESTING

Maincrop turnips can be allowed to reach full size and used as an autumn/winter veg. However salad types are best harvested when the size of a golf ball. Swedes are usually harvested when fully mature, lifting as required from autumn onwards in mild areas, or storing in boxes of dry sand for the winter in colder districts.



### VARIETIES

**SWEDE 'TWEED F1':** A British-bred variety that can be harvested from autumn onwards.

**SWEDE 'VIRTUE':** Tasty yellow flesh. Very hardy.

**TURNIP 'TOKYO CROSS F1':** Harvest young for tender white roots for eating raw, stir frying or boiling.

**TURNIP 'ATLANTIC':** Attractive purple-topped oval roots.

**TURNIP 'SNOWBALL F1':** Round white roots with tender flesh which are great cooked whole.

### Top tip

*Cover with fleece or crop protection netting to keep off pests such as flea beetles.*



### PEST AND DISEASE WATCH

**FLEA BEETLE:** This is a damaging pest of all brassicas and will nibble the leaves of seedlings, in some cases causing them to collapse. Cover with fleece after sowing and keep covered for as long as possible.

**SLUGS:** Take precautions against these pests which can decimate rows of seedlings.

**CLUB ROOT:** This is the most serious soil-borne disease of brassicas of all types and once in the ground can survive for many years. Dust the soil with lime and incorporate prior to sowing and avoid growing these crops in infected soil.

**POWDERY MILDEW:** Maintain watering to deter the disease and spray as necessary using a suitable fungicide.

**CABBAGE ROOT FLY:** The adult flies lay their eggs close to the stems and the maggots feed on the roots and young stems before pupating in the soil. Cover with fleece to deter the egg-laying adults.

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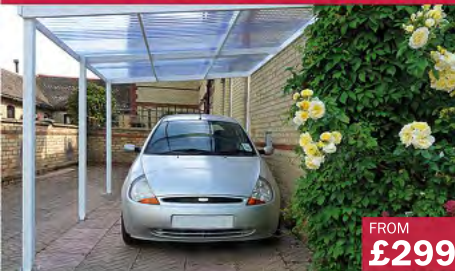
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