

Let's
GROW
& **COOK**

70
recipes
inside

**Feed your family from your garden:
Advice on growing 57 easy crops plus
70 mouth-watering recipes to try**



IN ASSOCIATION WITH
Kitchen
Garden

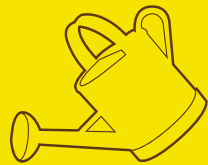
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Welcome...

TO THE WORLD OF GROWING AND EATING YOUR OWN FRESHLY PICKED PRODUCE!



More and more people are starting to appreciate the benefits of growing their own fresh fruit and veg and are seeking out their own patch to do just that.

Home-grown produce is not just fresher than anything you'll find in the shops, in growing it you'll have got some free exercise and in harvesting it will have saved the road and air miles that our supermarket produce has to travel to get to our plates. Not only that but you can also choose whether or not to use chemicals to grow your crops – they can be grown totally organically if you wish – and you'll save money into the bargain.

Of course the traditional place to grow fruit and veg is on an allotment and the long waiting lists in many areas of the UK show just how popular this hobby has become. However, you certainly don't need an allotment to produce your own crops – a back garden veg patch is a convenient solution for many; but even if you don't have the space for a dedicated growing area, just a few tubs and containers will allow you to grow a surprising amount of produce.

Growing your own fresh produce is only half the story, however. Having reaped the harvest the next step is to find some delicious and imaginative ways to prepare and cook it. So this book not only takes you through the simple steps required to grow more than 50 crops from start to finish, it also includes more than 70 delicious and original recipes for you and your friends and family to try.

There are no complicated techniques to learn – just a few simple common-sense ones – and you don't need to spend a fortune on equipment to get started. In fact most of you reading this will have a few basic gardening tools in the shed already and that's really all you need to get growing. So once you've decided what you'd like to grow, check out the seed catalogues or go online and order your seeds and plants and enter the world of fruit and veg growing. We guarantee you'll never want to eat shop-bought produce again!

Happy growing!



MEET THE AUTHORS



Steve Ott has worked in horticulture all his life. He has been editor of *Kitchen Garden* magazine for 10 years and when not writing about it, grows his own fruit and veg on his plot in the East Midlands. You can get lots more advice from Steve and the KG team on Facebook, Twitter on the website: www.kitchengarden.co.uk

Kitchen Garden is a monthly magazine and is available from high street retailers nationwide or as an interactive digital format. Visit the Apple App Store or Google Play and download the free app.



Anna Pettigrew is a food writer, recipe developer and photographer. Her blog, *Camera & Clementine*, is a vegetarian food blog, started by Anna in 2013 to inspire others to cook and eat seasonally as well as grow their own and forage for wild food. It was founded on the principles of using healthy and seasonal produce in the kitchen. Anna grows her own produce in her garden in the beautiful Scottish countryside. For more information visit: cameraandclementine.com



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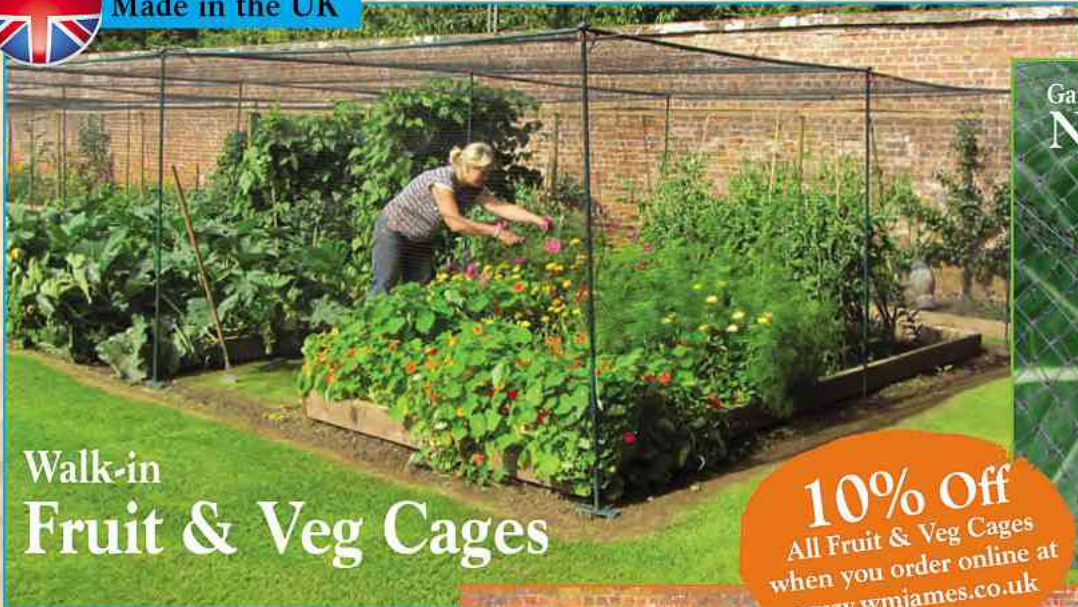
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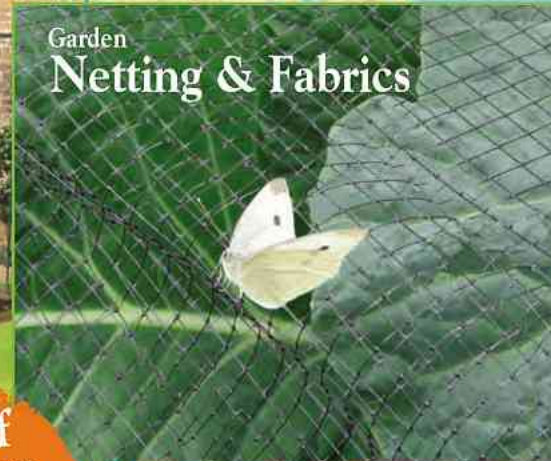


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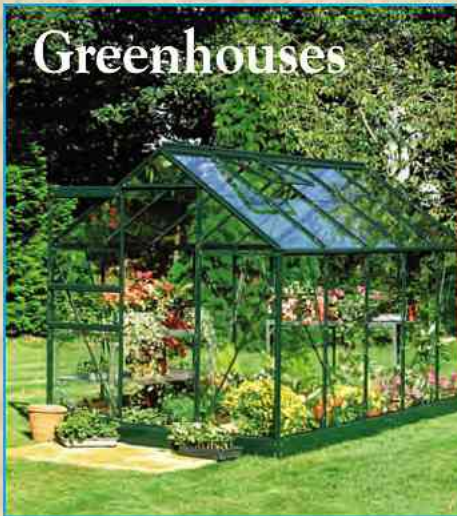


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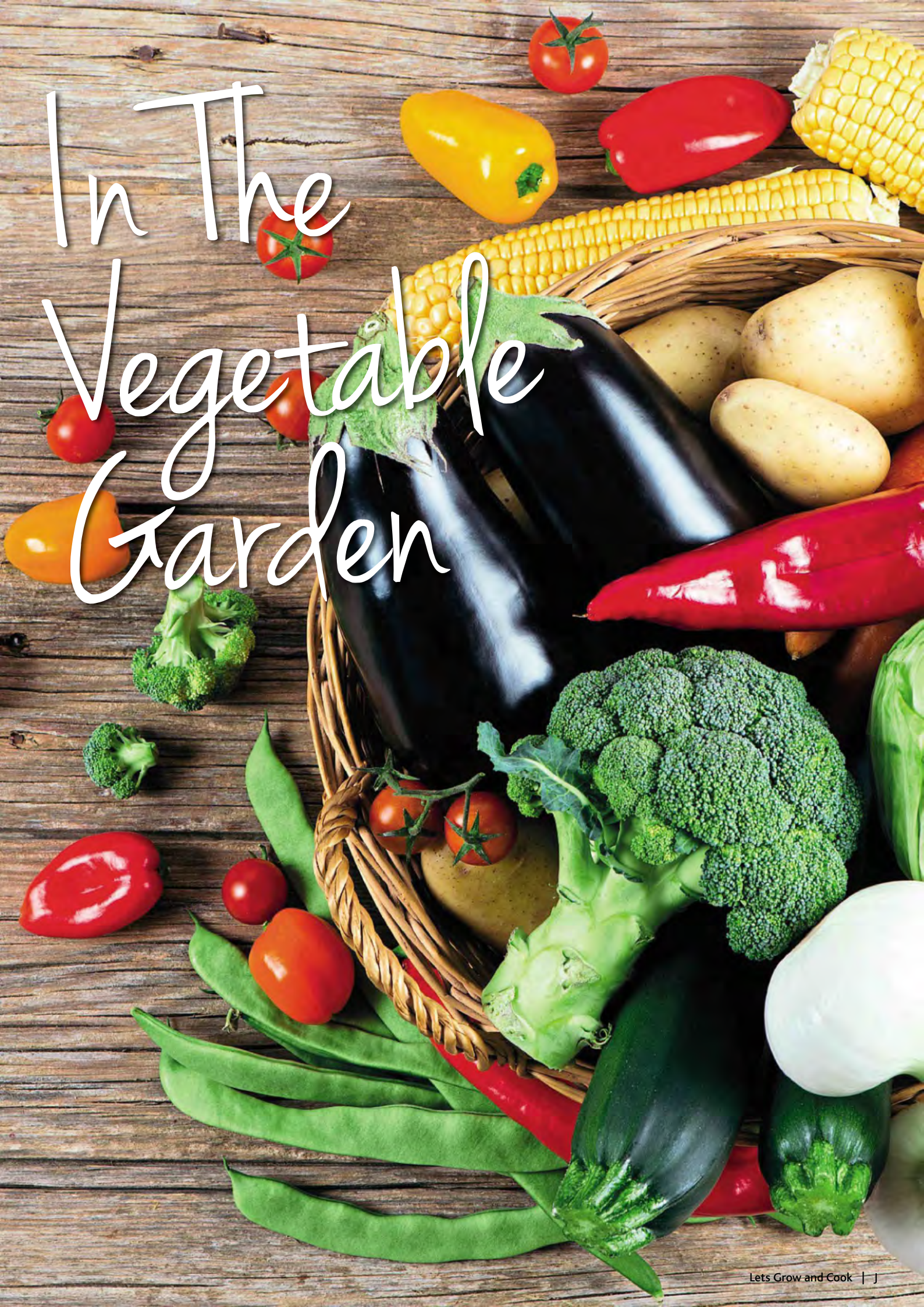
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In The Vegetable Garden



Asparagus

is a true delicacy. In early spring the first young shoots to grow from the spidery roots are harvested as the asparagus spears that we so love to eat. A well-cared-for bed may crop for 15 years or more.



ASPARAGUS AND MINT SLAW

Embrace this season's best asparagus by whipping up this fresh and crunchy spring slaw. Great served as a salad, with fish or in a pitta pocket.

SERVES 4

- 4 shallots, thinly sliced
- 2 carrots, julienned
- 1 bunch asparagus, trimmed and shaved using a vegetable peeler
- ¼ head of red cabbage, thinly sliced
- 1 tbsp roughly chopped mint
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 2 tbsp red wine vinegar
- 1 tsp sugar
- 1 clove garlic, finely chopped
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

1. Whisk the olive oil, vinegar, sugar, salt and pepper in a large bowl until well combined. Then add the mint and garlic, stirring well.
2. Add the red cabbage, shallots, carrots and asparagus and toss to combine.
3. Serve.



ASPARAGUS, WALNUT AND BACON RAVIOLI

Prepare this pasta dish of asparagus and walnuts on a spring day. It's delicious and very quick and easy to prepare.

SERVES 4

- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 shallot, chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, peeled and minced
- 1 bunch of asparagus, halved
- 4 rashers of free-range unsmoked back bacon, diced
- 50g (1¾oz) walnuts, chopped
- 4 tbsp single cream
- 2 packets of four cheese ravioli (or your favourite flavour)
- Sprig of rosemary, chopped

1. Put a large pan of water on to boil.
2. Next, gently heat the onion and garlic in the olive oil, then add the bacon and rosemary. Fry for 2 minutes, taking care not to burn the garlic.
3. Add the asparagus halves and walnuts, stir in and cook for 3 minutes.
4. Once the pan of water is boiling add the ravioli, and cook for 2 minutes. Then drain and set aside.
5. Add the cream to the asparagus pan, and cook for 1 minute, then add the drained pasta to the pan and stir to coat the ravioli in the sauce.
6. Season to taste with salt and plenty of black pepper.
7. Serve immediately.



PLANTING

Asparagus is a long-term crop so it pays to get the site in order before planting. Asparagus likes a sunny site that is well drained; also add some farmyard manure or garden compost.

Remove perennial weeds, which will otherwise quickly colonise the bed.

Plant in early spring; the roots are placed in a trench about 30cm (12in) wide and 20cm (8in) deep. Splay the roots out over a slight hump in the bottom of the trench. Cover with 5cm (2in) of soil and firm down.

GROWING ON

Avoid cutting shoots in the first year, allowing them to put on lots of good growth. You can take a small harvest the following spring and gradually increase as the plants establish.

Always keep the beds weed-free but avoid hoeing in the early spring as you will cut off the spears. The foliage will benefit from being supported with string around the outside to keep it growing straight and upright. In autumn it will start to yellow and can then be removed, cutting at the base. Leave 2.5cm (1in) stumps above ground.

In late winter, apply a little Growmore and if you have some compost place some over the beds.

HARVESTING IN POTS



Use a long, sharp knife to cut the shoots about 7.5cm (3in) below the soil once they reach 15cm (6in) long. Continue to harvest for approximately eight weeks.



Growing asparagus in a pot is not the norm as the crowns need room and to have enough water and nutrients to keep the crop strong. However, it can be done. Choose a large container 90cm (3ft) square to house one good crown. Mulch each year with some horse manure for a taster of fresh-cut spears, though you won't gather a feast!

AT A GLANCE



SOW: MAR-APR



PLANT: MAR-APR, SEP-OCT



HARVEST: APR-JUN

Asparagus can be grown from seeds but it will take a long time before it is ready for harvesting. Sow 2.5cm (1in) deep in a specially prepared seed bed. Once the plants are through and growing away well, remove some of the seedlings to keep space between. By the following spring you can plant out where you intend to harvest.

WATCH OUT FOR

Asparagus beetle is the main pest and will attack the feathery top growth from April onwards. Pick off the black larvae as spotted or spray with an organic insecticide such as PY Spray Garden Insect Killer or Bug Clear Gun for Fruit and Veg.

TOP TIP

Plant some crowns of an early and late variety to extend the harvest period

VARIETIES

'Pacific Purple'

Sweet and stringless. Steam to retain the purple colour. Plant autumn.

'Mondeo'

A popular variety producing early crops of sweet spears. Plant spring.

'Lucillus F1'

A later-cropping variety producing medium spears.

'Connover's Colossal'

A good early-cropping variety that is also available as seed. Plant spring.

'Gijnlim F1'

An early heavy-yielding variety producing thick, tender spears. Plant spring.

Broad Beans

These large, leafy beans produce big pods that contain either white or green beans depending on the variety. The tips of the bean plants can also be picked and eaten, so can whole small pods – or wait until the beans reach full size before harvesting.

BROAD BEAN RISOTTO

A lovely simple dish in which you can include some of your broad bean harvest.

SERVES 4

- A dash of olive oil
- 3 knobs butter
- 1 large onion, finely chopped
- 300g/10½oz risotto rice
- 1 litre/1¾ pints vegetable stock
- A small glass of white wine
- 3 tbsp marscarpone (optional)
- 50g/2oz Parmesan or vegetarian hard cheese, grated, plus extra to serve
- 200g/7oz cooked broad beans
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 heaped tbsp flatleaf parsley

1. Heat the olive oil and butter in a large pan, then add the onion and cook over a low heat for 5 minutes, until softened.
2. Stir in the rice and cook for a further 2-3 minutes, stirring continuously.
3. Add the wine, and stir until absorbed.
4. Next, pour in a ladle of stock and stir the mixture until the liquid is absorbed.
5. Continue to add more stock, one ladle at a time, until all the stock is used up.
6. Now stir in the marscarpone, Parmesan, butter, broad beans and season to taste with salt and freshly ground black pepper.
7. Sprinkle over the herbs to serve.



SOWING



Broad bean seeds are traditionally sown in a double row. Scoop out a shallow trench about the width of a spade and about 3-5cm (1-2in) deep. Then sow the beans in a double zigzag line down the trench. Space the seeds about 20cm (8in) apart. The double row of plants will give you a greater harvest from a smaller area. Pull back some soil to cover the seeds and water well. It will take seven to 10 days for the seedlings to emerge.

Alternatively sow in deep trays in autumn or early spring and grow on under cover in the early stages, planting out in March or April.

GROWING ON

Some broad bean varieties are quite tall and once they start to produce pods become top heavy. It is a good idea to give them some support by placing four stakes at the corners of the crop and tying string around them.

Keep the plants well watered in dry weather, especially once they flower and start to produce pods.

TOP TIP

Grow the crimson-flowered broad bean, a heritage variety, in your flower borders for its pretty two-toned red blooms.

HARVESTING IN POTS

Harvest the pods when 5-8cm (2-3in) long. These can be cooked and eaten whole.



Alternatively, wait until they are more than 13cm (5in) long and have filled out. Split open a pod to see if the beans are large enough to harvest. The smallest beans are the tastiest.



You can grow broad beans in a pot but it needs to be a decent size. A 60cm (2ft) diameter and deep pot will provide enough space for about six to eight plants. A potful of crimson-flowered beans will look pretty but for a good reliable harvest try growing dwarf variety 'The Sutton'.

Use a John Innes' no 2 or 3 compost because this will hold moisture better than a peat or coir-based compost. Do not let the pot dry out, especially when the pods are forming.

AT A GLANCE

-  SOW: FEB (INSIDE)
MAR-MAY, NOV (OUTSIDE)
-  HARVEST: MAY-SEP

Extra early sowing of the variety 'Aquadulce Claudia' can be made in November in milder areas on free-draining soil. These should be covered with a cloche to give extra protection in winter.

WATCH OUT FOR

Blackfly will often infest the soft shoot tips, sucking the sap and causing distortion. Pinch out the tips once the plant has set a good crop and you will remove the pests at the same time.



VARIETIES

'AQUADULCE CLAUDIA'
Grows to 1m (40in) so may need some support. Best variety for early or late sowings. White seeds.

'MEDES'
An award-winning variety which is reasonably compact at 90cm (35in). Suitable for spring or autumn sowing.

'THE SUTTON'
A short variety growing to about 30cm (12in) high with white seeds. A good choice if you don't have a lot of room.

'IMPERIAL GREEN LONGPOD'
Another tall one at 1.2m (4ft) and a green-seeded type. As its name suggests it produces long pods with up to nine beans in each.

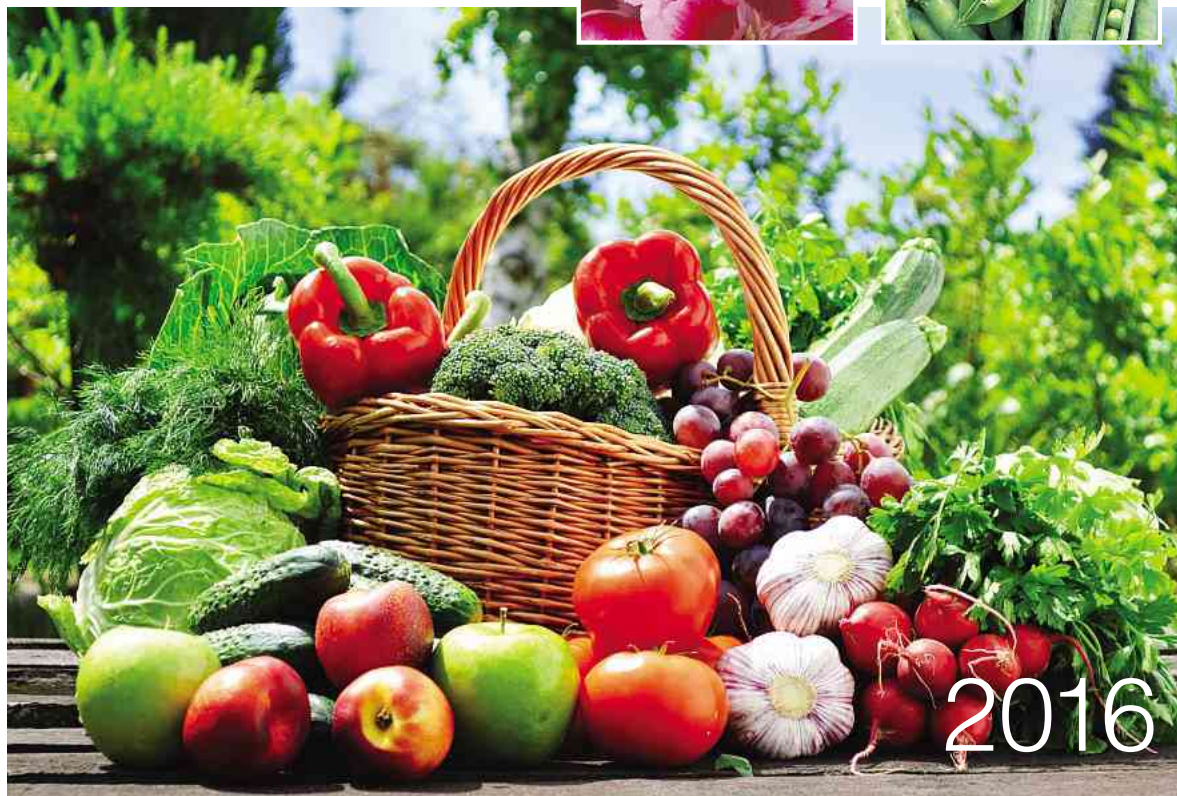


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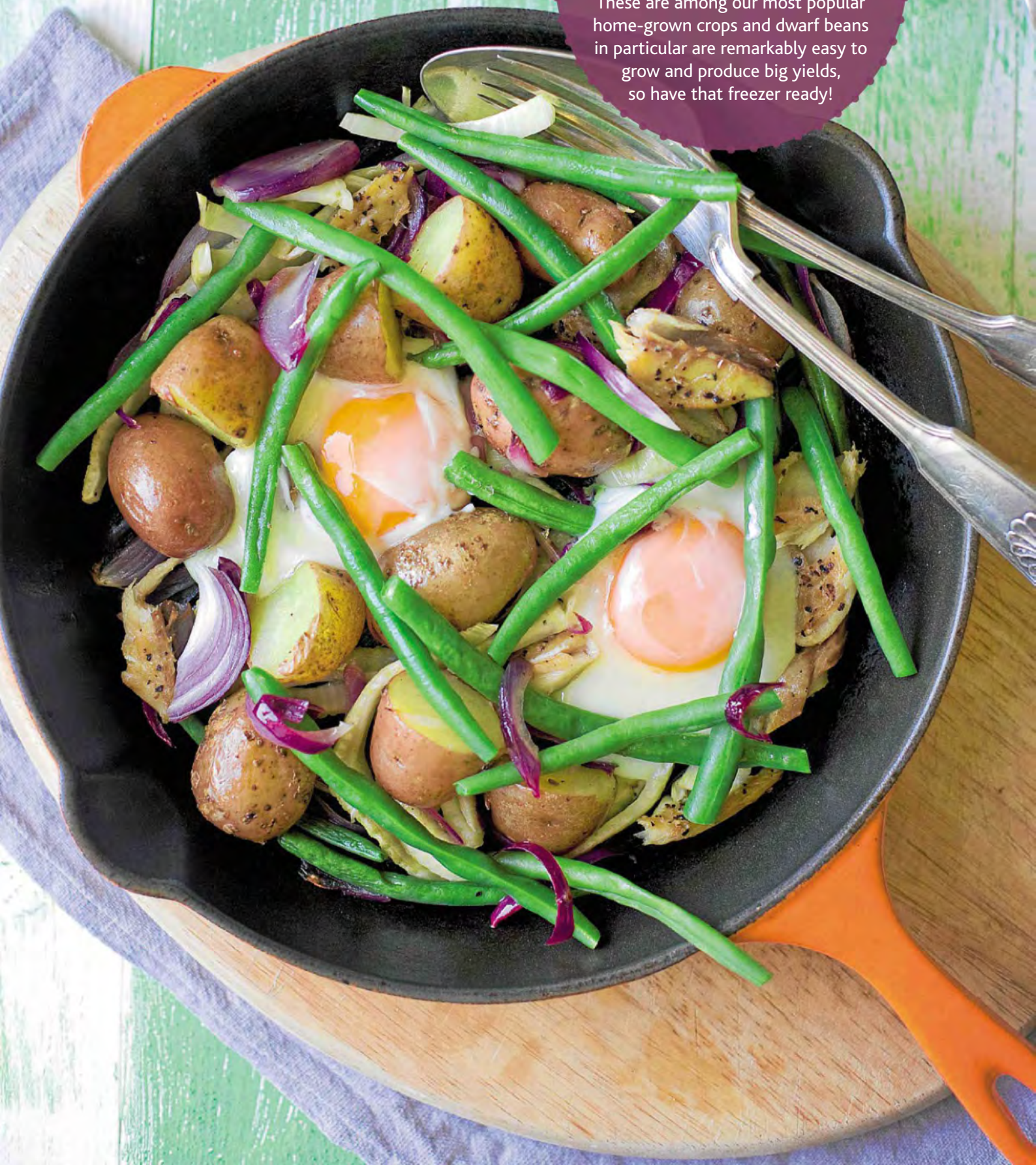
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COOK IT

Dwarf & Climbing Beans

These are among our most popular home-grown crops and dwarf beans in particular are remarkably easy to grow and produce big yields, so have that freezer ready!



