

FREE 16-PAGE SIMPLE-TO-GROW-VEG GUIDE

EASY PEASY VEG

Six quick and tasty crops anyone can try

Grow:

A HERBY GROWING BAG

WINDOWSILL
MICROGREENS IN DAYS

BOUNTIFUL BASKET
TOMATOES

POTATOES IN A POT

Kitchen
Garden

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Welcome

If you are new to growing vegetables or an old hand we hope this little guide will encourage you to try a few things that are easy and quick to grow. When you first start growing veg it can sometimes be quite daunting with a huge amount of information at your fingertips. Although this is great, it can also be quite confusing. It helps to just start with some simple growing ideas and techniques and once you've had some success with these it will give you the confidence to try more crops.

Happy veg growing.

Emma



TOP TIPS FOR FIRST TIME VEGETABLE GROWERS

- Start with a few containers or a small patch of ground.
- Tend only a small patch of earth first. You could even try a Mr Fothergill's Gromat that is a self sown mat of different veg seeds or salad mix. This will create instant well spaced mini rows of vegetables or salad leaves. (www.mr-fothergills.co.uk)
- If sowing outdoors and the weather is dry for a few days after sowing, dribble water gently along the row.
- Thin the seedlings as soon as possible. If the row is sown too thickly the seedlings compete for water and nutrients and space and it will drastically affect the success of the crop. Always keep a little space between seedlings.
- If you are having problems with pests consider investing in fleece or the very fine netting called Veggiemesh or Enviromesh. Cover all vulnerable crops from sowing. It can be reused and lasts for years so is a great investment.



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- 14 Pea shoots



MICROGREENS

These are just immature vegetables that you harvest at the seedling stage and are the ultimate easy peasy crop to grow

The young shoots are particularly nutritious and often with a flavour of the more mature crop but sometimes sweeter. You can be harvesting in as little as a week or two after sowing which is the real beauty of this crop.

WHAT YOU NEED

All you need are the seeds, compost and a container. The seeds can be any vegetables with just a few exceptions (see below). The compost can be multi-purpose compost or you could use perlite or vermiculite.

WHAT TO BUY

You can use up most leftover packets of seed (avoid tomato, pepper and parsnip seed) to produce microgreens. Examples of leaves ideal for this culture include: mizuna, cabbage, kale, kohlrabi, rocket, amaranth, radish, coriander, beet, basil, mustard, lettuce, cress, chard, Chinese cabbage, shungiku, parsley, carrot, fennel, fenugreek, leek, spinach.

Some kits are now available which provide everything you need to create a little crop of microgreens. Suttons sell kits that come with a shallow tray and a special mat on which to germinate the seeds. Check out good garden centres for these.

WHEN TO GROW

Microgreens can be grown at any time of year on a windowsill. The crops are not grown beyond seedling stage and so you don't need a lot of space and it doesn't matter if light levels are low which they are in the depths of winter. If growing in late autumn through winter and early spring then they will need a bit of warmth to help the seeds germinate. From March to October microgreens could be grown in pots outside on the patio or in an unheated greenhouse or mini greenhouse or cloche.

HARVESTING

After about 10-14 days when the seedlings are only 2½cm-5cm (1-2in) you can start to harvest. This is done either by cutting the tops off with scissors or you could carefully pull up a few whole plants and snip off the root. This can give you a longer shoot and if done carefully it can mean the other seedlings can be left to grow on a bit.



Top tip

If sowing in a large pot or trough consider filling the bottom half with some broken up bits of polystyrene and then add just 5cm (2in) of compost and sow. You are not growing a long term crop so this amount of compost will suffice



STEP BY STEP

GROWING MICROGREENS



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The young seedlings should be ready to harvest after just a week or so



4

USING MICROGREENS

Microgreens can be used in sandwiches or dropped into stir fries at the last minute or simply be used to garnish any dishes to give a slightly fresh zingy taste packed with vitamins and minerals.



1 Take a container, compost and seeds and some labels. This is a trough which is useful but not essential as a more shallow container will suffice. Fill the container with your growing medium and gently firm the compost. Keep the outer pack or make a label to identify your seedlings.

2 Sprinkle over the seeds. You can mix some seeds before sowing or sow half of the tray with one type of seed and the other half with another. The seed can be sown quite thickly for microgreens so aim for approximately 3-5mm between seeds.

3 After sowing cover the seeds with a light coating of compost. Water well either using a fine rose on a watering can or place the container into another container with a little water in the bottom to allow water to rise up gradually through the holes in the base to wet the compost evenly.

4 If sowing in spring through summer and into autumn you could place the container in a mini greenhouse that sits near your back door. This will give some heat and protection yet makes them convenient to harvest for the kitchen. Alternatively, place the container on a windowsill.



CUT-AND-COME-AGAIN SALAD LEAVES

Could this be the easiest crop of all? It is certainly one of the quickest and needs very little space to provide you with worthwhile crops for much of the year



Most of our popular salads have a neat trick that you can take advantage of. If you snip off the top growth (or pick individual leaves) when large enough, leaving the growing point attached, the plants will regrow allowing you to harvest them 2-3 times before they run out of steam and have to be resown. And that is just what cut-and-come-again crops are – plants that can be cut, or harvested, more than once.

This is a great way to produce all your salad needs in a very small space and it allows you to grow such a wide variety of leaves, all with different flavours, in one small tray.

They can be grown anywhere that offers a little protection during the cooler months, but outside too from March to September, or you can simply grow them on a reasonably bright windowsill.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- A suitable tray such as a windowbox-sized container or you can use pots or seed trays. If growing on the windowsill, you will need a suitable tray or saucer to catch excess water. A cover of some sort for the tray, such as a propagator lid or cling film, is useful but not essential.
- Compost – this can be the cheapest you can find such as growing bag compost or bargain multi-purpose. Salad seeds are not fussy about compost requirements.
- Last but not least – seeds. See 'Suitable For Salads' opposite for a list. There is no reason why you can't use up seeds left over at the end of the season for cut-and-come-again crops.

Top tip
Sow a batch of seeds every 14-21 days to ensure a continuous supply

WHEN TO GROW

You can grow cut-and-come-again salads all year round, but they will grow far slower in the winter. In summer you can be harvesting within



STEP BY STEP

SOWING A CUT-AND-COME-AGAIN CROP



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1 Fill container with compost. If it is deep, fill just three-quarters full to save compost. Sieve a little soil over the top.

2 Water the compost thoroughly. You can do this with a fine rose sprayer, or stand the tray in water and allow to soak until the surface is thoroughly moistened.

3 Sow your seeds thinly. Sowing thickly may result in overcrowding and could encourage rotting or 'running to seed' (bolting).

4 Water lightly over the surface of the compost and cover the tray to maintain humidity until the seeds have germinated and about 70% have established.

as little as three weeks from sowing. In winter it may take eight weeks or more.

SUITABLE FOR SALADS

Lettuce, mustards, oriental greens such as mibuna, mizuna and pak choi, kale, chard, peas (for shoots, see page 14), beetroot, perpetual beet, radicchio, onions, endive, radish, watercress, claytonia, lamb's lettuce. Also some herbs such as coriander, basil, parsley and chives. Seed catalogues also offer a wide range of themed seed mixtures especially for this purpose, or you can buy the seeds separately and experiment with your own flavours.

Not suitable: The foliage of members of the tomato family – tomatoes, peppers, aubergines – must never be eaten.

WATCH OUT FOR

If growing outside, slugs and flea beetles can be a nuisance with some crops. Take precautions against slugs and snails and cover trays with crop protection fleece to keep off beetles and other pests such as greenfly.





POTATOES IN A POT

Freshly harvested potatoes are an essential treat for every veg gardener, yet you don't need an allotment to share the experience – a few tubs will do

Potatoes might seem difficult for someone starting out on the growing adventure but they're not that difficult at all. A bit of basic know-how, the right materials, a little attention along the way and you should be able to produce a tasty crop of new potatoes as fresh as can be.

You might think that to grow potatoes you need a lot of space but this is not the case. You can grow potatoes in pots, sacks, bags, tyres – indeed, in all sorts of containers – and in all sorts of places too, including small backyards, patios, balconies, and even on top of a barge.

The minimum size realistically for a container should be 30cm (1ft) deep and 30cm (1ft) in diameter.

WHAT TO BUY

To grow potatoes you will need to buy 'seed' potatoes ('tubers') which are available online or from garden centres. There are many varieties of potato but they can be broken down into three categories. 'First

early' varieties take about 10 weeks to mature, 'second early' varieties take about 14 weeks, and 'maincrop' take 20 weeks.