GREEN BEANS AND NEW POTATOES WITH PEPPERED MACKEREL

This is a great recipe for using up some of all those green beans from the veg patch. Green beans have a lovely fresh flavour that complements the earthy potatoes and the peppery mackerel wonderfully.

SERVES 4

- 200g new potatoes
- 150g green beans or French beans
- 1 small fennel bulb, sliced
- 100g peppered mackerel
- 1 red onion, chopped
- 2 free-range eggs
- 2 tbsp olive oil

1. Start by washing the potatoes and cutting any large ones in half. Place in a pan of water and boil until just tender.
2. Meanwhile, top and tail the beans, and boil for 3 minutes, drain and set aside.
3. Prepare the remaining vegetables and tear the mackerel into pieces.
4. Heat a large skillet or frying pan with the olive oil, and sauté the onion over medium heat.
5. Next add the drained potatoes, fennel and mackerel, and cook slowly for 5 minutes.
6. Finally add the beans and make two hollows and crack an egg into each dip.
7. Cook for a further 2 minutes, without stirring, then place the skillet under a grill for 2-3 minutes until the eggs are cooked through.
8. Serve warm with a simple side salad.



GREEN BEAN AND NECTARINE SALAD WITH GORGONZOLA AND A BALSAMIC REDUCTION

This is a lovely, light summer salad with lots of texture and flavour combinations. Any blue cheese can be used, if gorgonzola isn't on hand. And peaches can be replaced with the nectarine if you wish.

SERVES 4

- 100g green beans
 - 50g gorgonzola
 - 7-8 walnuts
 - 1 nectarine or peach
 - 2 handfuls of salad leaves
- Balsamic reduction**
- 100 ml balsamic vinegar
 - 2 tbsp brown sugar

1. Combine the vinegar and brown sugar in a small saucepan and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low and simmer until thick and syrupy, about 10 minutes. Remove from heat and let cool.
2. Meanwhile, top and tail the green beans, and cook in a pan of boiling water for 2 minutes. Drain and set aside. Wash and slice the nectarine, wash the salad leaves, and dice the blue cheese.
3. Assemble the salad by tossing all the ingredients together, finishing by scattering the walnuts and drizzling the balsamic reduction over the salad.



HARVESTING

Once dwarf French and climbing beans are about 8cm (3in) long, start harvesting. Runner beans are left to develop a little longer, until the pods are around 15cm (6in) long, but must be picked before they become stringy.

IN POTS






Runner bean 'Hestia'

Beans can easily be grown in containers, especially the dwarf types. Climbing beans will need some canes for support. Use John Innes' no 3 compost and keep well watered, especially when the beans start to form. During growing season give the plants a feed with a general-purpose liquid feed such as Phostrogen or Westland Feed-All. Harvest regularly.

Beans can easily be grown in containers, especially the dwarf types. Climbing beans will need some canes for support. Use John Innes' no 3 compost and keep well watered, especially when the beans start to form. During growing season give the plants a feed with a general-purpose liquid feed such as Phostrogen or Westland Feed-All. Harvest regularly.

AT A GLANCE

-  SOW INSIDE: MAR-APR
-  SOW OUTSIDE: MAY-JUN
-  HARVEST: JUN-OCT

WATCH OUT FOR

Blackfly will infest the tips and cause the pods to become sticky. Spray as necessary with an insecticide or a strong jet of water.

SOWING

Unlike broad beans these types are not hardy so it is best to make early sowings indoors in pots or cell trays. Use multi-purpose compost and sow four beans to a 9cm (3½in) pot or one seed per cell if using deep cell trays.



Insert into the compost about 2.5cm (1in) deep. Cover with more compost, water well and place in a propagator or on a warm windowsill. It will take 7-10 days for the seedlings to emerge. If the seeds are in a propagator, remove as soon as you see the seedlings breaking through the surface.

Place the seedlings on a sunny windowsill or on a greenhouse bench to grow on.

GROWING ON

Choose a sunny spot to grow your beans and prepare the ground by adding plenty of well-rotted garden compost or farmyard manure. A sprinkling of Growmore or chicken manure is a good idea too. If growing climbing types install your bean supports.

By early to mid-May the pots of beans can be placed in a sheltered part of the garden or in a cold frame to harden off. Protect from late frosts with some fleece. Plant at the beginning of June.

In the case of climbing beans plant one or two plants next to each support. Tie the stem to the pole loosely. It is a good idea to use a slug control at this early stage.

Plant dwarf French beans about 15cm (6in) apart in the row with rows about 45cm (18in) apart. Water the plants well during dry spells.



VARIETIES (DWARF FRENCH)



Dwarf and climbing French beans come in a range of colours and shapes

'COBRA' (climbing)

A really heavy-yielding climbing bean with round green pods and mauve flowers.

'Goldfield' (climbing)

A wonderful yellow flat-podded type. The beans don't have that stringy edge to them. Would be attractive in the flower border.

'Delinel' (dwarf)

A French 'filet' type of bean producing masses of thin, round pods. The plants are sturdy and upright.

'Borlotto' (Dwarf and climbing)

There is a climbing version of this one too. Picked young, the green beans are lovely and tender. Alternatively, wait until the pods mature, turning a fiery red and streaked cream. The seeds can be used in stews or soups.

VARIETIES (RUNNER)

'Painted Lady'

A classic variety producing unusual bi-coloured red and white flowers. Ideal for growing in the flower border.



'White Lady'

A white-flowered form that is less prone to having the flowers attacked by birds. White-flowered varieties are supposed to set better in higher temperatures.

'Hestia'

This is the ideal variety for pots and containers. The bushy growth does not require staking. Attractive red and white flowers producing good crops.

'Moonlight'

A modern white-flowered variety producing long, tender pods. Tolerant of poor weather, it is largely self-setting.

'Enorma'

A good runner bean to grow if you want long pods to exhibit in your local show.

TOP TIP

It takes about 8-10 weeks from sowing to harvesting the first beans.

Beetroot

The sweet roots of beetroot are popular on the continent as an ingredient of desserts but in the UK they are traditionally used as a salad ingredient, served boiled or pickled. The young leaves are delicious and colourful when used as a salad leaf



CHOCOLATE BEETROOT CAKE

Not only does the added beetroot gently sweeten this rich chocolate cake, it makes it incredibly moist too.

MAKES 8-10 SLICES

- 50g (2oz) cocoa powder
- 175g (6oz) plain flour
- 1½tsp baking powder
- 200g (7oz) caster sugar
- 250g (9oz) cooked beetroot
- 3 medium organic eggs
- 200ml (7fl oz) sunflower oil
- 150g (5oz) dark chocolate, finely chopped

FOR THE ICING:

- 225g (8oz) icing sugar
- 2-3tbsp orange juice
- 1tbsp beet puree

1. In a large pan of boiling water, boil the beetroots in their skins until tender when pierced with a knife, roughly 40 minutes. Let cool and rub away the skins with your fingers. Set aside.
2. Preheat the oven to 180C/fan 160C/gas 4, then grease and flour 2 x 23cm (9in) springform cake tins.
3. Sieve the cocoa, flour and baking powder into a large mixing bowl, then add the sugar.
4. Pop the beetroot into a food processor and blend until smooth. Scoop out 1tbsp of the beets to use later in the icing.
5. With the machine running, add the eggs one at a time, then pour in the oil. Blend the mixture until the liquid is just smooth.
6. Stir the wet mixture into the dry ingredients and mix in the chocolate. Pour into the tin and cook for 30-45 minutes or until a skewer comes out clean.
7. Remove from the oven and set aside for 10 minutes, then turn out the cakes and leave to cool.
8. Sift the icing sugar into a bowl.
9. Using a wooden spoon, gradually stir in enough juice until the mixture is the consistency of thick cream. Then add the beetroot puree, and mix until pink, smooth and thick enough to coat the back of the spoon.
10. Use the icing to decorate the cake. Spread half between the layers, and the remaining on the top.



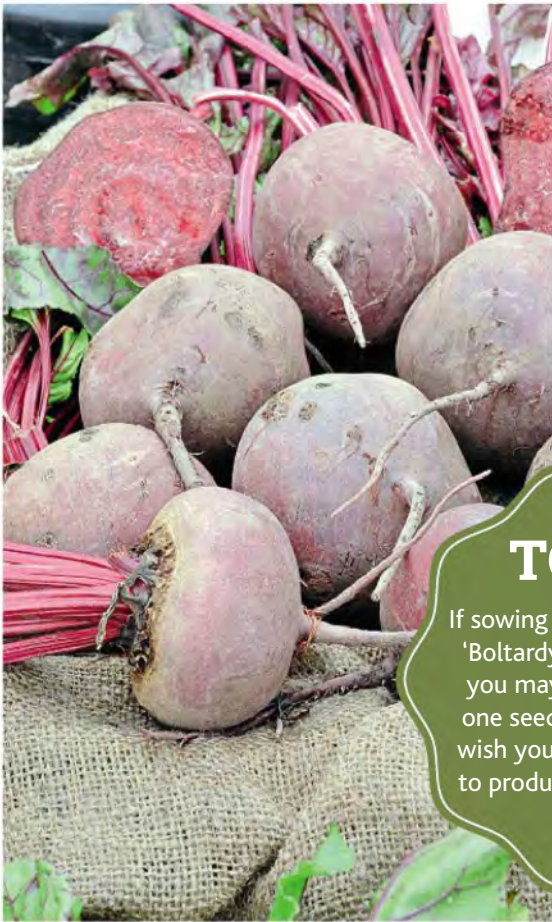
BEETROOT AND GOAT'S CHEESE TART

Fresh, colourful and delicious, this is a great treat to serve up with a big side salad.

SERVES 4

- 175g (6oz) beetroot
- 400g (14oz) ready-made shortcrust pastry
- 4tbsp red onion marmalade/chutney
- 2 large organic eggs
- 100g (3½oz) crème fraîche
- 100g (3½oz) goat's cheese, sliced
- 1tsp chopped thyme leaves, plus sprigs to garnish
- Salt and pepper

1. Pre-heat the oven to 200C/ fan 180C/gas 6. Wrap the beetroots in foil, then roast for 45 minutes until tender. Leave to cool slightly, then rub off the skins and thinly slice. Set aside.
2. On a floured surface, roll out the pastry and use to line a 23cm (9in) tart tin. Gently press the pastry into the grooves of the tin and cut away any excess with a knife. Prick the pastry base with a fork all over.
3. Cover with a sheet of baking paper, then fill with ceramic baking beans or dry rice. Bake for 10 minutes. Remove the beans, or rice, and bake for another 5 minutes.
4. Turn the oven down to 180C/ fan 160C/gas 4.
5. Spread the onion marmalade over the base of the tart, then beat together the eggs and crème fraîche, season with salt and pepper, then pour into the pastry case.
6. Top with the sliced beetroot, goat's cheese and thyme.
7. Bake in the oven for 25 minutes, or until just set.
8. Serve with a side salad.



SOWING



Beetroot is sown in shallow seed drills about 2.5cm (1in) deep. The corky seeds are sown about 10cm (4in) apart. Two or more seedlings may appear at each sowing station when growing older varieties; for the largest roots remove the excess seedlings to leave one. Leave 30cm (12in) between rows to allow room for growth. Ideally sow short rows of beetroot every month to give a succession of cropping.

It is possible to sow in cell trays and to plant out later. However, beetroot is prone to bolting if the roots are disturbed, so be sure to plant out before the roots begin to grow around the outside of the compost.

TOP TIP

If sowing older varieties such as 'Boltardy' as described above, you may produce more than one seedling per 'seed'. If you wish you can leave all to grow to produce a clump of smaller roots.

GROWING ON

As the seedlings grow keep the ground moist and weed free; if allowed to dry out and then suddenly watered, the roots may split. Periods of drought too may lead to bolting (premature running to flower and then seed).



HARVESTING



Harvest when golf ball size

When the roots are about golf ball size or a little larger, they can be harvested.

It is best not to leave them to grow too large as they will become woody. Remove alternate roots and allow the remaining ones to grow on.

Once lifted, place one hand around the leaves at the top of the root and twist off the growth above. This prevents the roots from leaching all their colour into the water when cooking – not a problem with white-rooted varieties.


IN POTS

Beetroot can be grown in a container as long as you can keep the compost moist.

With this in mind a larger container, at least 38cm (15in) diameter, is best as it won't dry out too quickly. Beetroot can be sown at closer spacings in a container – 5cm (2in) apart – and the result will be more, smaller roots. Use a John Innes no 3 compost and place the container in a sunny spot.

AT A GLANCE

 SOWING INSIDE: MAR

 SOWING OUTSIDE: APR-JUN

 HARVEST: JUN-SEP

For very early crops sow in March under cloches to protect the young seedlings from frost. The main sowing time is April but sow another row in May to keep a succession coming. A late sowing in early June should provide roots for winter storage in boxes of moist sand.

WATCH OUT FOR

Prone to bolting in hot or dry weather and if sown very early. Use a bolt-resistant variety for early sowings and keep watering as even as possible.

VARIETIES

'Boltardy'

A very popular red beetroot, ideal for early sowings and not prone to bolting.

'Pablo'

Round roots with deep red flesh. Sweet and delicious in salads when picked as baby beets or mature roots.

'Burpees Golden'

An orange variety with mild and tender yellow flesh. The young leaves can be steamed or added to salad.

'Albino'

A white globe variety which does not 'bleed' if the flesh is cut. Does not store as well as the reds.

'Cylindra'

A longer-rooted beetroot that is easy to slice and excellent for winter storage.

'Moneta'

A modern 'monogerm' variety producing just one seedling per seed. Round red roots are sweet, delicious and slow to bolt.

'Chioggia'

An old heritage variety with distinctive red and white rings when cut. These fade to pink when cooked. Good flavour.

'Bull's Blood'

An old variety grown mainly for its deep red leaves which are harvested young and used in salads. Will produce edible roots if allowed to mature.



Broccoli

Broccoli is highly nutritious and packed with cancer-beating antioxidants. It is available all year round from the shops, but so much more tender and flavoursome when picked fresh from the garden



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BROCCOLI PASTA WITH GARLIC AND PINE NUTS

Whip up this fresh pasta dish in less than 30 minutes, perfect for a busy weekday.

SERVES 4

- 2 broccoli heads, cut into florets
- 50ml extra virgin olive oil, plus
- 4 tablespoons to serve
- 5-6 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- ½ chilli, chopped
- 500g (1lb) fresh pasta
- 50g (2oz) pine nuts, toasted
- Handful of fresh basil leaves
- 60g (2oz) Parmesan cheese, grated
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper

1. Bring a large pan of salted water to the boil, add the broccoli and simmer for 3-5 minutes.
2. Meanwhile, heat the olive oil in a separate pan and gently cook the garlic and chilli for 3 minutes or until the garlic is golden brown.
3. When the broccoli florets are tender, scoop them out of the water with a slotted spoon and add to the pan with the garlic and chilli along with 120ml (4fl oz) of the broccoli cooking water. Using the back of a fork, roughly mash the broccoli with the garlic to form a coarse purée. Add the basil leaves, mixing in.
4. Cook the fresh pasta according to the packet instructions until al dente. Once cooked, drain and tip into a large serving bowl. Top with the broccoli mixture and drizzle over the extra olive oil. Scatter the pine nuts over and season with freshly ground black pepper.
5. Serve with grated Parmesan cheese.



BROCCOLI AND LEMON CHICKEN

Serve up this vibrant, oriental-inspired dish of broccoli, tender chicken and a zesty lemon sauce.

SERVES 4

- 1 tbsp sunflower oil or olive oil
- 340g (12oz) pack of organic chicken breast, cut into strips
- 3 garlic cloves, sliced
- 2 heads of broccoli or 350g (12oz) tender stem broccoli
- 300ml (10fl oz) organic chicken stock
- 2 heaped tsp cornflour
- 2 tbsp runny honey
- 1 tsp sugar
- 1 lemon, zest and juice of
- A large handful of roasted cashews
- 2 tbsp sesame seeds

1. Heat the oil in a wok or large frying pan. Add the chicken and fry for 3-4 minutes until golden.
2. Add the garlic and broccoli. Stir-fry for a few minutes.
3. Mix the stock with the cornflour, sugar and honey, then pour into the wok and stir until thickened.
4. Add the lemon zest and juice, and cashew nuts.
5. Add the sesame seeds, then serve with rice or noodles.

Brussels Sprouts

You either love them or hate them, but Christmas just isn't the same without some sprouts to complement the turkey and in the kitchen they can be more versatile than you may think



BRAISED BRUSSELS SPROUTS WITH MAPLE SYRUP PANCETTA, KALE AND CRANBERRIES

There is no other vegetable that can cause more friction at the dinner table than the humble sprout. Fortunately, there is more than one way to cook these little green gems – as in this recipe – using delicious sweet maple syrup, salty pancetta, and tart cranberries. Even the sprout haters can be turned into sprout lovers.

SERVES 4

- 300g (10½oz) Brussels sprouts
- 100g (3½oz) kale
- 60g (2oz) organic pancetta
- 2 shallots
- 2 tbsp maple syrup
- 3 tbsp white wine vinegar
- ½ orange, juiced
- 1 tbsp dried cranberries
- 2 sprigs of thyme
- 1 knob of butter

1. Finely chop the shallots and pancetta, and fry in butter in a hot pan until very golden.
2. Remove from the pan and set aside.
3. Cut the sprouts lengthways and place, cut side down, in the hot pan for 2-3 minutes.
4. Meanwhile, mix the maple syrup, orange juice and vinegar, then pour into the sprout pan.
5. Toss the sprouts in the syrup mixture to coat evenly.
6. Now add the kale and thyme sprigs and cook for a further 1-2 minutes.
7. Finally add the pancetta mixture back into the pan along with the cranberries and heat through for 30 seconds to 1 minute.
8. To serve, transfer to a serving dish, and enjoy hot.

Full growing advice on pages 28-29



NUT ROAST SERVED ON A BED OF BRUSSELS SPROUT PURÉE

It's nothing new but the nut roast is still a good dish to serve vegetarian guests. This tasty take on the old favourite is delicious and looks lovely layered on a bed of Brussels sprout purée.

SERVES 4

- 3 tbsp butter, plus extra for greasing
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 6 sage leaves, shredded
- 100g (3½oz) cooked chestnuts
- 100g (3½oz) walnuts
- 50g (1¾oz) breadcrumbs
- 100g (3½oz) black rice
- ½ nutmeg
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 1 large parsnip, chopped
- 50g (1¾oz) Brussels sprouts, shredded
- 2 tbsp cranberry sauce

FOR THE PURÉE

- 100g (3½oz) Brussels sprouts
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- Salt and pepper

1. Cook the rice as per instructions. Once cooked, transfer into a large bowl.
2. Melt the butter in a large non-stick pan, add the onions and gently cook for 10 minutes until very soft.
3. Next, add the Brussels sprouts, chopped parsnip and sage and cook for 5 minutes.
4. Tip the mixture into the rice bowl and set aside to cool slightly.
5. Pulse the chestnuts, walnuts and breadcrumbs in a food processor until chopped fine, then transfer the nut mixture into the rice mixture bowl.
6. Now add the nutmeg, beaten eggs, 1 tsp salt and some pepper, and mix everything together well.
7. Grease a 900g (2lb) loaf tin with extra butter, then spread an even layer of cranberry sauce on the bottom.
8. Next, spoon in the nut roast mixture and push down well, ensuring the corners are filled.
9. Place the roast in a preheated oven at 180C/fan 160C/gas 4, for 1 hour.
10. Meanwhile, make the purée. Trim the Brussels sprouts, then blanch for 5 minutes until tender.
11. Drain, then pop into a food processor along with the olive oil, ½tsp salt and a bit of pepper. Blitz the sprouts until very smooth.
12. To serve, loosen around the sides of the nut roast loaf with a plastic knife, then turn out. Serve on a layer of Brussels sprout purée in slices with extra cranberry sauce.

Cabbages

When cooked properly, the humble cabbage can be elevated into a real delight and is packed with nutritious goodness, plus antioxidants



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FISH TACOS WITH CRISPY CABBAGE

Add a little Mexican flair to your dinner table with these vibrant fish tacos.

SERVES 4

FOR THE CABBAGE:

- ½ small cabbage, sliced thin
- A big handful coriander, chopped
- 1 carrot, thinly sliced
- ½ lime, juiced
- Salt and pepper to taste

FOR THE FISH:

- 400g (14oz) white fish fillets
- 2 tbsp vegetable oil
- ½ lime, juiced
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 ½ tsp chilli powder
- 1 tsp ground cumin
- 1 tsp ground paprika
- 1 tsp cayenne pepper
- 1 tsp honey
- Salt and pepper
- 8 small flour tortillas
- Sour cream, hot sauce or salsa for serving (optional)

1. In a mixing bowl whisk together the oil, lime juice, garlic, chilli powder, cumin, paprika, cayenne and honey, and season with salt and pepper to taste. Place fish into the bowl, and leave to marinate for 25 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, make the cabbage. Add the cabbage, carrot and coriander to a medium mixing bowl. Pour lime juice over and season lightly with salt and pepper. Toss to evenly coat.

3. Heat a frying pan with a little oil, and cook the fish for about 3 minutes per side (cook time will vary based on thickness of fish). Transfer to a plate, break into pieces and serve on warmed tortillas with cabbage slaw.



HOMEMADE CHICKEN BURGER WITH SAVOY CABBAGE, BRIE AND CRANBERRY

This dish takes advantage of the seasonal cabbage, replacing the traditional iceberg that you would usually find as a burger accompaniment. Gently sautéing the cabbage brings out the sweetness of the vegetable, and gives the burger some extra bite.

SERVES 4

- 4 organic chicken breasts
- ½ head of Savoy cabbage, chopped
- 200g brie, sliced
- 4 tbsp cranberry sauce
- 4 burger buns
- A little olive oil to fry

For the marinade:

- 1 garlic clove
- 1 tbsp dried sage
- 1 tbsp dried oregano
- 2 tsp tabasco or other hot sauce
- Salt and pepper

1. Start by popping the chicken breasts into a zip-lock bag with the marinade ingredients and shake the bag about to evenly coat the fillets. Place in the fridge overnight to marinate.

2. Heat a pan or griddle with a little olive oil and fry the breasts for 3 minutes on each side, or until cooked through.

3. Halfway through the cooking time, add the chopped cabbage and sauté. Remove the chicken breasts and rest on a plate for a few minutes. Toast the buns for 30 seconds on the still-hot pan. Assemble the burgers by layering the cabbage, chicken, brie and cranberry sauce between the buns.

Cauliflowers

Cauliflowers are versatile in the kitchen and can be eaten raw and pickled as well as boiled. The availability of a range of colours including green, orange and red has increased their popularity in recent years



ROAST CAULIFLOWER QUINOA BOWL WITH GINGER, CHILLI AND LIME

This recipe is wonderfully light and low in fat, and it still leaves you full due to the protein-rich quinoa and healthy cauliflower. Adjust the chilli to your preference and don't hold back on the lime.

SERVES 4

- 1 head of cauliflower
- 1 leek, chopped
- 3 cloves of garlic
- 200g (7oz) quinoa
- 2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 1 tsp sesame oil
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- A handful of parsley
- A handful of chard
- 2 tbsp sesame seeds

DRESSING

- 1 lime, juice and zest of
- 1 tbsp golden syrup
- ½ yellow chilli

1. Preheat oven to 220C/fan 200C/gas 5.
2. Finely chop the cauliflower into florets, and lay out on a baking tray together with the leek and garlic.
3. Season well with salt and pepper and drizzle over the olive and sesame oil. Add the sesame seeds, and stir well to evenly coat the vegetables in oil.
4. Roast for 15-20 minutes.
5. Meanwhile cook the quinoa. Rinse well under a cold tap, then transfer to a pan with 400ml (14fl oz) water. Simmer for 12-15 minutes, then drain and set aside.
6. Combine the dressing ingredients, set aside.
7. Now combine the roasted cauliflower with the quinoa and mix well. Then drizzle the dressing over and scatter the parsley and chard on top.

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GLUTEN-FREE CAULIFLOWER CRUST PIZZA

If you are on a gluten-free diet, or have friends and family who are, this is a fabulous way to still enjoy a flavourful pizza, without the wheat. You can add any of your favourite toppings and make it a custom bake.

SERVES 2

- 1 head of cauliflower
- 1 egg
- 50g (1¾oz) mozzarella, grated
- 1 clove of garlic, minced
- Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

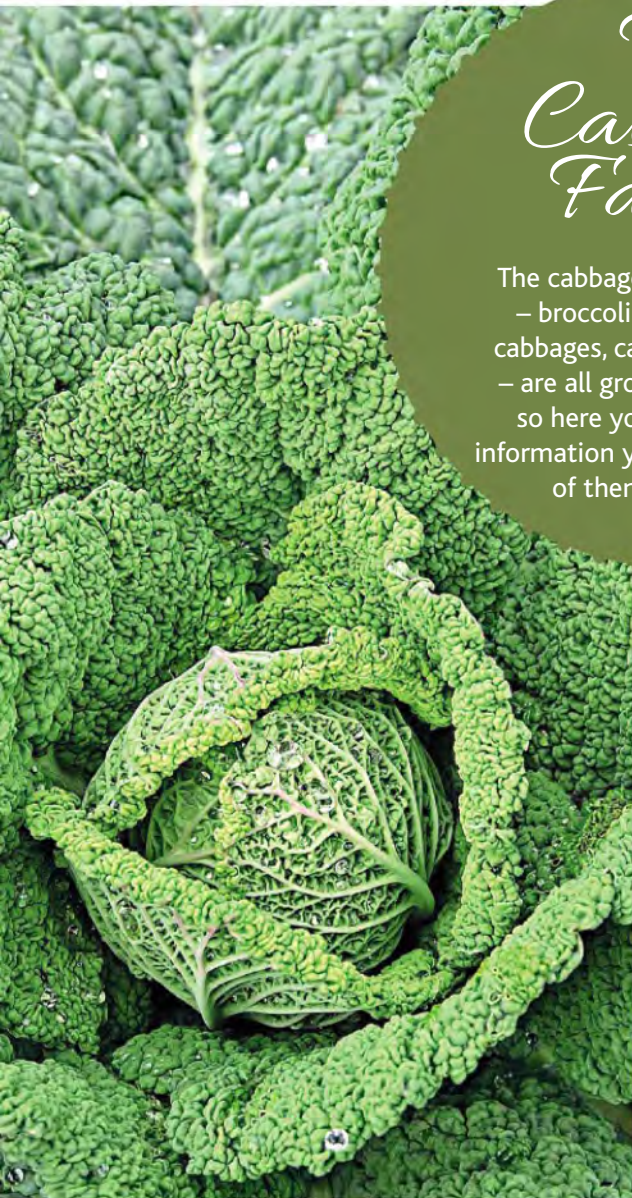
TOPPING

- 100g (3½oz) buffalo mozzarella cheese, torn up
- ½ jar sun-dried tomato paste
- A few basil leaves
- A handful of mushrooms or pepperoni, chopped

1. Preheat a pizza stone or baking tray in an oven to 200C/fan 180C/gas 6.
2. Add the cauliflower to a food processor and pulse until finely ground and the consistency of couscous.
3. Transfer the cauliflower to a large bowl. Add the mozzarella, egg, garlic, a pinch of salt and freshly ground black pepper.
4. Combine until the mixture holds together, then place on to a clean kitchen towel and wring out as much moisture as you can.
5. Line a baking sheet with parchment.
6. Spread the cauliflower mixture into a 30cm (12in) circle. Press the 'dough' into shape using the palms of your hands. Transfer the parchment paper and the pizza to the hot stone or baking tray, and cook for 15 minutes, or until the base is golden brown.
7. Remove the crust from the oven and spread the tomato paste over; then sprinkle with the remaining mozzarella and top with pepperoni or mushrooms.
8. Place back into the oven for about 4 minutes until bubbly.
9. Sprinkle with basil and serve.

The Cabbage Family

The cabbage family (brassicas) – broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbages, cauliflowers and kale – are all grown in similar ways so here you will find all the information you need to grow any of them with success



GROWING ON

When the plants are about 10cm (4in) high they can be planted outside. Prepare the soil as above and when planting make sure you firm well around the roots. Use your heel if necessary. If any brassicas are planted loosely they will not produce good results – cabbage and cauliflowers won't produce good heads or curds and Brussels sprouts won't form the lovely tight buttons we are looking for.



Firm brassicas in well after planting with the heel of the hand or foot

HARVESTING

It is the flower heads of broccoli and cauliflower that we eat and these should be cut while the flower buds (broccoli) or curds (cauliflower) are still tightly closed. In the case of broccoli, removing the first flush of flower heads usually encourages a second and even third flush to appear, so extending the harvest. Calabrese is closely related to sprouting broccoli and is the sort most often sold in supermarkets. This produces one very large head followed by several much smaller ones once the main head is removed.

Cabbages can be harvested before they have formed solid heads (as in spring greens) or allowed to form a head and cut when mature. Sprouts are harvested once the buttons (enlarged leaf buds) are big enough and are cut from the base of the plant upwards and kale can be harvested as whole plants or alternatively pick off individual leaves as required.

SOWING

It is possible to sow and harvest brassicas of one sort or another all year round. All like a sunny or partly sunny site and a good fertile soil. When preparing to sow or plant brassicas, the ground needs to be dug over and farmyard manure or garden compost added. A sprinkling of Growmore or chicken manure pellets a week or two before sowing or planting is beneficial.

Lime is also important for brassicas as the plants prefer a pH level of 7 or above and this also has the effect of deterring club root disease, so check levels with a simple pH testing kit prior to planting and add garden lime if necessary.

Sow in either a seed bed outside or in pots, trays or cell trays. Sowing in pots or cell trays is a good idea because small seedlings are easily decimated by slugs and snails. Growing in pots or trays means you can control their environment until they are well established.

Sow in cell trays into a good multi-purpose compost. Put in one or two seeds per cell at about 6mm (¼in) deep. Water well and place in a cold frame, on a greenhouse bench or on a windowsill indoors.

As soon as the seedlings are through, thin out to one seedling per cell or if sowing in seed trays lift and move the seedlings into individual pots when large enough to handle.



Harvesting individual kale leaves



Sprouts are harvested from the base of the plant to the tip

TOP TIP

Protect your crops from slugs and snails at all times using your favoured form of control such as pet-friendly slug pellets.

IN POTS

Most brassicas are happiest when grown in the soil, however kale grows very well in containers where it can look very attractive and cabbages, especially for spring greens, also thrive. However remember to cover them against cabbage white butterflies (see below) and also birds, particularly pigeons, which love to nibble the leaves.



Kale and cabbages can be grown in containers

VARIETIES

There are numerous varieties of each type of brassica to choose from. Here is a selection of favourites to get you started.

BROCCOLI

'Purple Sprouting': A hardy variety producing spears from February to May.



Broccoli 'Purple Sprouting'

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

'Crispus F1': An early variety that harvests over a long period. Good club root resistance.

CABBAGES

SPRING: 'Advantage F1': Great for spring greens, but is very hardy and can be harvested nearly all year round.

SUMMER: 'Hispi F1': Pointed heads provide a sweet flavour and can be grown for much of the season.

SPRING-AUTUMN: 'Pyramid F1': Very versatile and can be sown for much of the season from February to July.

WINTER: 'Traviata F1': A Savoy type. Very hardy and with good disease resistance.

CAULIFLOWERS

'Clapton F1': Harvests from August to November and has good club root resistance.

KALE:

'Black Tuscany' or **'Nero di Toscana'**: A traditional favourite with delicious and attractive strappy leaves.



Colourful kales



Cauliflowers don't just come in white

AT A GLANCE

Brussels Sprouts



SOW INSIDE: FEB



SOW OUTSIDE: MAR-APR



HARVEST: JAN-MAR, AUG-DEC

Cabbages (Spring)



SOW: JUN-AUG



HARVEST: APR-JUN

Cabbages (Summer)



SOW: FEB-MAR



HARVEST: JUL-SEP

Cabbages (Winter)



SOW: APR-MAY



HARVEST: OCT-JAN

Cauliflowers (Summer)



SOW: JAN



HARVEST: JUN-JUL

Cauliflowers (Autumn)



SOW: APR-MAY



HARVEST: SEP-NOV

Cauliflowers (Winter)



SOW: MAY-JUN



HARVEST: FEB-MAY

Kale



SOW INSIDE: MAR



SOW OUTSIDE: APR-MAY



HARVEST: NOV-MAR

WATCH OUT FOR

Cabbage white butterflies and pigeons are the main enemies. Keep the young plants free from pest attack by covering with some crop protection netting at all times.



COOK IT

Carrots

Go to the shops and you'd be forgiven for thinking that all carrots are long and orange. Grow your own and you discover varieties ranging from round to long and in orange, purple, red, yellow and white, all with a unique flavour and mixture of nutrients and antioxidants



PULLED HONEY CHICKEN TORTILLAS WITH LOW-FAT CARROT COLESLAW

Looking for a way to use up your stored carrots? Then look no further than to a healthy bowl of Greek yogurt coleslaw and tender honey chicken tortillas.

SERVES 4

- 4 chicken thighs and 2 chicken breasts

- 1 onion, chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tin chopped tomatoes
- 1 green chilli, chopped
- 3 tbsp cider vinegar
- 2 tbsp honey
- 1 tbsp tomato puree
- 2 tsp smoked paprika
- 2 tsp mustard
- 1 tbsp brown sugar
- 1 tsp ground cumin
- 200ml (7oz) water

FOR THE COLESLAW:

- ½ head purple cabbage, cored and thinly sliced
- 3 carrots, grated
- 1 tbsp cider vinegar
- 2-3 tbsp plain Greek yogurt
- Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste
- 8 tortillas
- A handful of fresh coriander leaves

1. Preheat oven to 170C/fan 150C/gas 3.
2. Place all the chicken ingredients into a large casserole dish, and place in the oven for 2 hours.
3. Remove the chicken from the oven, and using two forks shred the meat and discard the thigh bones.
4. Put the lid back on the dish and let it cook for a further 30-45 minutes.
5. Meanwhile make the coleslaw.
6. Combine the shredded cabbage, grated carrots and yogurt in a large mixing bowl. Add the vinegar and seasoning. Add more salt and pepper if needed. Place in the fridge until needed.
7. To serve, place a few tablespoons of the pulled chicken on top of each tortilla, then top with coleslaw and garnish with coriander.



CARROT CAKE

Simple to make, yet worthy of a gold star, this carrot cake really is a winner in the afternoon tea department. Rich, moist and flavourful, it's an all-round winner.

SERVES 8

- 155ml (5½fl oz) sunflower oil, plus extra for greasing
- 230g (8oz) self-raising flour
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 2 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1 tsp allspice spice
- 1 thumb-sized piece fresh ginger, grated
- 230g (8oz) dark brown sugar
- 1 lemon, zest of
- 100g (3½oz) walnuts, chopped
- 75g (2½oz) golden sultanas
- 260g (9oz) carrots, coarsely grated
- 3 large free-range eggs, beaten

ICING

- 150g (5¼oz) butter, softened
- 200g (7oz) full-fat cream cheese
- 200g (7oz) icing sugar
- 2 tsp orange juice
- 1 orange, zest of

1. Preheat the oven to 180C/fan 160C/gas 4. Grease two 18cm (7in) loose-bottomed, round cake tins and line the base with baking paper.
2. Sift the flour, baking powder and spices into a large bowl. Add the sugar, lemon zest, grated ginger, walnuts and grated carrots, then stir until well combined. Combine the oil and eggs, then mix well with the dry ingredients.
3. Divide the mixture between the two prepared cake tins and bake in the oven for 25-30 minutes or until a skewer inserted comes out clean.
4. Transfer to a cooling rack, leave in the tins for 5 minutes, then turn out and leave to cool completely before icing.
5. For the icing, beat the butter in a large bowl with a hand mixer until soft. Add the icing sugar, orange juice and half of the zest, beat again.
6. Now add the cream cheese and beat again until well mixed.
7. Store, covered, in the fridge until needed.
8. To decorate, place half of the icing on top of one cake layer, sandwich the second layer on top and ice the top of the cake with the remaining icing. Decorate by scattering the remaining orange zest over the top.



SOWING

Carrots are sown in rows 15cm (6in) apart. It is a good idea to sow thinly leaving a gap of about 6mm (¼in) between seeds if possible. The reason for this is that when you thin (remove) some seedlings due to overcrowding they will release a scent that can attract the carrot fly.

Some gardeners have problems with germination of carrots and this is often due to sowing too early into cold, wet soils. For best results sow when the soil temperature is at 7C (45F) or above.



HARVESTING

Harvest when the roots are at the size you prefer. Early sowings are best used while young, but maincrop carrots for winter storage can be allowed to mature to full size. Water the rows the night before harvesting if the soil is dry and ease the roots out of the ground with a hand fork to avoid breaking them. Always trim the roots and dispose of the tops away from the plot so as to avoid attracting carrot fly.



IN POTS

Carrots can be grown in containers, especially if you choose a short-rooted variety such as 'Parmex'. They can also be grown in troughs or deeper pots for long-rooted types. Fill the pots with any good potting compost or growing bag compost and sow the seeds thinly over the surface. Keep thinning out until there is at least 2.5cm (1in) between seedlings. Keep well watered.





GROWING ON

Thin carrots as they grow to keep a little room between plants. As the thinnings grow they may be large enough to eat as sweet, tender finger roots. Keep the crop well watered and as the roots get larger some may be visible above the soil. Try and earth up the crop to cover the shoulders of the roots and prevent them turning green and bitter. Remove competing weeds regularly by hoeing in between the rows and hand weeding around the plants.



AT A GLANCE

-  SOW: MAR-JUN
-  HARVEST: JUN-OCT

Sow early March under cloches or in late March to June without cloches.

WATCH OUT FOR

Slugs are partial to the seedlings and will also nibble the roots as they develop. Water the rows with a biological control such as Nemasys Natural Fruit and Veg Protection. Carrot fly can be deterred by covering the crop with fine netting throughout its life.



VARIETIES

'Early Nantes 2'

Can be sown in early March under cloches to provide an early crop in June.



'Flyaway F1'

A good, sweet carrot with blunt-ended roots. Has partial carrot fly resistance.

'Parmex'

A great carrot for container growing as the roots are short and stumpy, almost radish-like. Also good for heavy clay or shallow soils.

'Rainbow F1'

A mixture of coloured carrots including white, pale yellow and through shades of orange.



'Sugarsnax 54 F1'

A very long narrow carrot with a sweet flavour and very high in beta-carotene.

'Autumn King 2'

A classic late-sowing carrot that will remain in good condition in the soil over winter.

TOP TIP

If you don't get good germination try lining the seed drill with some multi-purpose compost and soaking it before sowing in the row and covering with a little more compost.

Celeriac

With a taste like celery and easy to grow, there should be a place for celeriac on any plot. Celeriac produces knobbly swollen roots with celery-like foliage and is a lover of moist soil. It suffers from few pests and diseases and stores well, making it a great winter crop.



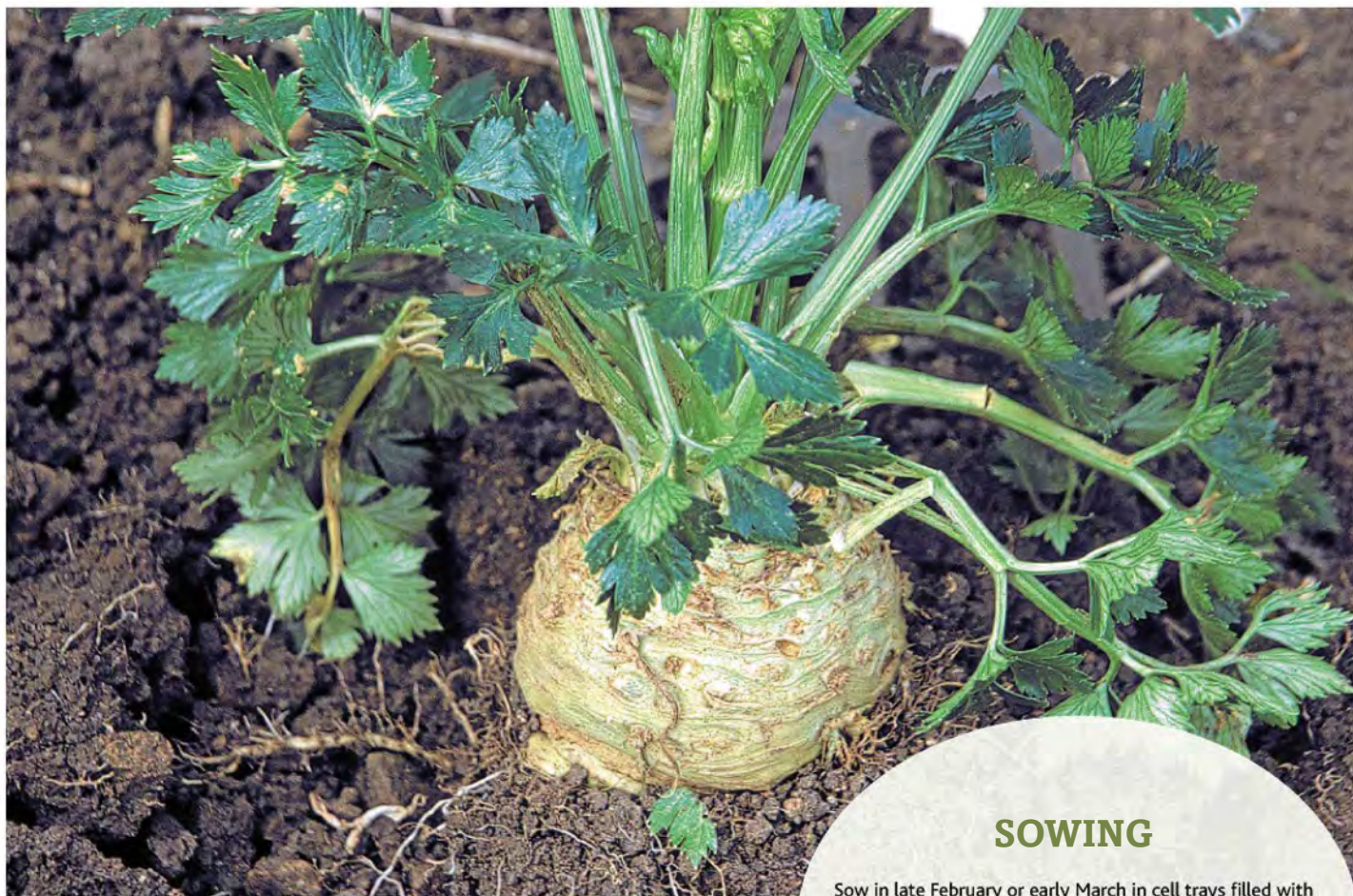
CELERIAC GRATIN

This is a very indulgent way to serve up the humble celeriac. It's easy to construct, and lovely served with a side of greens or fish.