Although you can grow maincrop in containers, it's probably wiser to opt for a first early or second early variety which will give you 'new' potatoes in late spring/early summer. When you come to buy your seed potatoes the label will indicate whether they are first early, second early or maincrop, and also the name of the specific variety, such as 'Home Guard'.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- Egg box or seed tray
- Seed potatoes
- Container (8 litre)
- Multi-purpose compost
- Fertiliser

WHEN TO GROW

You should plant first earlies towards the end of March, second earlies mid-April, and maincrop mid to late April.

PREPARING FOR PLANTING

Prior to planting it's a good idea to 'chit' your seed potatoes first. This simply means encouraging them to sprout ('chitting' means sprouting). When you look at your seed potatoes closely you will see that they have little indentations known as 'eyes' and it is from these that sprouts will rise. Chitting gives your potatoes a head start and results in an earlier crop.

WATCH OUT FOR

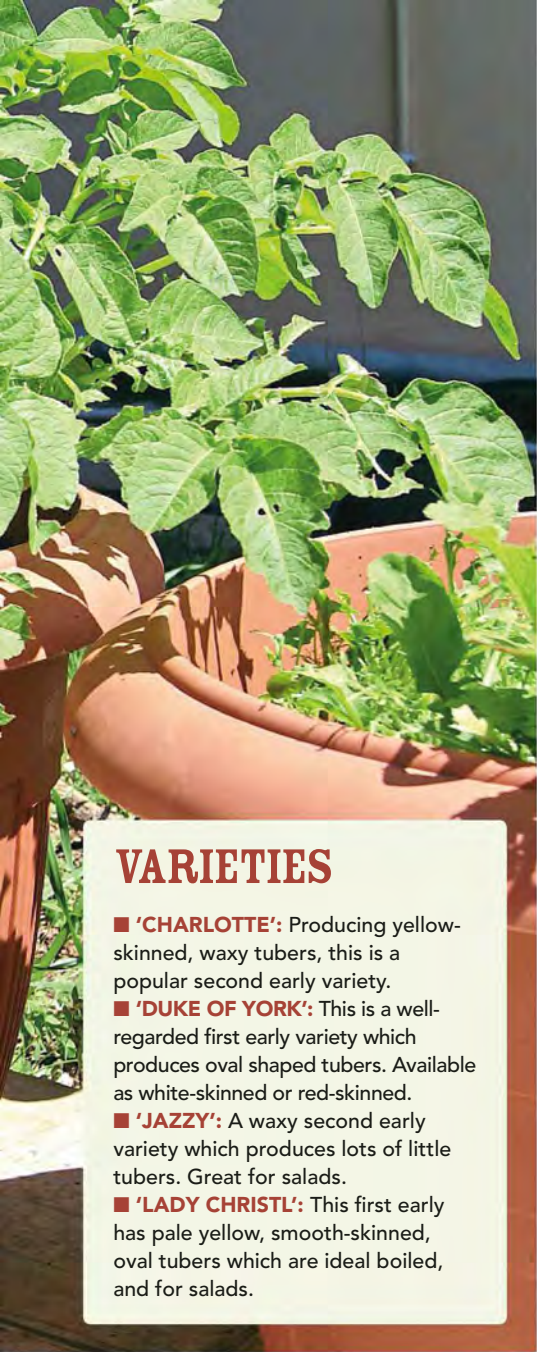
FROST: If your potato haulms (the stems and foliage) are hit by frost they will blacken and turn mushy. If there is a risk of frost, either bring your containers inside or cover them with horticultural fleece (available online and from garden centres) or spare bubble wrap.

LEGGY SPROUTING: If your chitting seed potatoes start sending up very spindly shoots it's probably due to lack of light or the conditions are too warm.

VIRUSES: Potatoes can suffer from a range of these, where the leaves will curl and or where they will take on a mottled appearance. Watch out for aphids which carry viruses and spray with an insecticide if necessary.

Top tip

Take an empty compost bag, turn it inside out and voila! A potato growing bag for free!



VARIETIES

- **'CHARLOTTE'**: Producing yellow-skinned, waxy tubers, this is a popular second early variety.
- **'DUKE OF YORK'**: This is a well-regarded first early variety which produces oval shaped tubers. Available as white-skinned or red-skinned.
- **'JAZZY'**: A waxy second early variety which produces lots of little tubers. Great for salads.
- **'LADY CHRISTL'**: This first early has pale yellow, smooth-skinned, oval tubers which are ideal boiled, and for salads.