SERVES 4

- 400g (14oz) waxy potatoes, peeled and sliced into 1cm (½in) slices
- 1 large celeriac, peeled and sliced into 1cm slices
- 4 cloves garlic, peeled and finely chopped
- 75g (2½oz) Cheddar cheese, grated
- 500ml (18oz) double cream
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 small bunch fresh flat-leaf parsley, leaves picked, stalks roughly chopped

1. Preheat your oven to 200C/190 fan/gas 6.
2. Layer the potatoes, celeriac and garlic, alternating between the three, into four individual ramekins, and season generously.
3. Pour over the cream, and top with Cheddar cheese.
4. Bake in the preheated oven for 35-40 minutes, or until tender and golden. Sprinkle over the parsley leaves. Serve with mangetout or broccoli.



SOWING

Sow in late February or early March in cell trays filled with multi-purpose compost. Sow two seeds per cell, water well and place in a propagator set to 20-25C (70-75F) and place on a windowsill or greenhouse bench. Once the seedlings emerge remove the weakest. Keep well watered. Germination takes around 21 days and once most of the seedlings are through, remove the propagator lid.

Acclimatise to outside conditions (harden off) in time for planting out in May/early June.

Start plants inside in cell trays or pots



HARVESTING

Once the roots have reached about 10-13cm (4-5in) across they can be harvested. The roots can be left in the ground until needed, but if intending to leave them into the winter it is a good idea to cover them with a layer of straw, bracken or leaves to keep off the worst of the frost.

IN POTS

This crop is not ideal for pots since it is sensitive to drying out. However by selecting a large tub and filling with loam-based compost such as John Innes no 1 it is possible to grow some roots.



Harvest as needed

VARIETIES

'Monarch'

Award-winning variety with good quality roots and a creamy flesh.

'Brilliant'

Similar to the above.

AT A GLANCE



SOW: FEB-APR



PLANT: MAY-JUN



HARVEST: SEP-DEC

TOP TIP

If your soil is very heavy or prone to waterlogging, lift roots in October and store in boxes of dry peat or sand.

GROWING ON

Choose a site in full sun and with moisture-retentive soil. Space the plants 30cm (12in) apart with 45cm (18in) between rows. Cover with cloches for a few weeks to help the young plants establish. Water the plants in well and mulch around the base with some grass cuttings to conserve moisture. Remove competing weeds regularly and continue to water during dry spells to prevent growth checks which may lead to bolting and small roots.



Water well at all times

WATCH OUT FOR

Plants will run to seed (bolt) if stressed – such as during hot, dry weather or if temperatures are variable. Maintain watering and mulch with grass clippings or well-rotted garden compost or manure.

Celery

This popular salad and cooking vegetable likes a very moist soil and is not one to grow on free-draining sites, but add plenty of compost or manure and this will help enormously. The traditional method of growing (trenching) celery involved earthing up the stems as they grew to blanch them. Fortunately, we have better self-blanching varieties today that do not require so much work.



CELERY AND APPLE SLAW

This fresh and crunchy take on the classic Waldorf salad has lots of bite and tang from the added goat's cheese.

SERVES 4

- 4 celery sticks, cut into matchsticks
- 1 large Cox apple, cut into matchsticks
- 50g/1oz goat's cheese, crumbled
- 2-3 tbsp walnut halves, toasted, coarsely chopped
- 2 tbsp crème fraîche
- 2tbsp yoghurt
- 2 tsp lemon juice

1. Combine the celery and apple in a large bowl. Pour over the lemon juice and mix.
2. Add the goat's cheese and half the walnuts, and mix to combine.
3. Add the crème fraîche and yoghurt, mix well.
4. Sprinkle with remaining walnut halves and serve.

GROW IT



TOP TIP

The outer plants in the block of self-blanching celery can be encouraged to blanch better if a barrier of cardboard or wood is placed around them when they are nearly mature.



HARVESTING

Harvest self-blanching celery before the first frosts, however trenching celery is better protected and can be harvested as required right up until Christmas. Simply lift with a fork and trim the roots, taking care not to allow soil to get into the crown.

Lift with a fork and trim the roots

AT A GLANCE



SOW: MAR-MAY (SELF-BLANCHING), JAN (TRENCHING)



HARVEST: SEP-OCT (SELF-BLANCHING), SEP-DEC (TRENCHING)

WATCH OUT FOR

Leaf miner may cause problems by tunnelling the leaves in summer. Squash the larvae inside the mines on the leaves as seen.

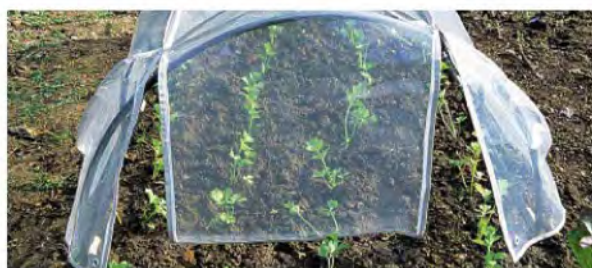


SOWING

Sow in March in cell trays filled with multi-purpose compost. Sow one seed per cell, water well and place on a sunny windowsill or greenhouse bench in a propagator or on a heated bench set to 15-18C (59-65F). Maintain watering and remove the propagator lid once most of the seeds have germinated. Harden off the plants thoroughly prior to planting out.

It is possible to sow direct into the soil in April or May.

GROWING ON



Cover newly planted crops with cloches

Plant out in May/early June 23cm (9in) apart in a block formation to aid blanching. Water the plants in well, make sure the soil never dries out and cover with a cloche. Give a liquid feed of a general-purpose fertiliser such as liquid Growmore or alternatively a tomato feed once a week during the summer.

If growing older trenching varieties dig a shallow trench about 30cm (12in) deep and add manure to the bottom. Cover this with soil and plant the celery 15cm (6in) deep in the trench. In August remove the lower leaves and surround each plant with some cardboard, damp proof course material or some drainpipe. The leaves should protrude from the top of the covering. Fill in the trench around the stems to blanch them.



Young trenching celery

VARIETIES

'Victoria F1'

A self-blanching type with crunchy and tasty green stems. Bolting resistant.

'Lathom Self Blanching'

Good quality tender stems. Bolting resistant.

'Giant Red'

A trenching type with red-tinged stems. Good flavour and weather resistant.



'Giant Red'

Chicory

Chicories are a popular Italian salad crop but they have never really taken off here. One reason could be their slightly bitter taste, but they should be more widely grown for the zing they can add to salads. There are two types of chicory – ‘Witloof’, which is forced to produce white chicons; the others are similar to lettuce and are either green or red leaved (called radicchio).



CRAB SALAD SERVED ON A BED OF CHICORY

Sweet crab and crispy chicory come together in this easy summer salad. It only takes minutes to prepare, and is great served for friends at lunch with a glass of chilled Riesling.

SERVES 4

- 4200g (7oz) cooked crab meat
- 4 radishes, sliced
- 120g (4oz) rocket
- 2 heads of chicory, chopped

DRESSING

- 2 tbsp white wine vinegar

- 2 tbsp lemon juice
- ½ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp freshly ground black pepper
- 1 tsp sugar
- 60ml (2fl oz) extra virgin olive oil

1. Mix the vinegar, lemon juice, salt, sugar and pepper in a blender. With the machine running, gradually blend in the oil. Season the vinaigrette to taste with more salt, sugar and pepper, if needed.
2. In a large bowl combine the rocket and chicory. Toss with the vinaigrette to coat, then arrange on four side plates.
3. Spoon a quarter of the crab meat into a small ramekin, firming down, then un-mould in the centre of the salad-lined plate. Garnish with the sliced radish.
4. Repeat with the remaining three other plates.
5. Serve immediately.



SOWING

Sow seed outside in shallow seed drills about 6mm (¼in) deep. Rows should be about 30cm (12in) apart. Water well and when the seedlings are through thin out to leave a little space between. As they grow keep thinning out if necessary.

GROWING ON

Keep the crop well watered and thin until plants are 15cm (6in) apart (forcing types) or 30cm (12in) apart (non-forcing types).

VARIETIES

'Witloof'

This is the classic forcing variety. Best forced by covering completely with compost to keep the chicons tight.



'Palla Rossa'

A forcing or non-forcing radicchio type that forms a pretty ball-head of red leaves. Not fully hardy. (See main picture)

HARVESTING

In autumn the forcing types should be cut back to just above soil level. At this stage the plants can be lifted and replanted in pots of John Innes no 2 compost. Pop them in a greenhouse or cold frame to offer some protection from the weather. Keep the stems covered and in darkness. In spring when the chicons are about 15cm (6in) high they can be cut.

Non-forcing types are simply cut like lettuces as required. The red types usually remain green until the autumn when they begin to take on their mature colour.



Lift and pot up forcing types in the autumn







They soon shoot if placed in a warm, dark place

IN POTS

Chicory will grow well in containers and the foliage of the red-leafed varieties provides a lovely contrast with other veg, bringing colour to the patio. Just two or three plants in a large tub would suffice.

AT A GLANCE

-  SOW (FORCING TYPES): MAY-JUN
-  SOW (NON-FORCING): JUN-JUL
-  HARVEST (FORCING TYPES): FEB-APR
-  HARVEST (NON-FORCING): SEP-JAN

WATCH OUT FOR

Chicory is generally trouble free. Problems may arise on wet soil in winter due to a disease called sclerotinia which may attack the stem, causing the plant to collapse and die. Rotting and a white fluffy mould may be present. Cover with cloches in winter or grow undercover in large containers or in the border soil in the greenhouse.

TOP TIP

Non-forcing chicories are quite hardy but can succumb to rotting in a wet winter and are best harvested in autumn or protect them in mid-winter with open-ended cloches.

Courgettes (And Marrows)

Courgettes and marrows have to be the first choice for beginners. They grow quickly and produce masses of fruit without too much trouble, making them real confidence boosters.



GRILLED COURGETTE AND HALOUMI SALAD WITH MINT VINAIGRETTE

At one point or another, the kitchen garden often finds itself overflowing with courgettes. Make the most of this abundant fruit with a refreshing summer salad dressed with zingy lemon and mint vinaigrette.

SERVES 4

- 3 courgettes
- 250g haloumi, sliced
- 2 handfuls of new baby leaf salad
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 2 tbsp pine nuts
- 5 mint leaves
- ½ unwaxed lemon, sliced

FOR THE VINAIGRETTE

- ½ unwaxed lemon, juice and zest of
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 6 mint leaves
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 1 tbsp honey

1. Start by making the vinaigrette, by mixing the lemon juice and zest, oil, crushed garlic, honey and mint leaves in a jam jar. Tighten the lid and shake to combine.

2. Heat your barbecue or a griddle, then using a vegetable peeler, slice the courgette into ribbons, then brush with oil. Grill the courgettes, haloumi and lemon slices for a few minutes on each side.

3. Arrange the baby leaves on a serving dish, layering the courgettes, haloumi and lemons on top. Pour the vinaigrette over and sprinkle with pine nuts and mint leaves.



COURGETTE AND GINGER CAKE WITH LIME FROSTING

Courgettes grow at a rapid pace during the summer months, so be sure to harvest them while still young. This delicious zesty cake is a good way to use up your harvested crop. With its super tangy lime icing, it's a great treat to enjoy on a hot summer's day.

MAKES 10 SLICES

- 150ml organic sunflower oil, plus extra to grease
- 250g self-raising flour
- 3 large eggs
- 175g unrefined granulated sugar
- ½ tsp bicarbonate of soda
- 2 medium courgettes or 250g, grated
- 1 tsp ginger root, grated

FROSTING

- 125g icing sugar
- 1 lime, juice and zest of
- 2 tbsp pistachios, roughly chopped

1. Preheat oven to 180C/160C fan/gas 4. Grease a 25.5cm (10in) cake tin or bundt tin.
2. Grate the courgette and ginger, and set aside.
3. Next beat the eggs, oil and sugar in a large bowl. Sift the flour and bicarbonate of soda and stir into the mixture.
4. Stir in the courgettes and grated ginger. Pour the mixture into the prepared tin and smooth the surface.
5. Bake for 35-40min, until golden and a skewer inserted into the cake comes out clean. Leave to cool slightly in the tin, then remove from the tin to cool completely on a wire rack.
6. To make the icing, mix the icing sugar with the lime zest and juice, a little at a time, until it has the desired consistency. Spoon over the cake and scatter the chopped pistachios.



SOWING

Courgettes and marrows are tender vegetables so are usually sown in containers and kept in warm conditions until planting out at the end of May or the beginning of June.

Ideally sow one seed in a small 9cm (3½in) pot. Use large-celled seed trays with one seed per cell. A multi-purpose compost is fine or a John Innes seed or J1 no 1 compost. Place the pots on a warm windowsill or a propagator.

Check them daily; if too warm, the stems stretch very quickly making them top heavy. Once they have germinated, move to cooler conditions such as the greenhouse bench or a cold frame to grow on. Keep a watch out for slugs.

Sowing can be attempted direct outside in May/June. Sow the seed on its side 2.5cm (1in) deep. This helps to prevent rotting.



GROWING ON

When all danger of frost has passed, plant outside. Marrows and courgettes like a fertile soil; some gardeners grow them on old muck heaps, which is fine if the manure is well rotted.

Plant in a sunny spot in fertile, free-draining soil and allow at least 60cm (2ft) all around between plants. On heavy soils plant on a slight mound to encourage water to drain from around the stems which are vulnerable to rotting. Supply a thin cane after planting to support the plants until they become established.



Bury a pipe near the roots to aid watering



HARVESTING

Courgettes should be harvested regularly to encourage the plants to continue to produce fruit. Marrows are harvested at the correct size for the variety.



IN POTS




You can grow a courgette or marrow plant in a large pot; a 60cm (2ft) diameter container is ideal. Fill the pot with a mix of multi-purpose compost and some garden compost if you have it. Plant one courgette plant only in this size container and place in a warm sunny spot. Keep the plant well watered, especially once the fruits begin to form.



TOP TIP

Plants often produce only male flowers at the beginning of the season, but this soon changes as the weather warms up and plants establish. Parthenocarpic types do not require pollination and are more reliable in cold summers.

AT A GLANCE

-  SOWING INSIDE: APR
-  SOWING OUTSIDE: MAY-JUN
-  HARVESTING: JUL-OCT

WATCH OUT FOR

Powdery mildew is a common disease of courgettes and marrows late in the summer and often encouraged by dry weather. Control is difficult since the plants are susceptible to damage from fungicides. Milk diluted in a little water is said to help to deter the disease. Ensure plants do not become dry and remove badly infected leaves.

VARIETIES

'Defender F1'

Produces excellent yields if you keep cutting the fruits.

'Cavili F1'

This variety produces very pale green fruits and is parthenocarpic. Its flesh is said to have a creamier texture than the more usual dark-skinned courgettes.

'One Ball F1'

This attractive round yellow courgette is ideal for stuffing and baking whole in the oven. For a green version try 'Eight Ball'.



'One Ball F1'

'Kojac F1'

If you don't like harvesting courgettes because of their prickly stems then grow this one. It has an open habit and hardly any spines.

'Orelia F1'

Long yellow fruits on vigorous plants. Good disease resistance.

'Table Dainty' (Marrow)

Medium-sized striped fruits with good flavour. Even size makes them ideal for exhibition.



'Tiger Cross F1'

'Tiger Cross F1' (Marrow or courgette)

Attractive striped green fruits. Early maturing.

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Cucumbers

This fast-growing crop is very rewarding to grow and whether you choose indoor or outdoor varieties will provide you with an abundance of fresh fruit all summer long



GARDEN CUCUMBER SALAD WITH ELDERFLOWER VINAIGRETTE

There are few things as satisfying as assembling a salad which has been entirely grown yourself. I recommend serving this in the garden with some homemade wine for full effect!

SERVES 4

VINAIGRETTE

- 50ml white wine vinegar
- 50ml olive oil
- 25ml elderflower cordial
- Pinch of salt

SALAD

- 2 heads of little gems, or equivalent

- ½ cucumber, sliced
- 8 sugar-snap peas
- A handful of garden peas
- 2 organic eggs, hard boiled and quartered
- 6 small new potatoes
- A handful of fresh dill
- A few flowers, such as nasturtiums

1. Boil the potatoes until tender, set aside to cool. One minute before the potatoes are ready, pop the sugar snaps into the pan and boil for 1 minute, drain and set aside.
2. Make the vinaigrette by pouring all the liquids into a jar, shake well until combined, add salt to taste.
3. Assemble the salad by placing the leaves, cucumber, potatoes, peas, sugar snaps, dill and eggs on to a serving dish. Finish with the flowers and elderflower vinaigrette.



SOWING

Sow seeds in individual 9cm (3½in) pots or in cell trays in multi-purpose compost about 13mm (½in) deep. Water well and place in a propagator at 24C (75F). Once the seedlings are through, reduce the temperature slightly and place in a well-lit spot to grow on. If sowing in February, grow on indoors at no lower than 15C (60F). If starting your crop this early, some heat will be required. If you can't provide heat, wait until April to sow.

The plants may need potting on into 13cm (5in) pots once they outgrow their small pots. Keep in warm conditions at this stage to encourage new growth.

It is possible to sow outdoor (ridge) cucumbers direct outside once the frosts are over in your area (see below).



GROWING ON

By May the plants will be ready for planting into the greenhouse, either into the borders or preferably into a special raised bed filled with layers of manure and sterilised soil or compost. The modern way is to grow in growing-bags; the compost is rich and perfect for cucumbers.

Outdoor varieties can be planted out in June and the soil is best earthed up in mounds with plenty of farmyard manure or garden compost incorporated. The outdoor ones are usually best left to trail along the ground but the greenhouse cucumbers are tied to wires or canes. Use string to tie up the stems on a regular basis to keep them well supported.

Feed the plants weekly with a high-nitrogen feed, such as dried blood or a general-purpose feed such as Westland Feed-All or Miracle-Gro.

Once the growing tip of the plant has reached the greenhouse roof, remove it. The sideshoots growing off the main stem will bear the female flowers. These can also be 'stopped' (growing tip removed) about two leaves beyond a female flower. This will encourage the plant's energy to go into swelling the fruit.

Keep the greenhouse well ventilated on hot sunny days and dampen down the floor regularly as cucumbers love a humid atmosphere.



Outside let plants trail

HARVESTING

Cut while still young and tender and before the seeds form inside the fruit. Cut through the stalk, taking care not to damage the main stem, which is prone to rotting, especially in the greenhouse. The more fruit you cut, the more will be produced.






IN POTS

Cucumbers can be grown in large pots or in growing-bags. The pots need to be a minimum of 25cm (10in) in diameter and filled with any good potting compost, growing bag compost or multi-purpose. If using a growing-bag plant two cucumbers per bag. Don't forget to sow the appropriate variety depending on where you plan to grow, either outside or in a greenhouse or polytunnel.



The cucumbers will still need the support of a framework of canes. Water them often to maintain growth.

AT A GLANCE

-  SOWING: MAR-APR
-  SOWING OUTSIDE: MAY-JUN
-  HARVESTING JUL-OCT

Sowing can be made direct outside in May/June but watch out for slugs. Sow the seed on its side at about 2.5cm (1in) deep. Planting on a mound helps water to drain from the middle of the plant.

WATCH OUT FOR

Powdery mildew may attack plants in dry weather or later in the season. Maintain even watering and ventilate greenhouse-grown plants. Spray with diluted milk (see page 41) to deter the disease.

VARIETIES

'Carmen F1'

An all-female greenhouse variety that has an RHS Award of Garden Merit. It also has good disease resistance and fruits are produced in profusion.

'Cupino'

Another all-female variety that produces very small cucumbers. It is best in a greenhouse but can be grown outside.

'Long White'

A pure white form that can be grown outside. It has a thin skin and so peeling is not necessary. Don't remove any of its male flowers.

'Swing'

A new variety that is good for indoor or outdoor production. The fruits are slightly prickly and about 20cm (8in) long.

'Burpless Tasty Green F1'

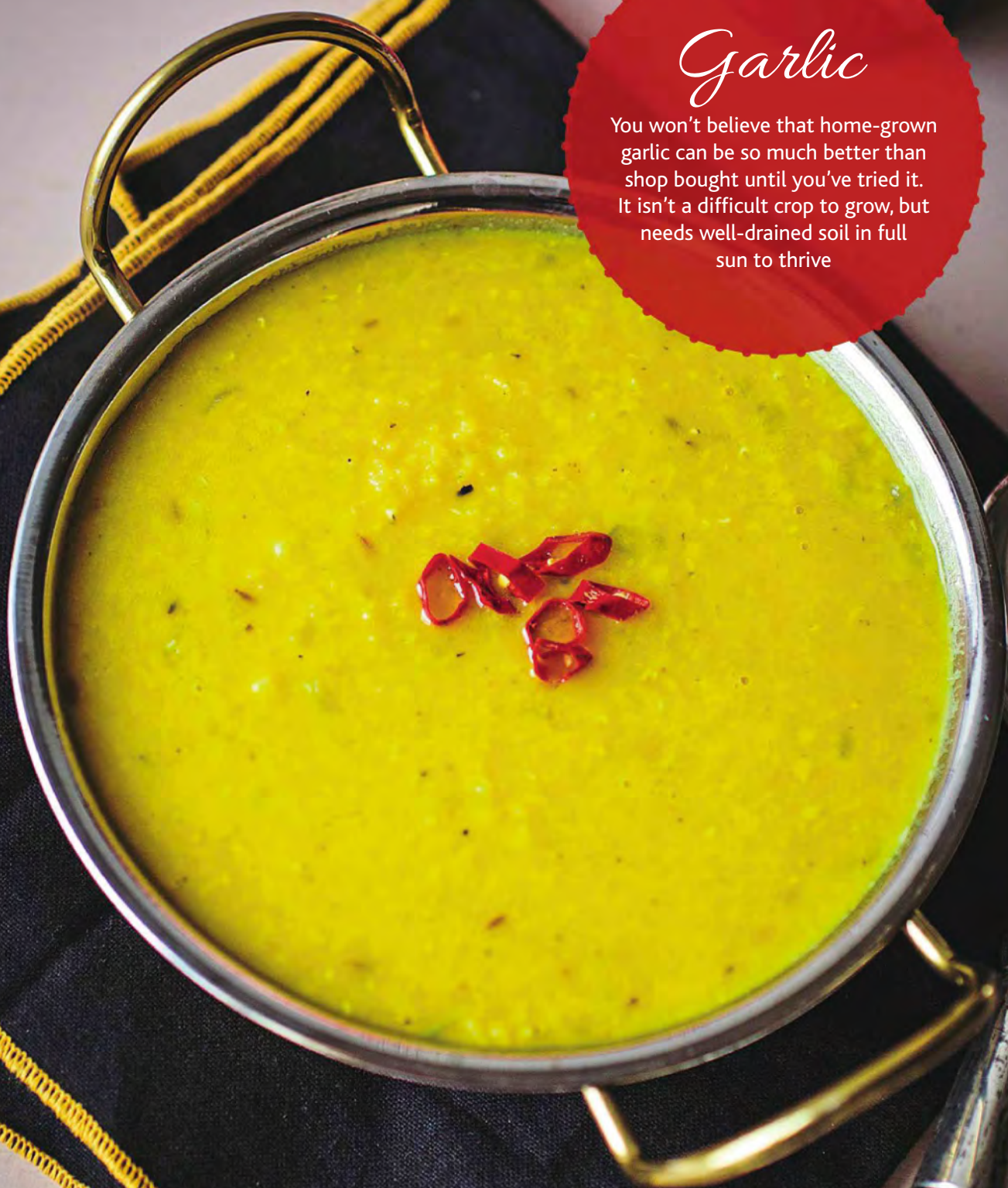
An outdoor variety which can be left to trail over the ground or trained up a trellis. Harvest while still small and tender.