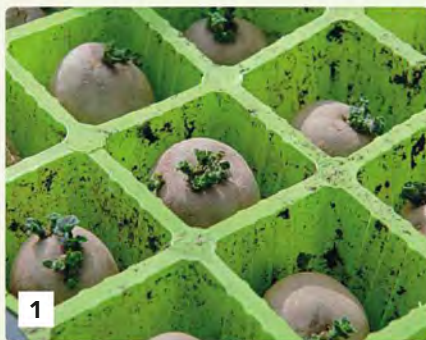
In the Kitchen

BUTTERED NEW POTATOES WITH PARSLEY: Sometimes simple is best. Just boil the potatoes. Then melt butter in pan, add chopped parsley and then pour over potatoes. Salt and pepper to taste.



STEP BY STEP

GROWING POTATOES IN CONTAINERS



How many seed potatoes you grow will depend on the size of your container. The method that follows is the simplest, using a 48 (H) x 30 x 30cm (18 x 12 x 12in) potato bag (available online and from garden centres) and one seed potato.

1. CHITTING

In late January place seed potatoes in an egg box, seed tray or modular seed tray with some of the eyes facing upwards. Place in a cool, light, frost-free place. After about six weeks, when the shoots are about 2.5cm (1in) long, they are ready for planting.

2. ADDING THE BOTTOM LAYER

Create a 15cm (6in) layer of compost to the bottom of the container and mix in some potato fertiliser according to the instructions on the box. This will form the basic bed for your seed potato.

3. PLANT THE SEED POTATO

Place the seed potato in the centre of the bed with its shoots pointing upwards, and then cover with another 15cm (6in) layer of compost. Water in, and continue to water regularly – don't let the compost dry out.

4. EARTHING UP

After a couple of weeks you will see foliage emerging. Cover the emerging leaves with more compost, though allow a few to peep through. Continue to do this until the compost has reached the top of the container. Continue to water and add a liquid fertiliser every two weeks.

5. FLOWERING

First and second earlies are usually ready when they flower. To harvest, simply turn the container on its side and pull on the stems, dragging the tubers out with them. Then turn the whole container upside down to access the rest of the tubers.



HERBS IN A BAG

You can't beat a few fresh herbs sprinkled in your cooking pot and they are so easy to grow. Why not try a few select herbs in a growing bag by your back door?

Fresh, young herbs give a powerful punch to your cooking and are so much better than dried herbs. Herbs also need to be handy and this herby growing bag is ideal to place by your back door.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- A growing bag
- About 1-2m (39in-78in) of hanging basket liner (cut off a roll from a garden centre) or hessian
- About 8-9 small pots (3½in/9cm) of herbs of your choice



WHEN TO GROW

Ideally start this herby bag in the spring but it can be planted up later during the summer months too.

HARVESTING

You can pluck a few leaves off almost straight away although be careful not to defoliate the plant. Allow it to establish and grow a bit ideally. You only need a very small amount of fresh leaf to add excellent flavour to your cooking.

WATCH OUT FOR

Take note of the labels when you plant up your herbs. Does it say annual or perennial on the label? If annual then at the end of the growing season they will start to die back so lift and dispose of these. Examples include basil and to some extent parsley and coriander. More hardy perennial herbs such as rosemary, sage and thyme can be left for another year in the growing bag if you apply a controlled-release fertiliser in the spring. After a couple of seasons you will need to lift these and replot individually into larger pots of fresh compost or plant out in the garden.

Top tip

Every week in the summer check how dry the compost is and water if necessary. A general purpose liquid feed will also be beneficial every couple of weeks

GREAT HERBS FOR GROWING BAGS

Most popular herbs will grow well in your growing bag, such as: basil, thyme, coriander, parsley (flat and curly-leaved), chives, sage, rosemary and mint.