TOP TIP

Plants may produce more fruit than they can carry and as a result will often drop them prematurely. Maintain feeding and watering and the situation should soon right itself again.

Garlic

You won't believe that home-grown garlic can be so much better than shop bought until you've tried it. It isn't a difficult crop to grow, but needs well-drained soil in full sun to thrive



GARLIC DAL

Aromatic and full of strong garlic, this dal is a great comfort food, and easy to whip up too.

SERVES 4

- 250g (9oz) chana dal (yellow dried split peas)
- 8-10 garlic cloves, peeled and slightly crushed
- 1 tsp cumin seeds
- 1 tsp mustard seeds
- 1 green chilli
- ½ tsp turmeric powder
- 1 pinch of asafoetida
- 3 tbsp ghee or oil
- Salt and black pepper to taste
- A small bunch of fresh coriander leaves

1. Place the lentils and 900ml (1¾ pints) of water into a pan, stir well and bring to the boil. Skim off any froth that forms on the surface of the water with a spoon. Cover the pan with a lid and reduce the heat to a simmer. Simmer, stirring regularly for 35-40 minutes, or until the lentils are just tender, adding more water as necessary.

2. When the lentils have cooked through, remove the pan from the heat and use a whisk to break down the lentils. Set the mixture aside to thicken.

3. Meanwhile, heat the ghee/oil in a pan over a medium heat. Add the cumin and mustard seeds and fry for 20-30 seconds, or until fragrant.

4. Add the chilli, asafoetida and turmeric and fry for 3 minutes, or until golden brown.

5. Add the garlic and stir well to combine. Season with salt and simmer over a medium heat for 5 minutes.

6. Add the cooked lentils to the spice mixture and stir well, adding more water as necessary to loosen the mixture.

7. Bring the mixture to the boil and season again to taste with salt and freshly ground black pepper. Stir in the chopped coriander just before serving.

8. Serve the garlic dal hot with roti, naan or rice.



EASY GARLIC AND BASIL PESTO

It's always a great idea to have a pesto recipe on hand, should you need to whip up a tasty pasta dish in a hurry.

MAKES 1 SMALL JAR

- 50g (2oz) basil
- 30g (1oz) pine nuts, toasted
- 30g (1oz) Parmesan, or similar vegetarian hard cheese, freshly grated
- 3 cloves garlic, crushed
- 85ml (3fl oz) olive oil
- ½ lemon, juiced
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper

1. Put the basil, Parmesan, garlic and pine nuts into a food processor and season well.

2. Whiz together, and with the motor still running pour the oil in until the pesto thickens.

3. Use within one week.



PLANTING

Autumn is the best time to plant garlic because it actually benefits from a period of cold to induce good hearty bulb formation by summer.

Garlic bulbs can be bought in early autumn from garden centres or by mail order from specialist growers. To plant, split up the bulbs into individual cloves and plant with the pointed end uppermost. Bury about 5cm (2in) deep and 15cm (6in) apart. If your soil is very heavy you may want to wait until February to plant or alternatively add some gritty sand to the trench before planting.



GROWING ON

If planted in October/November the garlic should be showing shoots by January. In spring a high-nitrogen feed can be beneficial and encourage good growth. Maintain weeding, taking care not to damage bulbs with the hoe.



HARVESTING IN POTS



Between May and June the leaves will start to yellow and growth will cease. Once the foliage has almost completely withered it is time to lift the bulbs. Choose a period of settled dry weather to do this and leave the bulbs on the surface of the soil to dry for a day.



Garlic can be grown in large pots. Use John Innes no 3 compost, with some added grit for drainage. Do not overfeed – there is already some fertiliser in the compost when purchased – as the growth of the bulbs may become too soft and lush, making them vulnerable to rotting diseases.

Keep the compost moist, but do not overwater and as growth slows reduce the watering to ripen the bulbs.

WATCH OUT FOR

Leeks suffer from many of the same pests and diseases as their cousins the onions. One of the most common problems is a disease called leek rust. This leads to orange/red pustules on the leaves and stems and the foliage may turn yellow prematurely. However, it rarely affects the yield unduly and is worse in mild autumns. Do not overfeed with nitrogen, but instead dress the plants with a little sulphate of potash.

TOP TIP

Store cloves in an open container or weave into ropes/hang in a cool, frost-free place.

VARIETIES



'Solent Wight'

Very large bulbs about 6cm (2½in) across. Keeps well.

'Purple Wight'

Has very chunky cloves and is slightly sweet.

'Albigensian Wight'

A large garlic from southern France.

Elephant garlic

Not a member of the garlic family *A. sativum* but more closely related to the leek. Makes a massive bulb and cloves are great for roasting.

AT A GLANCE



SOW: OCT-NOV, FEB-APR



HARVEST: JUN-AUG

Kale

KALE or borecole is one of the best winter greens you can grow and just packed with health-giving nutrients. It is a member of the brassica family so is closely related to cabbages and broccoli but probably easier to grow



KALE AND CHEESE CASSEROLE

For this seasonal winter dish, we have paired kale with delicious 18-month-matured French Comté cheese for a truly comforting dinner, perfect to enjoy on a cold day. Serve alongside roast chicken or baked fish.

SERVES 4

- 1 large bunch of curly kale, green or purple
- 100ml (3½fl oz) organic chicken or vegetable stock
- 200ml (7fl oz) cream
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 75g (2½oz) breadcrumbs
- 75g (2½oz) mushrooms, chopped
- 110g (3¾oz) Comté cheese or Parmigiana, grated
- ½ tsp nutmeg
- ½ tsp salt
- ½ black pepper, freshly ground
- A dash of olive oil

1. Preheat the grill to a high heat.
2. Tear the kale leaves away from the stems.
3. Tear or chop the kale leaves into small pieces and rinse in a colander.
4. Add the leaves to a large pan together with the stock and cover.
5. Steam the kale for 5-7 minutes, until the leaves have softened, and much of the stock has evaporated. Set aside.
6. In a new pan, gently fry the mushrooms in a dash of olive oil, sauté for a couple of minutes, then add the garlic, cream and nutmeg and simmer on low heat for 2 minutes. Season this with salt and pepper.
7. Now add the kale to the cream pan and heat through for a few minutes.
8. Stir in the breadcrumbs and half the cheese, season with salt and pepper. Then transfer the mixture into a casserole dish or four individual ramekins. Top with the remaining cheese.
9. Place under the hot grill for 3-5 minutes or until golden brown and bubbly.
10. Serve with crusty bread.

Full growing advice on pages 28-29



KALE GNOCCHI IN HERB AND ANCHOVY SAUCE

This exciting dish combines gnocchi, kale and anchovies with grated cheese and crème fraîche.

SERVES 4

- 2 packets of gnocchi
- 1 tbsp of butter
- 1 tbsp of extra virgin olive oil
- 1 x 60g (2oz) can of anchovies in olive oil
- 2 small shallots, finely sliced
- 50g (1¾oz) button mushrooms, thinly sliced
- 2 big handfuls of kale leaves
- 90 ml (3fl oz) of organic chicken stock
- 90g (3oz) Parmigiana cheese, grated, plus more to serve
- 3 tbsp of crème fraîche
- ½ lemon juice and zest of
- A small bunch of parsley, chopped
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

1. Poach the gnocchi for 3-4 minutes until they float to the surface of the water, then remove with a slotted spoon. Set aside.
2. Meanwhile trim the stems off the kale and finely slice the leaves.
3. Heat up a large pan over medium-high heat, then add the butter. Once the butter is golden brown, add the gnocchi and fry them until nicely browned on both sides. Transfer to a plate.
4. Add 1 tbsp of extra virgin olive oil in the pan along with the anchovy fillets; heat them through for a few minutes.
5. Next add the sliced shallots and mushrooms, season with ground black pepper. Cook for 5 minutes until the shallots have softened. Add the sliced kale leaves, and cook until wilted.
6. Now add the chicken stock, and cook for a further 5 minutes.
7. Stir the grated cheese and crème fraîche into the pan.
8. Finally, add the gnocchi and toss to combine. Cook over high heat for a few more minutes to reduce the sauce.
9. Serve immediately.

Leeks

The leek has to be king of the winter vegetables and probably the most popular to grow and eat during this season of the year. It is also the easiest of the onion family to produce and generally undemanding



LEEK AND SMOKED SALMON MINI QUICHES WITH GOAT'S CHEESE

These little quiches go down very well at Christmas parties, and they can be made a day ahead to save some cooking time during the busy festive period.

MAKES 4

FOR THE PASTRY

- 125g (4½oz) plain flour
- 1 tsp English mustard
- 80g (2¾oz) cold butter
- Cold water

FOR THE FILLING

- 1 medium leek, sliced
- 1 tbsp freshly chopped lemon thyme
- 100g (3½oz) soft goat's cheese
- 2 large eggs
- 100 ml (3½fl oz) double cream
- 50g (1¾oz) smoked salmon
- Olive oil for cooking
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper

TO MAKE THE PASTRY

1. Tip the flour, mustard and butter into the bowl of a food processor and whiz until the mixture resembles breadcrumbs.
2. Add 1-2 tbsp ice-cold water and whiz again until it just starts to bind together.
3. Divide the mixture into four and roll each portion out to line 12cm (5in) flan tins.
4. Pop in the fridge to chill for 30 minutes.

TO MAKE THE FILLING

5. Meanwhile, cook the leek in a frying pan with a little olive oil for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally so as not to burn.
6. Stir the thyme and seasoning into the leek.
7. Preheat the oven to 200C/fan 180C/gas 6.
8. Line the pastry cases with baking parchment and fill with baking beans.
9. Blind bake the cases for 10-12 minutes, then remove from the oven and lift out the baking parchment with the baking beans.
10. Return to the oven and bake for a further five minutes, or until the pastry is a light golden colour.
11. Remove the pastry cases from the oven and divide the leeks and salmon between the pastry cases.
12. Crumble the goat's cheese over.
13. Beat together the eggs with the cream, then pour it into the pastry cases.
14. Bake for 25 minutes until golden. pine nuts and mint leaves.



WHITE WINE BRAISED LEEKS WITH PARMIGIANA

Leeks are a very versatile vegetable and go well braised in white wine and grated parmigiana. A light dish but with plenty of flavour.

SERVES 4 AS A SIDE

- 6 leeks
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 75ml (2½fl oz) dry white wine
- 100g (3½oz) parmigiana, freshly grated

1. Wash the leeks, then top and tail, and cut in half lengthwise.
2. Heat the olive oil over medium heat in a wide, heavy-based frying pan.
3. Place the leeks in the pan, cut side down, and cook for 5 minutes until they are nicely browned.
4. Turn the leeks over and cook on the other side for 2-3 minutes until they are golden.
5. Next, pour in the wine and stir to deglaze the bottom of the pan.
6. Bring to the boil, reduce the heat and simmer uncovered for 5 minutes until the leeks are tender.
7. Cover the leeks with the parmigiana, then place under a hot grill until the cheese has melted and is beginning to colour.
8. Remove from the heat and serve immediately.



SOWING

Leeks like a sunny spot and a good fertile soil, so add plenty of garden compost or farmyard manure to the site. A week or two before planting sprinkle some Growmore or chicken manure pellets over the soil and rake in.

Leeks can be sown in a seed bed on the plot or in cell trays or pots. If sowing outdoors prepare a small area of ground and dig and rake to a nice crumbly surface. Make a groove (drill) in the soil and water the bottom. Sow the leek seed thinly along the row, about 1cm (1/2in) between each seed. Cover with some soil and when the seedlings are through remove every other one to leave 2.5cm (1in) between each seedling. When these have reached pencil thickness, by about June, they can be carefully lifted and planted out where they are to grow.

If starting off in cell trays, fill with some multi-purpose compost and sow one seed per cell. By June they should be ready for planting out.



Sow in the ground...



Or in pots

GROWING ON

Put out a line of string and make 15cm (6in) deep holes with a trowel or dibber along the row at 15cm (6in) stations. If planting more than one row make these 30cm (12in) apart.

Drop a leek plant into each hole and then pour in a generous amount of water, which will settle the soil around the roots. Don't fill in the hole with more soil – just leave the plant as it is. Keep the leeks well watered.

Once the leeks have established, earth up the stems a little. Simply rake up the soil around the base of the stems to help blanch them (produce a longer edible white shank).

A fortnightly general-purpose feed applied when you water the leeks will help bulk up the stems, but stop feeding by August.



HARVESTING

Leeks can be harvested as soon as they are large enough. Thinnings are delicious from pencil thickness, but being very hardy the remainder can be left in the ground all winter until required. Any surpluses freeze very successfully after washing, chopping and blanching for a few minutes. Simply lift with a garden fork, trim off the tops and roots and wash thoroughly.



AT A GLANCE

 SOW INSIDE: FEB-MAR

 SOW OUTSIDE: MAR-MAY

 HARVEST: SEP-MAR

TOP TIP

Deep planting and earthing up increases the length of white stem.

WATCH OUT FOR

Leek moth can be damaging and burrows into the leaves and stems of the plants in late spring and late summer. Crush them as soon as they are seen.



IN POTS

Leeks would not usually lend themselves to container growing, however, there are varieties which have been bred for use as baby leeks. These will grow and mature to the size of ordinary leeks if left, but offer a tasty treat if eaten while still small.

Look out for varieties such as 'Atal' and 'Amor', also certain standard varieties such as 'King Richard'. Sown more thickly than traditional varieties, they can be harvested in as little as six to 12 weeks from sowing.

VARIETIES

'Bandit'

A new variety that is described as outstanding for the garden. It has lovely dark green leaves and pure white stems and has been shown to have good resistance to bolting (going to flower and seed) and rust disease.

'Oarsman F1'

The stems bulk up quickly on this variety making it a good mid-season leek.

'Carlton'

Another early variety producing good long white stems that are ready for harvesting in September right through to November. Has an RHS Award of Garden Merit.

'Musselburgh'

A popular mid-season variety that produces shorter, chunky stems.

'Pancho'

A very early maturing variety, but will still remain in good condition if left in the ground for the winter. Also has an RHS Award of Garden Merit.

'Toledo'

A strong-growing reliable variety that can be harvested from November to late February.



Lettuce

This has to be one of the most popular vegetables to grow. It is fast maturing, the ultimate salad ingredient and can be grown in a tiny space. Sown successionaly, crops can be produced nearly all year round



For full growing advice see page 76

TAKE-AWAY SALAD JAR

If, like so many, you are trying to cut back on plastic waste, then glass salad jars are for you. They are an excellent container for your lunch that you can easily and conveniently take to work with you. You can collect enough jars for a week's worth, and make in advance. The salad will stay fresh for up to 5-7 days, as long as you always put the dressing and the wetter ingredients at the bottom.

MAKES ONE LARGE JAR

- 2 tbsp salad dressing of your choice, we used Caesar dressing
- ¼ cucumber, diced
- 6 cherry tomatoes, halved
- ½ red onion, sliced into rings
- ½ red bell pepper, diced
- 200g (7oz) red cabbage, thinly sliced
- ¼ head of crisp lettuce, chopped
- 1 tbsp sunflower seeds

1. Build the salad jar by layering the ingredients in order of water content: dressing, cucumber, tomatoes, onion, peppers, cabbage followed by the lettuce and sunflower seeds.
2. Refrigerate until needed.



SALAD CUPS WITH ASIAN GRILLED PRAWNS

Get a little fancy with this Asian prawn dish including some crisp, freshly picked lettuce leaves from the kitchen garden. Serve this dish as a starter, or as appetisers at a garden party.

SERVES 4

- 400g (14oz) raw peeled prawns
- 2 tablespoon dark soy sauce
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tbsp sunflower oil
- 1 head of lettuce, leaves separated
- 1 carrot, julienned
- 3 spring onions, chopped
- 1 small bunch of coriander
- 1 pinch salt and freshly ground pepper
- 100g (3½ oz) thin rice noodles
- 1 red chilli, finely chopped
- 1 tbsp soft brown sugar

1. In a sealable container, combine the shrimp, 2 tsp oil, soy sauce, sugar, chilli and garlic. Seal and shake to coat the shrimp. Marinate for 1 hour in the fridge.
2. Cook the noodles following pack instructions, then rinse with cold water and drain and set aside.
3. Heat a non-stick pan over medium-high, fry the prawns on one side for 2 minutes, flip and sear for 30 seconds more. Remove from pan and set aside.
4. To assemble the dish, fill each lettuce cup with rice noodles, then add the prawns followed by the carrots. Garnish with spring onion and coriander.

Onions

This crop belongs to the allium family, which also includes garlic. Here we include shallots, which split to form several small bulbs and are generally milder and sweeter than normal bulb onions and spring or bunching onions



CARAMELISED RED ONION PIZZA WITH KALAMATA OLIVES, ANCHOVIES AND GOAT'S CHEESE

This pizza looks gorgeous and tastes gorgeous! The sweet caramelised red onions work tremendously well with the anchovies by balancing out their sharp salty flavour. Make the pizza dough by hand, or use your bread machine's dough setting. You can't beat homemade pizza made with your own harvested onions!

MAKES 2 LARGE PIZZAS OR 4 INDIVIDUAL PIZZAS

FOR THE DOUGH

- 300g organic strong white flour
- 170ml lukewarm water
- 2 tbsp organic olive oil
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ tsp easy bake yeast

FOR THE TOPPING

- 2 medium red onions
- 2 tbsp sugar
- ½ jar green pesto
- 1 tin (80g) anchovies
- 10-12 kalamata olives
- 125g roll of goat's cheese
- 1 knob butter
- Black pepper

1. Start by making the dough either by hand or with your bread machine (follow manufacturer's guidelines). To make the dough by hand, mix the dry ingredients in a large bowl, then add the lukewarm water, incorporating it all to make a soft dough. Tip out on to a floured work surface, knead for 10 minutes until the dough is smooth and elastic.
2. Place in a covered bowl, and leave to rise for an hour.
3. Peel the red onions, and slice finely into rings. Add a knob of butter to a large frying pan and heat the onions gently, until soft. Now add the sugar. Continue to gently fry until all the sugar has dissolved and has coated the onions in a thin coating of caramel.
4. Preheat oven to 220C/fan 200C/gas 6
5. Turn out the dough and knead briefly, divide into 2 or 4 pieces depending on your preference and, using a rolling pin, roll the dough pieces to 5mm thickness.
6. Line baking trays with greaseproof paper and place the pizza bases on to the trays. Evenly spread the pesto over the pizzas, then add slices of goat's cheese, anchovies, olives and finally scatter the caramelised onions over the top. Finish by grinding fresh black pepper over the pizzas.
7. Bake for 10-12 minutes, until the crust is golden.
8. Serve with a side salad.



STUFFED ONIONS WITH MUSHROOM, WHITE WINE AND CHARD

Although upholding the foundations of almost all savoury dishes, the onion rarely takes centre stage. This dish takes advantage of the onion's excellent ability to be stuffed, offering numerous flavour combinations. Try stuffing them with ground lamb and tomato, or beans and rice.

SERVES 4

- 4 large onions, red or brown
- 250g chestnut mushrooms
- 1 garlic clove
- 100ml white wine
- 125g cottage cheese
- 2 big handfuls of spinach/chard or kale
- 2 tbsp pumpkin seeds
- Salt and pepper

1. Preheat oven to 200C/fan 190C/gas 6
2. Cut 1 cm (½ inch) off the bottoms of the onions, so they can stand flat. Wrap each onion in foil and bake until soft in the oven, for 30 minutes. Remove from the oven, unwrap, and leave until cool enough to handle.
3. Peel the onions and hollow out the middle, using a melon scoop, or small knife, leaving the outer 3 layers to form a shell and place back into the baking dish. Save 4 heaped tbsp of the onion flesh, chop and set aside (save the rest for another use).
4. Heat the olive oil in a large frying pan, and add the chopped onions, mushrooms and spinach/chard and sauté for a few minutes. Next add the garlic and half the white wine, heat through. Finally add the cottage cheese, season to taste and scoop the stuffing into the hollow onions.
5. Brush the outsides of the onions with olive oil. Pour the remaining wine into the baking dish.
6. Roast until the onions are tender and golden, for 30 minutes. Carefully lift each onion from the baking dish and serve hot with couscous or mashed potatoes and gravy.



SOWING

Prepare the soil well, digging it over and raking. Scatter some Growmore or chicken manure pellets a week or two before sowing. Rake over again and firm by tamping down with the rake and gently rake over again.

Depending on the conditions of your soil you can start sowing as early as February but for most places in the UK, especially after a wet winter, it will be mid-March, or April in Scotland, before conditions are favourable.

Onion seed: Sow seed fairly thickly along a groove about 13mm (½in) deep. Alternatively sow into trays for planting out later on. Once the seedlings are through remove some to leave about 2.5-5cm (1-2in) between each. Once the plants are larger and more upright thin them out again to about 10cm (4in) between them. Take away thinnings as the smell could encourage onion fly. Japanese onions sown in mid-summer are usually spaced a bit further apart.

Onion sets: Plant the small onion sets 10cm (4in) apart in rows 23cm (9in) apart with the tips just showing.

Shallot sets: Plant these about 15cm (6in) apart with the pointed tip just showing above the surface of the soil.



GROWING ON

Once the bulbs are growing well, keep the rows free of weeds. Weed by hand if possible as bulbs are easily damaged by a wayward hoe. If the weather is exceptionally dry then do water but otherwise avoid it.



HARVESTING IN POTS

Once the bulbs start to mature the tops begin to yellow and eventually topple over. Once this happens and during settled weather lift them with a fork, leaving them on the surface for a couple of days to dry. The bulbs can then be stored in a dry shed or garage in net bags or open trays.







Shallots and onions are usually grown direct in the ground. However, many growers of exhibition onions grow their mammoth bulbs in pots. Smaller bulbs can be produced by planting onion bulbs so that they are not quite touching and thinning them as they grow; the first bulbs can be used as spring onions, the rest allowed to grow on and harvested as larger bulbs. Spring onions are suitable for growing in a pot as they are harvested small.

TOP TIP

Spring onions can be sown at closer spacings as they are harvested small. Start sowing from March at intervals through the summer to get a succession of crops.

AT A GLANCE

-  SOW ONIONS: JAN-APR, AUG-SEP
-  SOW SHALLOTS: FEB-MAR
-  HARVEST ONIONS: AUG-SEP
-  HARVEST SHALLOTS: JUL-AUG

For large exhibition onions sow in December/January in containers with some heat.

WATCH OUT FOR

If onions become too dry at the roots then they can bolt, which is when they prematurely flower. Cut off the flower heads and use the bulbs straight away, they won't be any good for storing.

VARIETIES

- 'Ailsa Craig'**
An old favourite producing large bulbs. Great for the show bench.
- 'Hi Keeper'**
A good variety to sow in late summer/early autumn for overwintering as it is very hardy.
- 'Red Baron'**
Superb red variety with a beautiful mild flavour. (See main picture)
- 'Electric'**
An excellent red autumn-planted onion.
- 'New Fen Globe'**
Produces large bulbs from early plantings.
- Shallot 'Pikant'**
A good early variety that also stores well.
- Shallot 'Mikor'**
Nice round shallots with slightly pink flesh. Eight to 10 bulbs per clump when mature in August.



'Mikor'

Parsnips

This winter veg is not difficult to grow once it is established and although it requires a little time and space, the unique sweet roots make it worth the investment



SPICY PARSNIP SOUP WITH COCONUT MILK

The natural sweetness of the parsnip lends itself very well to being paired with oriental flavours such as warming ginger and fresh lemon grass. You can make it as hot as you like by adjusting the chilli.

SERVES 4

- 1 onion, peeled and roughly chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, peeled and chopped
- 1 thumb-sized piece fresh ginger, peeled and chopped
- 1 stem lemon grass
- 6 parsnips, peeled and chopped into chunks
- 1 can of coconut milk
- 1 litre (1¾pt) organic vegetable stock
- 1 fresh red chilli, deseeded and finely sliced
- 1 lime, juiced
- 1 handful fresh coriander
- 1 tbsp Thai fish sauce
- 1 tbsp sesame oil or olive oil

1. Over medium heat gently fry the chilli, parsnips, onion, garlic and ginger in the oil.
2. Using the end of a rolling pin, flatten the lemon grass. This will allow them to release their flavour. Add the lemon grass to the soup pot.
3. Stir all the ingredients and cook for 10 minutes until softened.
4. Next add the stock and the fish sauce. Bring to the boil then simmer gently for 10-15 minutes until the parsnip is very tender.
5. Remove the lemongrass and discard, stir in the coconut milk and lime juice. Blitz the soup with a hand blender.
6. Finally add the coriander and black pepper and serve.

PARSNIP HUMMUS

Like so many things, hummus is better homemade, and you can make it from many things, not just chickpeas. Make your own homemade dip with your winter parsnips for a delicious snack or appetiser. This is a very easy dish to make when you fancy something a bit different.

SERVES 4-6 AS A STARTER

- 4 small parsnips, peeled and cubed
- 1 can of chickpeas, drained
- 60ml (2fl oz) extra virgin olive oil
- 1½ teaspoons ground cumin
- ¼ teaspoon ground coriander
- ¾ teaspoon sea salt
- 3 large garlic cloves, minced
- 6 tbsp tahini (sesame seed paste)
- ½ a lemon, juice of
- 70ml (2½fl oz) cold water

1. Bring a pan of water to the boil, then add the cubed parsnips, and par boil for 6 minutes.
2. Add the drained par-boiled parsnips to a pan with 1 tbsp of the olive oil, cumin and coriander.
3. Gently fry for 10-15 minutes until the parsnips are tender and easily pierced with the tip of a knife.
4. Next, pureé the parsnips together with the minced garlic, tahini, remaining olive oil and lemon juice in a blender until smooth and thick, scraping down the sides of the food processor as necessary.
5. With the blender running, slowly drizzle in half of the water to create a light fluffy consistency. If the mixture is too thick, add the remaining water.
6. Spoon into bowls and let it cool to room temperature before serving.
7. Serve drizzled with some garlic chilli oil or chopped parsley with carrot sticks or flat bread.





SOWING

Prepare the soil well by digging it over deeply to break up any hard layers and also remove any large stones. Do not add manure or heavily feed the ground where parsnips are to grow since this will cause the roots to fork.

The ground should be raked over well to form a nice crumbly surface. Put out a line and make a shallow seed drill along it. Water the bottom of the drill well and then sow. Parsnip seed is quite large and easy to handle. Either sow quite thickly along the row or every 7.5cm (3in) sow two or three seeds. With the latter method there is a good chance of one of the seeds germinating at each sowing station and you can always remove excess ones that you don't need.



GROWING ON

As the parsnips grow, thin out the plants so there are always gaps in between. Eventually you are aiming for about 15cm (6in) between plants. This will leave room to allow for the foliage and give space for each root to develop. Remove any weeds regularly and water the crop in dry spells. This is important if you are to get good-sized roots by early winter.

HARVESTING

The roots are ready for lifting once the foliage has died down, although they can be lifted as baby roots before then, even as early as September. It is said that the sweetest-flavoured parsnips are those that have experienced a frost or two, but in our milder winters of late, this may not be an option so simply dig up one or two roots as and when required.



Parsnips will happily sit in the ground all winter so there is no need to lift the whole crop and store elsewhere. Eat before growth starts again in the spring.

VARIETIES

'Avonresister'

This variety can be grown at closer spacings about 7cm (3in) apart. It shows good canker resistance.

'Dagger F1'

Has an Award of Garden Merit from the RHS. Smooth roots and good canker resistance – ideal for mini roots.

'Gladiator F1'

A hybrid parsnip which means it should produce more uniform plants and roots of excellent quality. Has a lovely smooth white skin and a very sweet flavour. Ideal for exhibition purposes.

'Tender and True'

Another popular variety that is good for the kitchen and show bench. Also has reasonable canker resistance.

'Javelin F1'

Another variety that can be harvested for mini or full-grown roots.

'White Gem'

Heavy yields and highly resistant to canker.



IN POTS

Parsnips are deep rooted and usually grown direct in the soil. However, if you have a large barrel, at least 90cm (3ft) deep, preferably more, and reasonable drainage, then you could grow one of the mini varieties such as 'Dagger F1'. Exhibition growers often produce them in deep sand-filled drums for perfectly clean and straight roots.



AT A GLANCE



SOW: MAR-APR



HARVEST: SEP-MAR

TOP TIP

If you are intending to grow mini roots, these can be sown a little later – from March to the end of May.

If germination is poor, try sowing the seeds on some wet kitchen paper first. Put them in a warm, dark place in a Tupperware box and leave for a week or two. Gently sow those seeds which show an emerging root.

WATCH OUT FOR

Parsnip canker is a soil-borne disease that affects the roots. There are several forms, but the most common attacks the shoulders of the root causing brown lesions. It is worst in wet seasons and in heavy soils. Improve drainage where possible or grow roots in raised beds. Select varieties with canker resistance.

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Peas

Peas are packed with nutrients and goodness especially when picked straight from the garden and children love them. Home-grown also have a superior taste that has to be experienced to be believed



CHUNKY GARDEN PEA DIP

Peas can be so satisfying to grow so make sure to put them to good use, with this dip for example. It's great served as a snack or appetiser with crispy bread or carrot sticks.

SERVES 4

- 200g (7oz) fresh shelled peas
- 2 tbsp tahini
- 2 tbsp lemon juice
- 2 cloves of garlic
- ½ red onion
- Salt to taste

1. Add the shelled peas to a small pot of water and bring to a boil. Cook the peas until tender, about 2 minutes.
2. Drain and place into a food processor together with the tahini, lemon juice, garlic and onion.
3. Whiz until the mixture comes together, but still has some texture.
4. Season with salt.
5. Serve with crackers, as a dip for fresh vegetables or on hot toast.



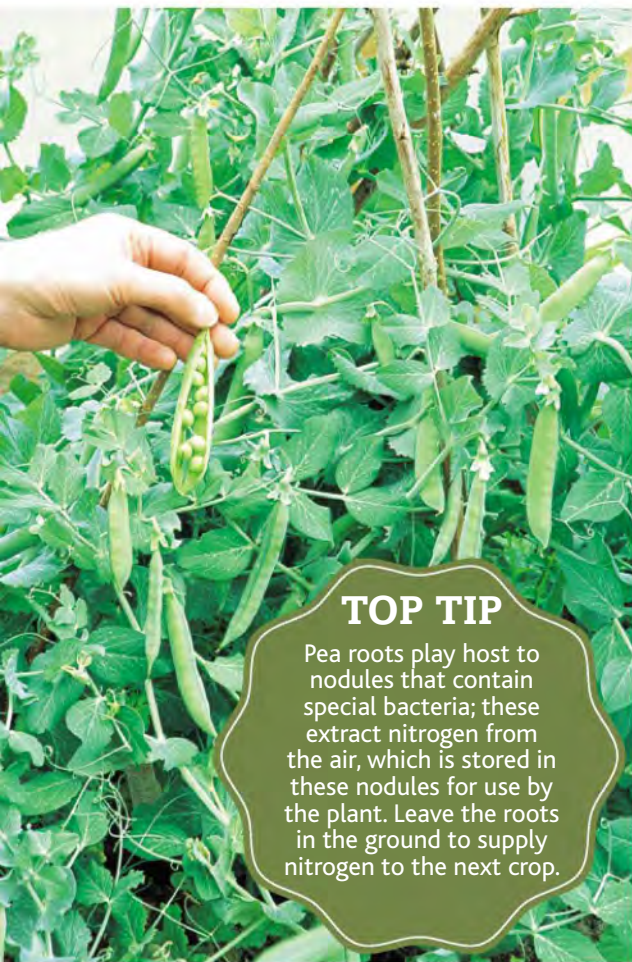
GARLIC SHRIMP AND PEA SPAGHETTI

This is a super-fast dish to prepare, taking under 15 minutes from start to finish. It's also very light – a perfect summer dish.

SERVES 4

- 1 packet spaghetti
- 400g (1lb) shrimp, peeled
- 400g (1lb) peas
- 3 cloves of garlic, chopped
- 8 cherry tomatoes, halved
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- a glug of white wine
- 2 tbsp pesto
- Salt and pepper to taste

1. Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Add the spaghetti, and cook for 8 to 10 minutes or until al dente.
2. Meanwhile, heat the olive oil in a frying pan over high heat.
3. Add in the shrimp, peas and garlic. Cook and stir for 2 minutes, until the shrimp are almost opaque. Then add a dash of white wine, and reduce to a simmer for 2 minutes.
4. Now add the pesto and tomatoes and cook for 30 seconds.
5. Drain the pasta, then add to the frying pan, toss to combine, and serve.



TOP TIP

Pea roots play host to nodules that contain special bacteria; these extract nitrogen from the air, which is stored in these nodules for use by the plant. Leave the roots in the ground to supply nitrogen to the next crop.

SOWING

Peas can be sown direct into the plot from March. Sow 5cm (2in) apart in a double or triple row and to a depth of 4cm (1½in). However, these outdoor sowings are sometimes taken by birds and mice so cover the seeds with netting or alternatively sow under cover in pots or trays in a cold frame or greenhouse.

Another method is sowing into a piece of guttering filled with compost. Once the seedlings are through, the compost can be gently pushed out of the guttering straight into a prepared shallow trench.



Sow in the ground from March



Or sow inside in deep pots

GROWING ON

Some pea varieties are short while other, often older, varieties will grow up to 1.5m (5ft) or more. All have quite fragile, spindly stems so need some form of support. The dwarf ones can be supported using twigs stuck in the ground among the crop. Taller varieties will require netting. Twine stems around the supports if necessary to begin with.



Most peas require some support

HARVESTING

Mangetout types are harvested while the pods are young and tender and before the seeds swell inside. Sugar snaps are eaten, pods and all, and are at their sweetest when the peas have developed, however the 'strings' must be removed before cooking. Alternatively harvest young. Podding peas are harvested once the peas have swelled but before they become hard and tough. Regular harvesting of all types ensures a longer harvesting period.



IN POTS

Peas can be grown in containers – especially the shorter varieties. They may still need some sticks to support them. You could also grow the perfect container pea called 'Half Pint'. It is so small you could plant five seeds in a 15cm (6in) diameter pot and still get a little harvest, at least a taster! Its name is perfect for this little pea because it only grows to about 30-38cm (12-15in) tall. It dates back to the 1800s and is said to be very cold tolerant down to -6C (20F). It's a good variety to grow in a cold frame or even in a pot on the windowsill.



Pea 'Half Pint'

PEA SHOOTS

Peas are also excellent when grown as delicious and nutritious pea shoots. Any variety will do for this and they can be sown at any time, so it is a good way to use up any old packets at the end of the season. Simply sow thickly into a pot or any sort of container and cover with 1cm (½in) of compost. Water thoroughly and allow to germinate. Nip out the growing tips once plants have made 3-4 true leaves. They can be harvested two or three times.



Peas shoots are expensive to buy, but easy to grow

VARIETIES

'Feltham First'

A popular variety that is particularly good for sowing very early or late in the season. Doesn't need too much supporting.

'Early Onward'

A very heavy-cropping variety that is also good for early sowings.

'Alderman'

A late maincrop variety that grows to about 1.5m (5ft) high so support is needed.

'Greensage'

Bred from the popular 'Greenshaft' variety but said to be even sweeter.

'Bingo'

A compact variety which is ideal for containers. Heavy cropping and resistant to root rot and powdery mildew.




'Half Pint' (see left).

The perfect patio pea.

'Alexandra'

Maincrop pea producing long, well-filled pods. Crops well in October from a July sowing. Good resistance to powdery and downy mildew.

AT A GLANCE

-  SOW INSIDE: SEP-NOV, MAR-MAY
-  SOW OUTSIDE: FEB-JUL
-  HARVEST: MAY-SEP

Sowings in autumn are best made in pots or seed trays and grown in a cold frame or greenhouse, but can be sown direct on the plot in milder areas with well-drained soil. Cover with cloches to protect against the weather and rodents.

WATCH OUT FOR

Powdery mildew is a common problem with peas especially later in the season. Feed occasionally with a potash-rich fertiliser such as a liquid tomato feed. Some varieties are more resistant to the disease than others.

Peppers

There are two types of pepper; chilli peppers and sweet peppers, the latter being the milder relatives and much used in salads or in cooking



STUFFED APRICOT AND FETA BULL HORN PEPPERS WITH MINT COUSCOUS

Vibrant and flavoursome peppers are in focus in this recipe. The combination of sweet apricots, tangy feta and salty olives will make your tastebuds sing. Enjoy with a glass of crisp white wine, on a sunny day!

SERVES 2

- 4 bull horn peppers
- 100g feta
- 100g red lentils
- 100ml water
- 6 dried apricots, chopped
- 1 onion
- 1 small courgette, chopped
- A splash extra virgin olive oil
- 2 tbsp black olives, chopped
- 2 tomatoes, diced
- 1 tsp cumin
- 2 tsp oregano
- Salt and pepper to taste

FOR THE COUSCOUS

- 100g couscous
- Roughly 100ml boiling water
- 1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- ¼ lemon, juiced
- Salt and pepper
- A few sprigs of mint

1. Preheat oven to 200C/fan 190C/gas 5
2. Place the lentils in a small saucepan with 100ml water and bring to the boil, simmer gently for 25 minutes.
3. Finely chop the onion and fry with the cumin in a splash of olive oil for a few minutes. Add the tomato and courgette, and fry until most of the water from the vegetables has evaporated. Add the cooked lentils and stir through. Now add the apricot, chopped olives and oregano, heat through. Finally add salt and pepper to taste, set aside.
4. Cut a slit lengthways down the peppers, and gently prise out the seeds. Rinse under cold water to remove any loose seeds.
5. Place the peppers in an ovenproof dish, and fill the peppers with the filling.
6. Crumble feta over the filled peppers, and place in the oven to cook for 25-30 min.
7. Meanwhile make the couscous.
8. Put the kettle on boil, and add the couscous to a bowl. Add olive oil, lemon juice, salt and pepper to the couscous and stir. Now pour enough boiling water in the bowl, so that the couscous is JUST covered by water, place a lid on the bowl, set aside for 15 min.
9. When ready to serve, fluff up the couscous with a fork, add the mint, and serve with the stuffed peppers.



SEARED SCALLOPS ON A YELLOW PEPPER PUREE WITH RED PEPPER SALSA

Sweet scallops paired with yellow pepper puree and crunchy salsa makes a delicious treat for family and friends. Serve as a starter, and remember to buy fresh scallops, they should smell sweet, not fishy.

SERVES 4 AS A STARTER

- 8 scallops
- 1 yellow bell pepper
- 3 garlic cloves, chopped
- 1 red bell pepper
- ½ chilli, chopped
- 1 tsp ginger, chopped
- 1 small bunch of coriander
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- ½ red onion
- 1 mango
- ½ lime, juiced
- Salt and pepper to taste

1. Preheat oven to 180C/ fan 170C/gas 5.
2. Slice the yellow pepper in quarters, remove seeds, drizzle with half the olive oil, and place, skin side up, in a baking tray for 35 minutes, until the skin blisters.
3. Once baked, wrap in clingfilm until cool. Once cooled, peel off the skins and pop in a frying pan alongside the chopped garlic.
4. Fry for a few minutes until the garlic is soft.
5. Remove from the heat, and pop in a blender, blitz until smooth, add salt and pepper to taste. Set aside.
6. To make the salsa, finely chop the red onion, red pepper and mango and add to a mixing bowl. Add the coriander, ginger, chilli and lime juice. Mix well. Set aside.
7. Debeard the scallops, rinse well under the cold tap, drain and pat them dry with a clean dish cloth.
8. Heat a frying pan on high heat with the remaining olive oil and place the scallops in the pan. Sear for 2 minutes on either side until golden in colour. Don't overcook the scallops, or they will go rubbery.
9. Assemble the dish by placing the cooked scallops on a tablespoon of pepper puree, and top with salsa.



SOWING

Peppers need a long growing season, so are usually sown quite early in February or March. Sow several seeds in small pots of multi-purpose compost. Water well and place in a propagator or airing cupboard. They need temperatures of about 15-21C (60-70F) to germinate, so keep on a warm windowsill or in a heated propagator.

Once the seedlings are large enough to handle, transplant them, one seedling per small 9cm (3½in) pot. Place on a warm, sunny windowsill to grow on. They may need to be moved on to the next pot size before planting out, but by



Transplant the seedlings when large enough to handle



mid-April to early May they can be transferred to the greenhouse and be planted in large pots or growing-bags. Peppers that are going to be grown on a patio will need to be kept indoors for longer. On warm, sunny days they can be placed outside but brought in at night. By about the end of May or the beginning of June they can be planted into their final pots outside.

GROWING ON

Some of the dwarf peppers will naturally form bushy plants. The taller-growing ones can have their growing points pinched out once they are 10-15cm (4-6in) tall. Provide a cane support and tie in at regular intervals. Keep the plants well watered but be careful not to overwater.



Most peppers grow into pretty, compact plants

HARVESTING IN POTS

Green peppers are perfectly edible. Sweet types will not have attained their full sweetness and hot peppers their full flavour. If you want them to ripen fully this may take some time depending on the weather; be patient and they will eventually change.



Harvest when the peppers are green or allow them to colour

A perfect plant to grow in containers; if growing in a greenhouse peppers will do very well in large pots or growing-bags. Plant three peppers per growing-bag. They would also look spectacular grown in a large 30cm (1ft) diameter pot placed on a sunny patio. Put three plants in this size pot for a really bushy effect and paint the pot red for a real wow factor!



Peppers thrive in pots

Beginners could try 'Numex Twilight' (below) which is very attractive and easy to grow.

TOP TIP

Capsaicin is the ingredient that makes chillis hot and this is beneficial to our health. In countries where chillis are eaten a lot, deaths from cancer are a lot lower than in countries where pepper consumption is low.

VARIETIES

'Tasty Grill Red F1'

Produces long red fruits up to 25cm (10in) in length. They are delicious sliced and grilled or stuffed or used in salads. Said not to 'repeat' on eating. There is also a yellow form – 'Tasty Grill Yellow F1'.

'Mohawk F1'

Compact plants ideal for patio containers. Produce masses of blocky green fruit ripening to yellow.

'Gypsy F1'

Masses of small fruits up to 10cm (4in) long and 8cm (3in) wide. Produces fruit earlier than some varieties and the fruits turn orange to red.

'Jalapeno Summer Heat F1'

This is the ultimate pizza pepper! It has long narrow

fruits that can be picked when green or left to mature to red.

'Thai Dragon F1'

A truly hot variety that is a prolific cropper of 9cm (3½in) red fruits.

'Numex Twilight'

An attractive small plant to grow in a pot on the patio. The masses of tiny fruits ripen from purple to yellow, orange and red and all these colours can be on the plant at once.

'Cayenne'

The classic hot chilli. Bags of slender red fruit; use fresh or dry for winter storage.



AT A GLANCE



SOW INSIDE: JAN-APR



SOW OUTSIDE: JUN



HARVEST: JUN-OCT

If aiming to grow in an unheated greenhouse, germinate the seedlings in a propagator first, planting them in pots in the greenhouse later on.

WATCH OUT FOR

Aphids (greenfly) often attack seedlings and young plants early in the season in the warmth of the greenhouse. Squash with the fingers or spray with a suitable insecticide as soon as the pests are seen.

Potatoes

One of the greatest pleasures of growing your own vegetables is lifting your first early spuds. Nothing beats that taste of your first home-grown potatoes boiled with a sprig of mint and served with a knob of butter



NEW POTATO AND GREEN BEAN SALAD

In place of mayonnaise, this delicious potato salad uses garlicky vinaigrette for a great flavour and fewer calories.

- 400g/14oz new potatoes
- 150g/5oz green beans
- ½ medium red onion, diced
- A handful chopped fresh dill or parsley
- 3 tablespoons Dijon mustard
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 6 tbsp balsamic vinegar
- 6 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

1. Place the potatoes in a large saucepan and bring it to a boil. Simmer until the potatoes are easily pierced with the tip of a sharp paring knife, around 15 to 20 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the potatoes to a colander, leave to cool.
2. Bring the water in the saucepan back to a boil. Add the green beans and cook for about 2 minutes, until the beans are bright green and tender. Drain the beans and pat them dry.
3. Slice the potatoes about ¼in thick. Cut the beans into 1in pieces. Place the potatoes, green beans, onion and dill in a large serving bowl and gently toss.
4. Make the vinaigrette by combining the mustard, garlic, vinegar, and oil in a jar, screwing on the lid and shaking well. Season with salt and pepper.
5. Pour over the vinaigrette and serve.



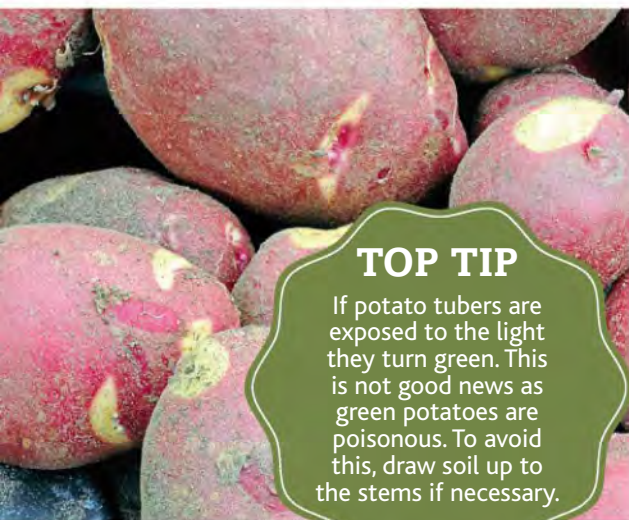
LEEKY MASHED POTATO AND SMOKED MACKEREL

This is a simple supper dish that is quick to prepare and is full of flavour.