STEP BY STEP MAKING A HERBY BAG



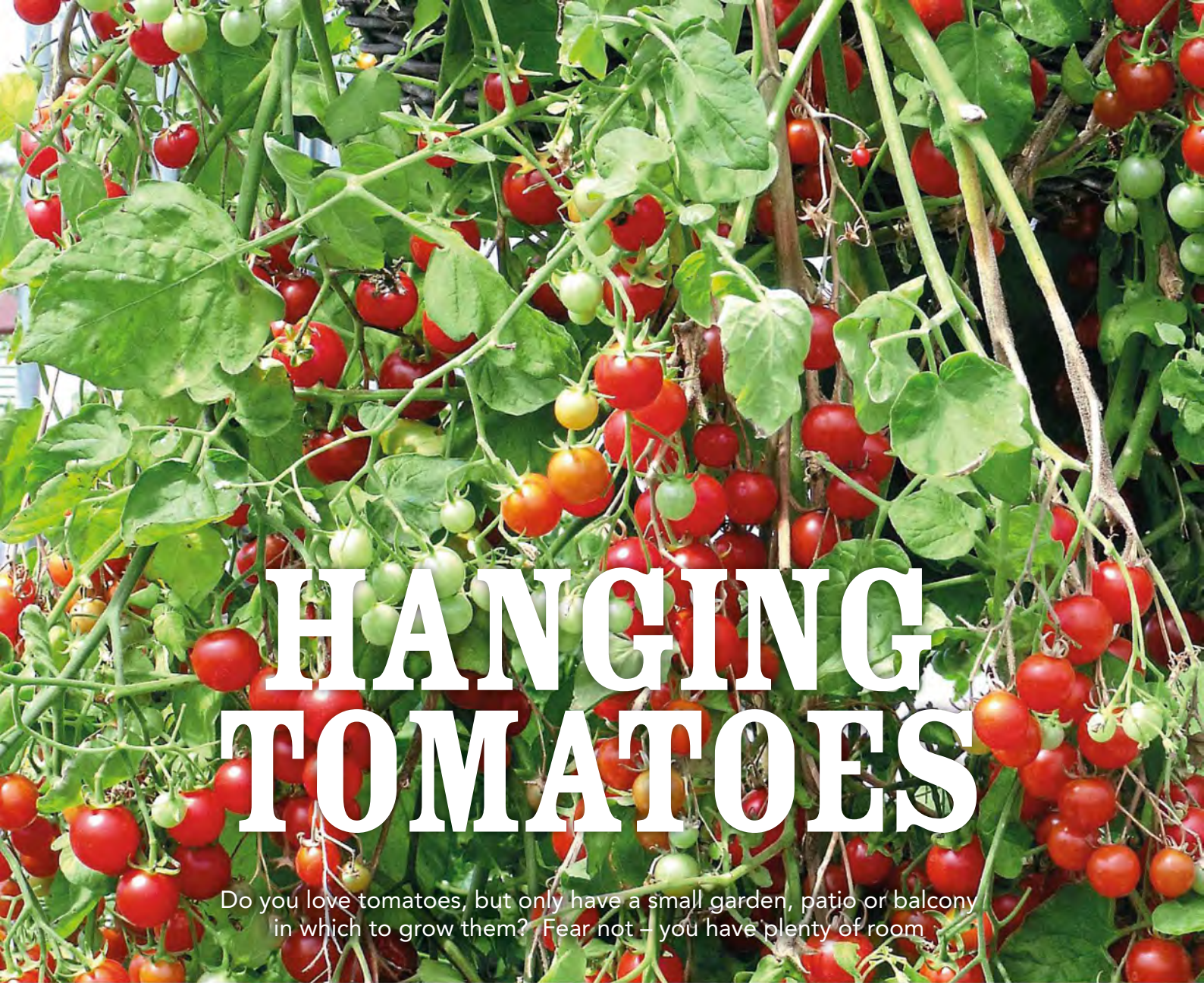
1 First plump up the growing bag to break up the compost inside and then make about 10 holes in the base of the bag.

2 Turn the bag the right way up and wrap with the hanging basket liner or hessian. Tuck the ends in and place by your back door.

3 Cut crosses through the material and the growing bag with scissors. Make sure you get them evenly apart across the bag. Fold the flaps under to form a planting space.

4 Remove some of the compost from the space and place in a bucket. Take the herbs out of their pots and plant into the holes you have made. Return some of the compost. Gently trickle a little water around the rootball and then firm lightly.

5 Brush off excess compost that may have spilled over the bag and then water the bag thoroughly. Label the plants and enjoy.