SERVES 4

- 1kg (2lb) potatoes, peeled and halved
- 2 large leeks, trimmed, washed and sliced
- 200ml (7fl oz) milk
- Extra virgin olive oil
- 4 smoked mackerel fillets
- ½ lemon, zest of

1. Cook the potatoes in simmering water for 15 minutes or until cooked through. Drain, cover and set aside.
2. Meanwhile, add a glug of olive oil to another saucepan and add the leeks. Sweat gently for about 5 minutes until soft. Add the milk and bring to the boil, then turn the heat off and add to the potatoes. Mash well and season to taste. Cover and set aside.
3. Put the mackerel on a baking tray, sprinkle over the zest, and grill for a couple of minutes on each side.
4. Serve the warm mackerel on a bed of mash.



TOP TIP
If potato tubers are exposed to the light they turn green. This is not good news as green potatoes are poisonous. To avoid this, draw soil up to the stems if necessary.

PLANTING

Potatoes are tubers – storage organs produced up the base of the stems. Disease-free seed tubers are planted in spring and shoots and new roots form from these. By early to midsummer, depending on the variety, they can be lifted and the new tubers that have formed are harvested.

There are lots of varieties to choose from and they are divided into first earlies, second earlies, early maincrop and late maincrop.

Seed potatoes are usually available from about January and they can then be chitted. This means placing the tubers in a tray with the 'eyes' (buds on the tuber) facing upwards. The trays are placed in a light, frost-free spot such as near a window in a shed or garage. The buds grow, giving the potato a head start before planting out.



Chit to give them a head start

Plant potatoes 13cm (5in) deep and 30cm (12in) apart with the chitted shoots facing upwards. Maincrop potatoes tend to be in the ground longer and produce larger plants so plant these about 38cm (15in) apart. Rows should be about 60cm (24in) apart for earlies and 76cm (30in) apart.

IN POTS



Potatoes crop well in containers and bags

Potatoes can be grown in containers and there are even special potato barrels and bags available. You can also plant them in a large bag of compost. Simply remove three-quarters of the compost and put this to one side.

Fold back the sides of the bag and make some holes in the base for drainage before planting three tubers in the few inches of compost at the bottom. This can be done as early as late February if you have a greenhouse or polytunnel. As the potatoes grow, put back some of the compost to just cover the new shoots. Do this two or three times and gradually unroll the sides of the bag as you do so. This 'burying' of the potato shoots will encourage elongated stems and more roots beneath the compost which will produce more tubers. Keep the compost just moist, never soaking wet, and place outside in April or May but cover the foliage if a late frost is forecast. When the potatoes are flowering, dig around in the compost to see if the tubers are big enough to lift. If not leave a little longer and keep well watered.

HARVESTING

When nearing maturity scrape away a little soil to see if the tubers are large enough to lift. New potatoes should be harvested quite small, about the size of a hen's egg.



Lifting 'Sarpò Mira' tubers

GROWING ON

Once the leaves appear above the soil surface, cover them with soil. This has two purposes. It protects the leaves from frost and it also helps elongate the stems, which will encourage more roots and tubers to form. This process is called earthing up and is best done two or three times as the plants grow.




Earthing up protects the crop from frost and light

If potatoes do get frosted they often turn black. Sometimes they will grow through this damage, but it is best to avoid them getting frosted in the first place.

When the plants are nearing time for harvesting (many varieties will start to flower at this time) it is most important they are given adequate moisture because the tubers will be small and starting to swell. Drought at this time will result in a small crop.

AT A GLANCE

 **PLANT: MAR-MAY, AUG***
*(In pots for an autumn harvest)

 **HARVEST: MAY-SEP**

Planting times: First earlies early March-mid May, second earlies March-late May, early maincrop March-late May, late maincrop end March-late May.

Weeks to harvesting: First earlies 10 weeks, second earlies 13 weeks, early maincrop 15 weeks, late maincrop 20 weeks.

VARIETIES

First earlies

'Charlotte'- A superb first early potato with a waxy flesh, ideal for boiling

'Arran Pilot'- A very popular early potato with a fantastic 'new' potato flavour.

'Epicure'- A good white potato with creamy flesh. Best one to recover if touched by frost.

Second earlies

'Estima'- Produces heavy crops. Good for baking potatoes and drought resistant.

'British Queen'- More than 100 years old, this variety produces good harvests of floury potatoes that have a delicious flavour.

Early maincrop

'Desiree'- Probably the most popular red variety. Great all rounder and heavy cropping.

'Sante'- A good potato for pest and disease resistance.

'Smile'- Aptly named as this red potato has white 'smile' shaped markings. Great flavour as bred from red 'Duke of York'.

Late maincrop

'Sarpò Mira'- One of a range of 'Sarpò' potatoes with good blight resistance. Great for baking and mashing.

'Pink Fir Apple'- A red knobbly shaped salad potato renowned for its delicious flavour. The shape makes them trickier to peel but the flavour outweighs this inconvenience.

WATCH OUT FOR

Potato blight is a devastating disease which will cause the plants to collapse. Choose a resistant variety.

*Summer
Radish*

This is one of the easiest and fastest vegetables to grow and adds a wonderful pepperiness to salads. It can be grown between slower crops such as leeks or brassicas making it useful for the small plot where space is limited



RADISH AND CLEMENTINE SALAD WITH A HONEY DRESSING

Sweet, crunchy and tangy! What more do you need from a salad? This dish is simple to prepare, but looks amazing on your table. Add a few leaves of rocket and strips of pancetta if you want to serve it as a main course.

SERVES 4 AS A STARTER

● 5 clementines, peeled and sliced

● 10 radishes, sliced

FOR THE DRESSING:

● 1 tbsp honey

● 2 tbsp olive oil

● 1 ½ tbsp white wine vinegar

● 1 tsp rosemary, chopped

● A pinch of salt

1. Mix all the dressing ingredients in a bowl, and whisk until well combined.
2. Arrange the sliced clementines and radishes on four plates, and drizzle the dressing over.
3. Serve immediately.



SOWING

Radish will tolerate a little shade and is ideal for planting close or between larger-leaved veg. They are usually sown direct leaving about 2.5cm (1in) between seeds in rows about 15cm (6in) apart.

Growing closer together helps to keep them small and tender. They mature quickly so it is better to sow a short row or a container every 14 days than lots at once which may then run to seed.



Sow outdoors in short rows from March to seed.

GROWING ON

Water the crop regularly and evenly especially in mid-summer when drought conditions can prevail as this will help prevent the roots from splitting or plants running to seed. If they are overcrowded thin to allow the remaining roots to swell.

TOP TIP

Try a mixture of colours to brighten up summer salads and add a range of flavours to your plate.

HARVESTING

Crops can be harvested in as little as three to four weeks after sowing. Harvest when roots are about the size of a 10 pence piece or less to prevent them from becoming tough or too hot to the taste. Wash the roots and top and tail them. Eat as soon as possible although they will store for a few days in the fridge. Rows can be harvested in stages taking the biggest roots first and leaving the rest to grow on.

IN POTS

Radish is perfect for containers as it is shallow rooted. Sow in any pot or tub; because the crop does not need a deep root run, if sowing in large pots you may wish to fill the base with some broken polystyrene packaging or similar to save on compost. Otherwise sow in windowbox-sized containers or growing bags, however it is important to maintain moisture in the compost to prevent any growth checks which can lead to poor roots or bolting (premature flowering).

Any reasonable compost will do, such as a multi-purpose or growing-bag compost.

AT A GLANCE



SOW INSIDE: FEB-MAR



SOW OUTSIDE: MAR-AUG



HARVEST: APR-OCT

Maintain regular watering to avoid the roots from splitting – sometimes a problem after heavy rain.

VARIETIES

'French Breakfast 3'

A classic variety of long red and white roots just perfect for summer salads.

'Zlata'

An unusual yellow variety with white flesh and oval roots. Ideal for mixing with red radish for great colour.

'Scarlet Globe'

This produces small round all-red roots which are milder than some radish.

'Bright Lights'

Red, white, purple and yellow round roots to add colour to your plate.

WATCH OUT FOR

Slugs love to nibble the tender roots so either lightly scatter animal-friendly pellets or water the rows with a biological control, use traps, barriers etc. Flea beetles will nibble the leaves of young seedlings. Covering with fine netting can help prevent this.



Slugs love to nibble the roots

Salad Leaves

Salad leaves are so easy to grow (all you need is a windowbox) and the choice is immense. Have fun experimenting with a mix of leaves with different textures, shapes and colours. Some, such as the mustards, are hot and spicy while others, such as lettuce, are mild



ROASTED CHERRY TOMATO AND AUBERGINE BRUSCHETTA WITH ROCKET

Its hard to beat freshly picking your own salad leaves, and rocket is at the top of the list for flavour and bite. Added to these warm and juicy bruschettas, it gives a lovely fresh pepper punch.

SERVES 4 AS A STARTER

- 250g grape or cherry tomatoes, halved
- 6 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp sugar
- 1 tbsp oregano
- 2 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1 large aubergine, sliced into 1cm thick rounds
- 2 handfuls rocket leaves
- sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 25g parmigiano cheese, shaved into flakes
- 1-2 small ciabatta bread

1. Pre-heat the oven to 150 °C/fan 140°C.
2. Place the halved tomatoes in a roasting dish, drizzle with 2 tbsp olive oil, oregano, sugar, salt and pepper, and roast for 1 hour.
3. Meanwhile, combine the remaining oil and crushed garlic and coat the sliced aubergines. Set aside.
4. Once the tomatoes are almost cooked, heat a large pan over a medium heat, and grill the aubergines for 5-10 min until soft and cooked through.
5. Slice the ciabatta and brush with a little olive oil and grill for a minute or two on each side until slightly golden.
6. Now assemble the bruschetta by layering up the aubergine, tomatoes, rocket and parmigiano flakes. Serve warm.



WARM SALAD OF ROCKET, BEETROOT, SWEET POTATO AND FETA

The sweet flavours of beetroot and sweet potato just scream to be paired with the strong pepper flavours of rocket. Serve this warm salad as a healthy weekend lunch, or as a side dish for a bigger spread.

SERVES 4

- 4 handfuls of rocket
- 4 small beetroot, peeled
- 2 sweet potatoes, peeled
- ½ pack of good feta
- 5 sprigs of thyme
- 1 tsp honey
- ½ lemon, juiced
- 3 tbsp olive oil

1. Pre-heat the oven to 180 °C/fan 170°C.
2. Roughly chop the peeled sweet potato and beetroot, and place in a roasting dish with 2 tbsp olive oil, bake for 35 min until soft.
3. Remove from oven, and leave to cool for 5 min.
4. Meanwhile make the vinaigrette by combining the remaining oil with the lemon juice, honey and thyme.
5. Crumble the feta over the roast vegetables, pour over the vinaigrette and top with rocket leaves.
6. Serve warm.



SOWING

Sow salad leaves in short rows or in pots. Simply sprinkle the seed fairly close together in the row. There is often no need to thin out the crop unless sown very thickly. If you do have to thin out the row just use the thinnings in a salad or as a garnish. If you wish to grow the plants to full size you can sow a few seeds into each cell of a cell tray and transplant in to rows in the open garden later.



Sowing lettuce intended for growing as mature heads

HARVESTING

To have a continuous harvest of the most tender, tasty leaves, you need to sow in succession; this means sowing a short row or a pot full of salad leaves every fortnight.

Simply pick a few individual leaves from each plant or harvest whole plants, leaving the rest to grow on..



Harvest-ready lettuce

IN POTS

All grow well in pots and containers. Make sure the container is well drained. Most are shallow rooted so the compost can be reused a few times; simply refresh the top 5-7.5cm (2-3in) before resowing. Keep your pots in a sunny, sheltered spot.

GROWING ON

Keep the crop well watered and as soon as the leaves are 7.5-10cm (3-4in) high you can start picking off a few leaves from each plant. Try not to take out the main growing tip but remove the young leaves on either side of this. That way the plant will keep growing.

Salad leaves are quick growing but this also means they are quick to 'go over' and get too large and coarse or too strong in flavour. Some such as rocket are also prone to going to flower and seed very quickly, although you can eat the flowers and seed if you like a very hot peppery flavour.

In the case of some such as lettuce and pak choi rows of thinned plants can be left to grow and harvested when mature.

TOP TIP

All salad leaves can be harvested as baby leaves or microgreens which are highly nutritious. Sow thickly and harvest by snipping the seedlings off with sharp scissors to leave the roots and compost behind.



Microgreens ready for harvesting

VARIETIES

Lettuce, komatsuna, green in the snow (perilla or shiso), rocket, lamb's lettuce, mizuna, mibuna, leaf beet, mustard, endive, pak choi, red orach, salad burnet, senposai, spinach, American land cress, beetroot 'Bulls Blood', radish leaf, tatsoi.

This list is not exhaustive; there are more available and some of those mentioned can be left to grow to maturity, such as pak choi, to provide a much meatier crop, but if the seedling leaves are harvested, they are ideal for tossing into a salad.



Mixed salad leaves

AT A GLANCE



SOW INSIDE: NOV, FEB



SOW OUTSIDE: MAR-OCT



HARVEST: ALL YEAR ROUND

WATCH OUT FOR

Slugs and snails will eat emerging seedlings and nibble leaves. Use animal friendly slug pellets, traps or barriers to control them. Flea beetle will attack leaves from the cabbage family such as pak choi and mustard. Covering with fine netting will deter them and also birds and butterflies.

Squashes

These are members of the gourd family and include pumpkins, courgettes and marrows; the latter are featured separately on page 39. Here we look at the remaining summer and winter squashes which include the pumpkins. Summer squashes tend to be softer skinned and do not store well. The winter squashes mature mid to late autumn and will keep for many months if allowed to ripen fully



TWICE COOKED BUTTERNUT SQUASH PASTA

For this deliciously heart-warming dish, use either pumpkin or butternut squash. What makes this dish a little different is the pan-frying of the pasta. This merges and melts all the flavours into a mouth-watering and easy midweek dinner.

- 1 medium butternut squash
- 1 large onion, peeled and diced
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- A dash of olive oil
- 1 small handful fresh sage leaves
- 500g (18oz) pasta
- 50g (1½oz) pumpkin seeds
- Good quality parmesan, grated for the top
- Salt and pepper to taste

1. Preheat the oven to 200C/fan 190C/gas 7.
2. Peel and dice the butternut squash, discarding the seed pulp.
3. Add the squash to an ovenproof dish, alongside the onion, salt and pepper and a drizzle of olive oil. Roast in the oven for 30 minutes until soft.
4. Add the pasta to a pan of boiling water and cook until al dente. Drain and set aside.
5. Remove the cooked squash from the oven, and lightly mash with a wooden spoon.
6. Heat about two tablespoons of olive oil in a large pan or wok, add the garlic, sage leaves, pumpkin seeds and squash mixture. Lightly fry for 2-3 min.
7. Next add the cooked pasta and cook for a further 5 min, until golden.
8. Serve with grated parmesan cheese and fresh black pepper.



ROASTED BUTTERNUT SQUASH, CHEDDAR AND ROSEMARY SOUP

Another great way to enjoy squash is to make this delicious and healthy soup. It is easy to prepare and perfect for winter nights.

SERVES 4

- 1 butternut squash
- 1 large potato, diced
- 1 parsnip, diced
- 50g (1½oz) Cheddar, grated
- 1 clove garlic
- 2 sprigs of rosemary
- 800ml (27fl oz) organic chicken or vegetable stock
- A dash of olive oil
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 4 tbsp cream

1. Pre heat the oven to 180C/fan 160C/gas 4
2. Halve the butternut squash, scoop out the seeds and place in an ovenproof dish, drizzle olive oil over, and roast for 30-45 minutes.
3. Remove from the oven, and leave to cool slightly.
4. Meanwhile chop the onion and add to a large pot, fry for a few minutes. Then add the diced potato, parsnip and garlic clove.
5. Peel off the skin of the butternut squash, then roughly chop. Add the squash to the pot, alongside the stock and rosemary. Bring to the boil, and simmer for 20 minutes, or until the potato is cooked.
6. Take off the heat and using a stick blender, blitz the soup until smooth.
7. Now stir in the grated cheese, until melted. Season with salt and pepper.
8. Serve with the cream drizzled over.



TOP TIP
Place developing squashes on a piece of wood or tile to keep the fruit off the soil and prevent rot setting in.

SOWING

Squashes are tender vegetables so are usually sown in containers and kept in warm conditions until planting out at the end of May/beginning of June although they can be sown outside from April onwards. Ideally sow one seed, on its edge, in a 9cm (3½in) pot or use cell trays with one seed per cell. Place the pots on a warm windowsill or in a propagator. Once they have germinated, move to cooler conditions such as the greenhouse bench or a cold frame to grow on.

GROWING ON

When all danger of frost has passed depending on where you live, the squashes can be planted outside. Space the trailing varieties at least 1.2m (4ft) apart and bush varieties about 60cm (2ft) apart.

These crops require a good fertile soil; dig a 30cm (12in) deep hole with a similar diameter and back fill with some garden compost or well-rotted manure. Then heap a half mix of soil and compost on top and form a mound. The plant can then be planted into a hole made in the top of the heap.

Make sure you plant deep enough to support the stem. Sometimes they can be a bit floppy at this stage so if necessary put in a short stake and tie the stem to this.

Winter squashes such as pumpkins are sometimes a bit shy to flower initially. Leave the stems to trail naturally for 3-4.5m (10-15ft) then nip the end out. This will encourage sideshoots to form along the stem. These will produce a lot more flowers, usually male flowers at first but then female blooms. Once this happens you should start to see one or two fruits setting. If you are aiming for a really large pumpkin then remove the growing tip about two or three leaves beyond the fruit. Remove the growing tips of other sideshoots too, to encourage all the plant's energy into the one or two fruits you have picked out.

Feed occasionally with a general-purpose feed to encourage good leaf colour but also fruit growth.



Some squashes such as butternuts can be trained up a tripod of pole



Female flowers have an embryo fruit behind the petals

HARVESTING

Summer squashes are best harvested when young and tender, but this depends in part on the variety. Check the seed packet for a guide. If you have several plants you will find you can be picking fruits every day; they grow that fast. If the fruits are left to become large the plants tend to stop flowering as much and you get a reduced crop.

Winter squashes may not be ready until October. Leave the fruits in situ until they have coloured fully and the skins have hardened, but bring in before the first frost.

IN POTS



You can grow squashes in a large pot, ideally, one the size of a large bucket or 60cm (2ft) diameter container. Fill this with a mix of multi-purpose compost and ideally some of your own garden compost. Plant one squash plant per pot and place in a warm, sunny spot. Keep the plant well watered, especially once the fruits begin to form.

Trailing squashes will need to be allowed room on the ground or alternatively tie the stems to a wigwam of canes or up a trellis on a wall. It is important that the stems are tied in regularly to keep them in order. If growing large pumpkins, it is better to allow them to trail as the weight of the fruit will be too heavy for a lightweight cane structure to support.

VARIETIES

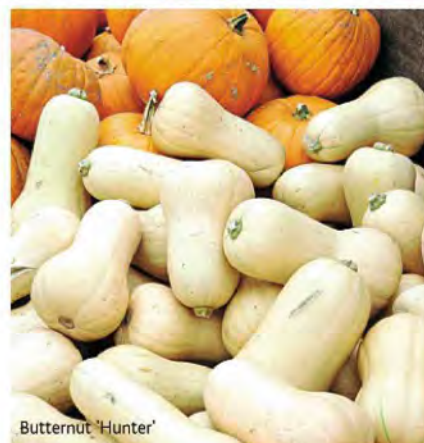
Patty Pan 'Scalloped Mixed'
An unusual flat yellow, green or white fruit with a scalloped edge. Pick small fruits which can be eaten raw or cooked as you would courgettes.

Winter squash Pumpkin 'Dill's Atlantic Giant'
The one to grow if you want a record-breaking monster.

Pumpkin 'Jack 'O Lantern'
Produces medium-sized fruits ideal for carving for Halloween or using in the kitchen.

Squash 'Vegetable Spaghetti'
A great winter squash that produces oval, orange fruits; inside, a spaghetti-like flesh which makes a refreshing healthy alternative to spaghetti.

Butternut 'Hunter'
Bred for the UK climate. Good flavour from fruits weighing up to 1kg.



AT A GLANCE

- SOW INSIDE MAR-APR
- SOW OUTSIDE: APR-JUN
- HARVEST: JUL-OCT

The long growing season of winter squashes means earlier sowings can be made in late March but only if you have a greenhouse to keep the plants in until all danger of frost has passed. Otherwise, best to sow during April.

WATCH OUT FOR

Keep a watch out for slugs as these will devour young squash plants.

Sweetcorn

There is nothing more delightful on a warm summer's evening than eating barbecued home-grown sweetcorn, the juices and melted butter dribbling down your chin. This crop is simple to grow and a great one to involve children in. You'll have the kids eating vegetables in no time!

BBQ CORN ON THE COB WITH HERB BUTTER

It's not every year my sweetcorn rewards me with a bountiful crop, due to Scotland's cold climate, but however many cobs I get, I savour them! Try this simple but delicious barbecue recipe for your next crop of corn.

SERVES 4

- 4 fresh corn on the cob, with husks
- 75g/2oz butter
- ½ tsp sweet paprika
- ½ tsp cayenne pepper
- 1½ tsp rock salt
- 1 tsp chives, chopped
- 1 tsp parsley, chopped
- ½ tsp garlic powder

1. Peel back the husks of the corn, and remove the silk (the stringy bits) then rewrap the corn in the husks. Soak the corn in a large pan of water for 15-20 minutes, ensuring the whole cob is covered.
2. Meanwhile make the herb butter, by combining the herbs and spices with the butter, and chilling in the fridge until needed.
3. Prepare your barbecue as you normally do, and place the corn on the preheated grill for 15 minutes, turning now and again to ensure even cooking.
4. Once cooked, remove from the grill and peel back the husks, spread with the herb butter, and enjoy!



HARVESTING IN POTS

The stage to pick sweetcorn is critical. Sweetcorn is ready for picking when the silks turn dark brown. Peel open a cob and push a fingernail into a kernel. If the juice is creamy the cob is ripe. Eat the cobs soon after harvesting.



Harvest when the tassels turn brown

Sweetcorn is not really ideal for growing in pots because of the need to grow in blocks to ensure pollination.