HANGING TOMATOES

Do you love tomatoes, but only have a small garden, patio or balcony in which to grow them? Fear not – you have plenty of room

One of the easiest and most attractive ways of growing this delicious and versatile crop is in hanging baskets and with modern F1 hybrid cherry tomatoes, you will be amazed at just how many small, sweet fruit you can harvest from such a small space.

Producing heavy crops does however require plenty of food and water and so it is important to choose a larger basket – 45cm (18in) diameter is ideal – so that it will hold a reasonable volume of compost for the hungry roots. You will also need a good compost and it is also a good idea to add a controlled release fertiliser to this prior to planting up

or to push some fertiliser 'tablets' into the compost after planting. These should feed your plants for the rest of the season. However, if you prefer to have more control over this aspect, use a liquid tomato feed instead, adding it at half strength every watering once the first truss of fruit has set on your plants.

As with many other fruiting crops, to get the best from them it is important to harvest regularly to ensure the development and ripening of the following fruits, but with care your hanging basket should provide you with fruit from late June/July to the end of September.

WHAT YOU NEED

■ A hanging basket – the bigger the better, but a 45cm (18in) diameter one is ideal. This can be a solid plastic basket or open wire type. If using the latter you will need something to line it with such as moss or moss substitute or a paper or fibre liner. If you are often away from home a self-watering basket (one with a built-in reservoir) might be a good option.

■ A good, fresh multi-purpose or potting compost is ideal. Avoid loam-based mixes such as John Innes as these are too heavy for a large basket.

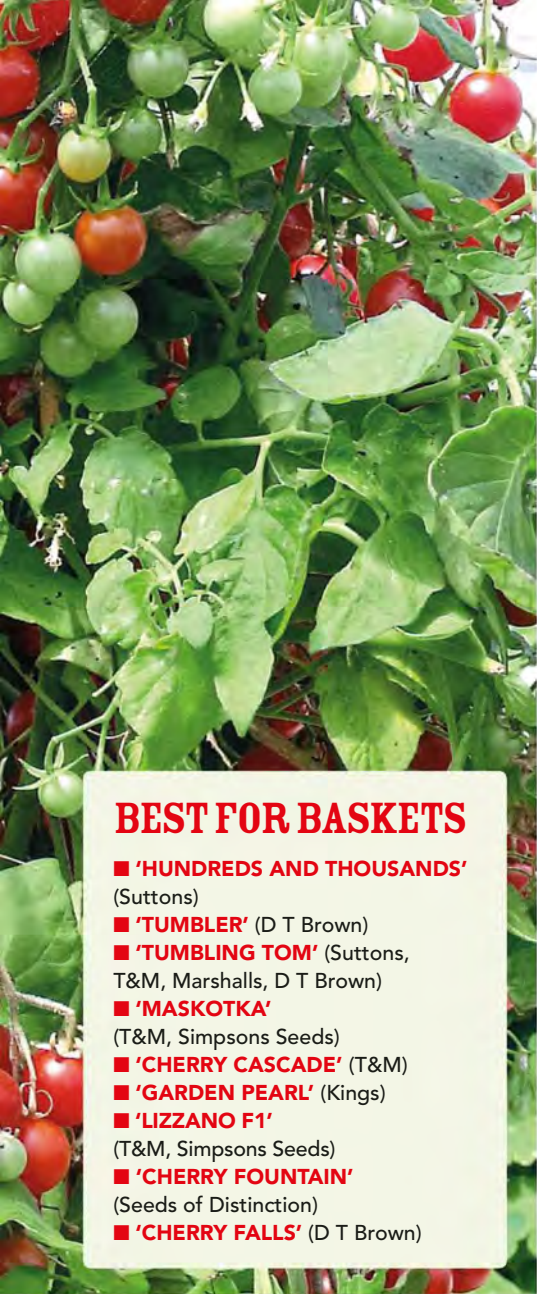
■ Controlled-release fertiliser or good liquid tomato food.

■ Water-retaining gel – this is optional, but again a good idea for those who struggle to find the time to give their basket enough water during the summer.

■ Tomato plants. You can grow these yourself (and you'll find all the advice you need in the January 2016 issue of KG) or buy them from your local garden centre or a young plant specialist. See our 'Best for baskets' panel opposite for some of our favourite basket varieties.

■ A strong bracket to hang the basket from, preferably near the house to make it easy to pop out to pick a few fruit.





BEST FOR BASKETS

- **'HUNDREDS AND THOUSANDS'** (Suttons)
- **'TUMBLER'** (D T Brown)
- **'TUMBLING TOM'** (Suttons, T&M, Marshalls, D T Brown)
- **'MASKOTKA'** (T&M, Simpsons Seeds)
- **'CHERRY CASCADE'** (T&M)
- **'GARDEN PEARL'** (Kings)
- **'LIZZANO F1'** (T&M, Simpsons Seeds)
- **'CHERRY FOUNTAIN'** (Seeds of Distinction)
- **'CHERRY FALLS'** (D T Brown)

WHEN TO GROW

If sowing your own seeds, this can be done from January to March. If you intend to grow your basket outside, March is ideal as plants are not frost hardy and can't be moved outdoors until June in most parts of the country, so you don't want to sow too early. If buying plants and you have somewhere frost free to keep them, then pick them up in April. If not, then buy them in May/June and plant up your baskets straight away.

WATCH OUT FOR

Never allow your plants to wilt as this will check their growth and may lead to reduced cropping. Yellow leaves may indicate that additional feeding is required. Whitefly can be a nuisance in summer, but can be tolerated.



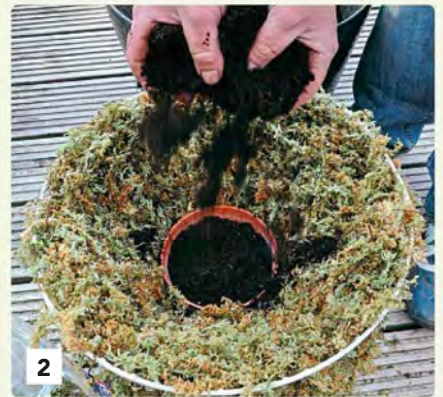
Add controlled-release fertiliser to the compost

STEP BY STEP

PLANTING A TOMATO BASKET



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1 Remove the chain and stand your basket on a large pot to help hold it steady. Line the basket using the material of your choice. We have used moss.

2 If using an open wire basket place a plant saucer or piece of polythene in the base. This will slow the flow of water through the compost a little. Fill about three-quarters full with compost.

3 Put in your plants. In a 45cm (18in) basket you will need three plants. In a 30cm (12in) basket you will only really need one plant.

4 Water thoroughly. You can do this with a watering can or, if using an open wire basket, by standing the basket in a water-filled bucket until the surface of the compost is soaked.



Cherry tomato 'Tumbling Tom'



PEA SHOOTS

Pea shoots have become something of a gourmet delicacy and can attract high prices in the shops – if you can find them at all – yet they are so easy to grow at home. Why not use up that opened packet of seeds you have left in the tin?

Fresh, young pea shoots give you all the taste of fresh peas, but without the hassle of preparing soil, installing supports, watering and weeding. What is more, they can be ready to harvest in less than a month and can be cropped at least three times.

Top tip

Pick regularly to enjoy the shoots when young and tender

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- A pot or container from 13cm (5in) upwards.
- Any multi-purpose or growing bag compost.
- Some pea seeds.

WHEN TO GROW

Sow your pea seeds all year round.

As with all crops they will grow more slowly in winter than summer, but given a warm, bright windowsill in winter these dry green seeds will produce their delicious shoots within three to four weeks.

HARVESTING YOUR SHOOTS

Allow the shoots to produce two mature leaves before harvesting. Then pinch out the tips with your finger and thumbnail or snip with scissors, leaving the bottom two leaves behind. These will go on to produce new shoots in the joint between leaf and stem for a second and even a third harvest. See main picture.

WATCH OUT FOR

Your peas should remain pest and disease free, but shouldn't be overwatered or may suffer from stem rot. Watch out for greenfly and slugs in summer outdoors.

DID YOU KNOW?

Pea shoots contain much of the goodness of freshly harvested peas. Only 50g contains half of our daily requirement of vitamin C and a quarter of our vitamin A. They also contain lots of folic acid and are low in fat, with just 9 calories per 50g of fresh shoots.



Pea seeds germinate quickly



STEP BY STEP

SOWING PEAS FOR SHOOTS



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1 Fill your pot with any fresh multi-purpose compost or growing bag compost.

2 Sow your peas over the surface thickly so that they are almost touching.

3 Cover with some more compost, perlite or vermiculite (pictured) to the depth of the seed.

4 Water well to soak the compost, label and place the pot in a warm, light place to germinate.



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