However, three 'Mini Pop' is a good variety for containers or four large tubs containing three or four plants of sweetcorn could be grown in a group and you may get a few cobs. As sweetcorn is a large leafy plant, it will look stunning in a group of pots on a sunny patio, giving a 'tropical' look. Any variety can be used but those harvested as baby corn such as 'Mini Pop' (pictured) are ideal for pots.



Large pots will be needed, at least 60cm (2ft) diameter, to provide stability to stop the plants from blowing over. The compost can be a multi-purpose compost or John Innes no 3, but if you have some well-rotted garden compost, add some of this to the mixture to help retain moisture. Water well during dry weather.

SOWING

Sweetcorn is best sown under cover to get it growing quickly before planting out. It is a crop that needs a long and warm season to do well.

It does not like root disturbance so sow into special Rootainers, which are long, deep pots that open up like a book. Otherwise make your own pots out of rolled-up newspaper or even toilet roll tubes. There is no need to remove the newspaper or toilet roll when you plant out.



Sow into deep cell trays, pots or cardboard tubes

Sow two seeds per tube or long pot and place on a greenhouse bench or a windowsill. In April no extra heat will be necessary. When the seedlings emerge remove the weakest to leave one per pot. Keep the compost moist and grow on in the best well-lit windowsill you have or place in a cloche or mini greenhouse outside.



Young plants ready for planting

GROWING ON

At the end of May or beginning of June when no more frosts are likely, sweetcorn can be planted out. If possible prepare the soil by adding some well-rotted farmyard manure or garden compost. Then plant in a block formation, spacing plants 45cm (18in) apart.



Plant in blocks to aid pollination

Water in well. As the crop grows keep the soil moist but especially when the cobs are forming; drought at this stage will cause shrivelled or undeveloped cobs.

TOP TIP

Growing your own sweetcorn is better than buying in because it can be eaten fresh when the cobs are still packed with sugary sweetness.

VARIETIES

'Extra Tender and Sweet'

A quick-germinating variety and said to be superior in taste and having better vigour than other varieties.

'Indian Summer'

A supersweet type that is high in sugars and produces red and purple kernels among the yellow ones.

'Mini Pop F1'

Small, tender cobs ideal for salads, dips or for steaming or stir-frying.

Popcorn 'Fiesta'

Multi-coloured cobs ideal for making popcorn.

AT A GLANCE

SOW INSIDE: MAR-MAY

SOW OUTSIDE: MAY-JUN

HARVEST: AUG-SEP

Keep plants growing on in a greenhouse or conservatory for as long as possible so the young plants are well established, around 13cm (5in), when planted out.

WATCH OUT FOR

Smut disease affects the stalks and kernels causing galls which if left will burst open to scatter spores far and wide. Cut them off before they burst and burn badly infected plants.

Swiss Chard

This plant is worth growing just for its decorative leaves and stems.

A clump could be grown in the flower border and not look out of place. The stems and the leaves can be eaten, making a tasty alternative to spinach

SWISS CHARD SALAD WITH ORANGE, BLUE CHEESE AND WALNUTS

A vibrant and colourful early season salad with fresh chard, sweet orange and tangy blue cheese.

SERVES 4

- 4 large handfuls chard (approx. 200g/7oz)
- 2 handfuls watercress or other salad leaves
- 2 oranges
- 150g/5oz blue cheese, such as stilton or gorgonzola
- 4-5 tbsp walnuts
- 1 raw beetroot, grated

FOR THE DRESSING:

- 2tbsp white wine vinegar
- 4tbsp olive oil
- 1tbsp runny honey
- 1tsp Dijon mustard
- 1tsp black pepper, freshly ground

1. Whisk the honey, mustard, vinegar, oil and black pepper together in a small bowl. Set aside.
2. Using a sharp knife, carefully cut the peel off the oranges, removing all the pith, then slice into rounds.
3. Place the chard and salad leaves into a serving bowl, and scatter over the walnuts, grated beetroot and orange slices.
4. Roughly chop the cheese, then add to the salad bowl.
5. Drizzle over the dressing, and serve immediately with crusty bread.



HARVESTING IN POTS SOWING

Either harvest a few leaves from each plant or lift whole specimens. In the case of salad leaves snip off enough young leaves for your intended use and leave the rest to grow. Providing the growing tip is not damaged you should be able to harvest the same plants two or three times.






Swiss chard is best grown in the ground where it has room, but three plants of different-coloured 'Bright Lights' in a large pot or trough would be highly attractive on the patio.

Swiss chard is not too fussy about soil but prefers a sunny spot. Sow direct where you intend to grow it in a seed drill about 2.5cm (1in) deep. Once the seedlings are through, thin them out to 10cm (4in) apart and then again when they are bigger to 30cm (1ft) apart.



Alternatively if growing as a salad leaf, scatter the seeds lightly over the surface of the compost in a pot or deep tray and cover with a little sieved compost. Cover with a sheet of glass or clingfilm and leave to germinate.

AT A GLANCE

-  SOW INSIDE: APR-MAY
-  SOW OUTSIDE: MAY-AUG
-  HARVEST: MAR-OCT

Usually takes about 10 to 12 weeks after sowing for the first harvest to be possible.

Early sowings should be covered with cloches or alternatively sow into cell trays indoors and plant out once well established.

TOP TIP
It is a good idea to sow the multi-coloured 'Rainbow' types in cell trays and to plant out later. In this way you can be sure of planting a good range of colours.

WATCH OUT FOR

Slugs and snails will nibble the leaves, especially of young plants. Powdery mildew may become a problem late in the season.

GROWING ON

It is important to water the plants regularly as they may go to seed (bolt) if they become too dry; afterwards cover early crops with fleece to protect them from cold snaps. Covering with crop protection netting in summer will reduce damage from flying pests.



VARIETIES

'Bright Lights'
A fabulous mixture of different coloured chards will create a rainbow of stems. This is simply gorgeous to grow and just admire without even eating. The stems in this mixture will be white, red, yellow and orange. When the winter's sun is low and catches the stems from behind, they light up like coloured light bulbs.

'White Silver 2'
White stems that harvest over a long season and make a good spinach substitute.

Tomatoes

This popular greenhouse crop can also be grown outside on the patio or plot or even in a hanging basket if you get the right variety. There are hundreds of tomato varieties ranging from the tiny cherry tomatoes to the huge beefsteak types and all sizes in between. Once you have tried standard varieties check the seed catalogues for some real heritage gems



TOMATO AND HARISSA CHICKEN

Middle Eastern harissa is paired with chicken and tomatoes for an aromatic medium-hot dish in this recipe. It's delicious served with spaghetti or tagliatelle.

SERVES 4

- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1 garlic clove, crushed
- 3 free-range chicken breasts, diced
- 1 tsp cumin seeds
- 3 tbsp harissa paste
- 2 tbsp tomato paste
- 50ml (1¾fl oz) cream
- 10 cherry tomatoes, cut in half
- 100ml (3½fl oz) vegetable stock
- 2 large handfuls spinach
- ½ lemon, juiced
- Handful fresh coriander, chopped

1. Heat oil in a large frying pan over medium-high heat. Season chicken with salt and pepper, and cook until browned, about 5 minutes per side; transfer to a plate.
2. Add onion, garlic and cumin seeds and cook until softened, about 3 minutes.
3. Add the harissa paste, tomato paste, spinach and stock; bring to a simmer.
4. Next pour in the cream, and nestle the chicken into the sauce.
5. Simmer covered for 20 minutes.
6. A couple of minutes before serving add the lemon juice and coriander.
7. Serve over pasta.



TOMATO AND FENNEL TART

The joy of growing your own tomatoes is not only for the superior flavour but also for the choice of colours. To create a vibrant-looking dish, try using different-coloured tomatoes for this tart.

SERVES 4

FOR THE PASTRY:

- 200g (7oz) plain flour, plus extra for dusting
- 100g (3½oz) butter, cut into small pieces
- 50g (1¾oz) grated Cheddar
- 1 tbsp cold water

FOR THE FILLING:

- 500g (17oz) cherry tomatoes, halved
- 3 baby fennel, cut in half lengthways

- 2 garlic cloves, sliced
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- A good pinch of salt and pepper
- 3 eggs
- 150ml (5fl oz) single cream
- 100ml (3½fl oz) milk
- 50g (1¾oz) Cheddar cheese, grated

1. Make the pastry. Tip the flour into a food processor with the butter and whiz until the mixture resembles breadcrumbs. Add 1-2 tbsp cold water and pulse until the dough comes together. Turn out on to a lightly floured surface and briefly knead. Wrap the pastry and chill in the fridge for 30 minutes or overnight.
2. Preheat the oven to 160C/fan 150C/gas 3.
3. Roll out the pastry and line a 25cm (10in) flan tin; there's no need to trim off the excess at this stage. Prick the pastry all over with a fork, then line with greaseproof paper and fill with baking beans. Bake for 15 minutes, then remove the paper and beans, and then cook for a further 5 minutes. Using a small, sharp knife, carefully trim off excess pastry.
4. Lightly whisk the eggs with cream, milk and cheese. Season with plenty of salt and pepper.
5. Pour the mixture into the pastry case and arrange the tomatoes over the top, cut-sides up, together with the fennel.
6. Bake for 30-35 minutes, at 170C/fan 160C/gas 3 until puffed and golden, then leave to cool slightly before serving.



HARVESTING IN POTS

Harvest the fruit as they ripen to the typical colour for the variety. Regular harvesting will encourage the ripening of the remaining fruit. Eat as soon as possible or convert into soups and sauces.



Harvest as soon as the fruit changes colour and softens

Tomatoes are best grown under cover in containers in a proprietary compost as outdoors they tend to be more susceptible to the disease blight. Growing-bags are ideal and you should fit three tomatoes per bag. They can also be grown in individual 38cm (15in) pots or the small bush tomatoes will do well in a hanging basket. Plant up a 30cm (12in) basket with one small bush tomato such as 'Tumbler' and some marigolds and perhaps a plant of basil and you have a very useful, attractive basket.



Tomatoes grow well in pots and hanging baskets

VARIETIES

There are so many to choose from it is difficult to pick just a few but there are some worth a mention.

'Sungold'

A really popular cherry tomato that can be grown in a greenhouse or outside. It produces masses of tiny orange-red fruits that are just so sweet. The skins are very thin too which does mean they split easily, but the taste makes up for it.

'Costoluto Fiorentino'

This is a fantastic beefsteak tomato that has fruits up to 10cm (4in) in diameter. It is renowned for its wonderful flesh and great flavour. Ideal for tomato sauces. Best grown in a greenhouse.

'Tumbler'

A perfect tomato to grow in a hanging basket. It produces tiny cherry-red tomatoes and can be put in a basket with some bedding plants for a pretty display.

'Crimson Crush'

This tomato is a must for gardeners who have had problems with blight affecting their toms in the past. It has good resistance to this fungal disease and produces medium to large tasty tomatoes.

TOP TIP

Growing marigolds with tomatoes is said to keep whitefly at bay

AT A GLANCE



SOW INSIDE: JAN-APR



SOW OUTSIDE: APR-MAY



HARVEST: JUN-OCT

WATCH OUT FOR

Tomato blight is a devastating disease of tomatoes (and potatoes) and causes complete collapse of the plants in summer in just a matter of days. Choose a resistant variety or grow plants under cover.

SOWING

Fill small pots or trays with multipurpose compost and sprinkle seeds over the surface. Cover with 6mm (¼in) of compost and water well. Place in a propagator or on a warm windowsill at a temperature of about 70F (21C).

Once the seedlings are through remove from the propagator and put on a light warm windowsill or if you have a heated greenhouse, place on the bench. When the seedlings are large enough to handle move into individual 9cm (3½in pots).

Grow on in a warm, well-lit spot. In April the plants will be large enough to put in an unheated greenhouse to grow on and by May they should be showing signs of flower buds and at this stage they can be planted into their final pots or growing-bag inside a greenhouse or polytunnel. Don't plant tomatoes outside yet, wait until the end of May or beginning of June as they are susceptible to the cold.



Cover with fine sand to help the seed coat come away from the seed leaves



GROWING ON

Tomatoes are either bush types or cordon. Cordons require the support of canes whereas bush types do not. As cordon tomatoes grow, tie them in with string and remove any sideshoots that form in the leaf joints.

Mist the flowers during the day to improve pollination and fruit set or tap the tops of the canes. Keep the plants well watered and once the first fruits start to set, feed with a tomato feed.

In the height of summer keep the greenhouse ventilated well on hot sunny days and if necessary shade the greenhouse a little. Pinch out the growing tips once the plants reach the eaves of the greenhouse or have set four to five trusses outside.



Plant outside after the frosts



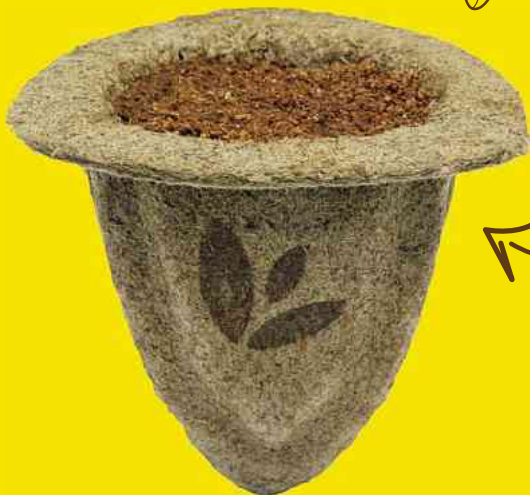
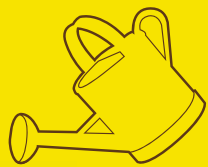
Take out the tops of outdoor plants once they have set 4-5 trusses





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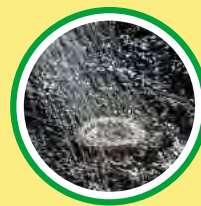


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plant



water



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*one plant per pod



New Crops – Time To Try Something Different

We are all familiar with fruit and vegetables traditionally grown in the UK. However, visit many allotments around the country or take a look in seed catalogues and you will find lots of crops previously grown mainly by gardeners in other parts of the world. This is thanks partly to Britain's modern multicultural makeup and partly because gardeners have a natural inclination to experiment and want to grow things they haven't tried before. We all love a challenge!

Of course although they are new to many of us, most have been grown for thousands of years and in their native countries may be staple foods. Here are a few crops that have become popular in the UK in recent years and which the more adventurous gardener may want to try to add interest to their garden and new flavours and textures to their plate.



AGRETTI (SALSOLA SODA)

Also known as land seaweed or Barba di Frate (Monk's Beard), this crop, which has been popular in Italian cooking for a long time, has only recently come to notice in the UK, thanks mainly to its use by top chefs. It is an annual plant which looks a little like grass or chives and has a spinach-like flavour with a touch of bitterness. It is usually steamed and dressed with oil and/or lemon and served as a side dish with fish or pasta.



SOWING: APR-JUL



HARVEST: AUG-NOV

Start in seed trays and transplant outdoors when well established and after the last frosts. Water regularly and harvest within about 50 days.



CALLALOO (AMARANTHUS SPP)

Amaranthus or callaloo has been grown both as a salad leaf and grain crop for generations in countries such as the West Indies, but can now be seen on many allotment sites in the UK. The seeds can be sown quite thickly into trays and pots for harvesting as a quick-growing salad leaf or sown outside or in the greenhouse or polytunnel border and grown on to harvest as a leafy vegetable, which is usually steamed. Several species are grown as food crops but *Amaranthus tricolor* is a particularly colourful form, producing foliage ranging from acid green to red.



SOWING: MAY-AUG



HARVEST: JUN-OCT

For mature plants start inside in trays or cell trays, planting outside in a sunny, sheltered spot once all danger of frost has passed. Can also be sown direct outside in the south from June onwards. The young leaves can be snapped off as required and the plants then allowed to grow on for a second and third harvest.



ASPARAGUS PEA (LOTUS TETRAGONOLOBUS)

Also known as the winged pea or winged bean, this crop may be a little more familiar to seasoned gardeners as it has been offered in UK seed catalogues for many years. The attractive plants are worth growing for their decorative appeal alone; the rusty red flowers are striking and the winged pods are also attractive. The taste is a cross between asparagus and fresh peas, although in fact this plant is not related to either!

 SOWING: APR-MAY

 HARVESTING: JUL-AUG

Can be grown in the open ground in a warm, sheltered spot or in pots on the patio or among other plants in the border. Not frost hardy so wait to sow outdoors until the frosts are over in your area. It is essential to harvest the pods while still young and tender as they quickly become tough and stringy. Boil whole as mangetout peas.



CHINESE ARTICHOKE (STACHYS AFFINIS)

These knobbly, white, almost translucent tubers are very easy to grow and have a pleasant nutty flavour. The one drawback with them is that they are difficult and fiddly to clean prior to cooking. It is likely that parts of the fragile tubers will be left in the ground after lifting and these should shoot again to produce a crop next season.

 PLANTING: FEB-MAR

 HARVESTING: NOV-MAR

Protect the tubers once the foliage has died down by covering with straw or fallen leaves and lift as required. Do not attempt to harvest too early as the tubers continue to develop until late in the season. Use in salads and stir-fries.



CUCAMELON (MELOTHRIA SCABRA)

Also known as mouse melon or bitter melon, this attractive little fruit is easy to grow and is produced on a delicate-looking, but vigorous climbing plant. This can be left to trail or trained up a wigwam of short canes. The tender plants are best grown in pots on the patio or in the greenhouse or polytunnel.

 SOWING: APR-MAY

 HARVESTING: JULY-SEP

These perennial plants can be overwintered, but are so easy to grow from seeds that it is often more convenient to start new plants each year. Eat the fruit unpeeled as a novelty side dish or chop and add to salads.



OCA (OXALIS TUBEROSA)

Similar in appearance to Chinese artichokes, oca, or the New Zealand yam, betrays its relation to weed and cultivated species of oxalis with its attractive clover-like leaves. The tubers have a pleasant lemony flavour and come in a range of colours from pink to red or yellow.

 PLANTING: APR-MAY

 HARVESTING: OCT-MAR

The plants grow rapidly, but are tender and best planted individually into small pots in April undercover or outside from May. Allow about 90cm (3ft) between tubers. The tubers are formed late in the season and plants should not be harvested until the leaves have died down after the first frost. Protect the plants in the meantime with a layer of straw, leaves or fleece. Attractive enough to be grown in large pots on the patio. Cook as potatoes or add to soups or stews.



CAPE GOOSEBERRY (PHYSALIS PERUVIANA)

Also known as the Inca berry, Aztec berry and Peruvian ground cherry, these attractive perennial plants are easy to grow and produce an abundance of attractive yellow flowers followed by the green lanterns which ripen to brown. When opened the soft red tomato-like berry is revealed and this is often used in restaurants as a garnish, but this can also be used in pies and jams. The berries have a unique subtle flavour, at its sweetest when the berries are fully ripe.



SOWING: FEB-APR



HARVEST: AUG-OCT

The plants do need a long growing season to produce good crops so sow as early as possible in a heated propagator, set to around 15C (60F). If kept frost-free, plants can be kept through the winter and cut back when they will produce shoots from the base and these overwintered plants will fruit earlier than newly sown ones, so giving a better crop in their second year.



STRAWBERRY SPINACH (BLITUM CAPITATUM, AKA CHENEPEDIUM CAPITATUM)

This vigorous plant is a strange cross between a fruit and a vegetable; the leaves can be eaten as a spinach substitute, although are best cooked to remove the oxalates they contain and the attractive raspberry-like berries are also pleasant when fully ripe. The flowers are also edible.



SOWING: FEB-APR



HARVESTING: JUL-SEP

The half-hardy annual plants can be sown outside or in trays or cell trays or grown as a container plant on a sunny patio. The growth is rather lax and is best given some canes for support as the plants develop.



SWEET POTATO (IPOMOEA BATATA)

This crop has become extremely popular in recent years and is often to be found in the supermarket. It is not related to potatoes, but to convolvulus or bindweed and has a similar trailing habit. It is not invasive however, since it is too tender to survive outside in the UK through the winter. The best crops are to be had from greenhouse or polytunnel-grown crops since it requires a long, hot summer outside for success.



PLANTING: MAR-APR



HARVEST: AUG-OCT

Slips (rooted cuttings) are usually available from suppliers in March/April, but increasingly suppliers are offering plug plants, again usually dispatched in April. These are grown on in pots and planted out in the greenhouse border once well established in May/June or kept in large containers as one might when growing potatoes. The long growth can be allowed to trail over the soil or encouraged to grow up a framework of canes.



In The Herb Garden



BASIL



The popularity of Mediterranean cooking has put basil at the top of the list of home-grown herbs. There are so many great varieties to grow, many with wonderful scents and subtle differences in flavour, not to mention a variety of leaf shapes and colours, just waiting to be tried.

TOP TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Sow the tiny seeds a small pinch at a time in a 9cm (3½in) pot or cell of a cell tray and grow on as one plant rather than pricking out from trays.
- Provide some gentle warmth in a propagator: 21C (71F) is ideal.
- Sow a few pots/cells every two to three weeks for a continuous supply of the fresh herb.
- Plant out into the soil or in patio pots once all fear of frost is over or simply keep a pot on the kitchen windowsill for convenient harvesting.
- Remove the flowers as they appear and pinch back plants occasionally to keep the fresh leaves coming.

BASIL AT A GLANCE



SOWING: MAR-JUN



HARVEST: MAY-SEP

IN THE KITCHEN

Basil quickly loses its flavour and impact after picking. Harvest and use as quickly as possible and add to hot dishes just before serving.

CHIVES



One of the prettiest and most trouble-free members of the onion family, chives are a treat in the ornamental garden as well as in pots or on the veg plot or herb garden. They can be harvested for much of the year and the pretty pink flower heads which appear in spring/early summer are also edible. For a subtle flavour of garlic try garlic or Chinese chives. These have broader leaves than the common chive and produce large heads of white flowers later in the season.

TOP TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Choose a well-drained spot in full sun or semi-shade.
- They do like some moisture so add a little well-rotted organic matter prior to planting.
- Propagate your own plants from seeds or buy a pot from the local supermarket and split it, replanting the sections in the garden or in pots.
- Sow seeds indoors in spring in a heated propagator set to 18C (65F). As with basil sow in little pinches and grow on as one plant.
- Every two or three years lift established clumps and divide them to keep them vigorous. This is best done in the spring.
- Chives are herbaceous plants and will die down with the first frosts, but will soon reappear in the spring. However, you can extend the season by lifting some in late summer, potting up and moving to a cold frame, cold greenhouse or polytunnel where they will continue to grow for longer.
- Harvest by snipping off leaves as required with scissors.

CHIVES AT A GLANCE



SOWING: APR-MAY



HARVESTING: APR-OCT

IN THE KITCHEN

Provides a lively savoury taste that can be used to replace salt. Finely chop and add to dishes just before serving as a garnish for salads and soups.

Herbs

Herbs are an essential part of our cuisine, yet often very expensive to buy in the shops. Dried herbs simply don't have the same flavour and piquancy of the fresh equivalent and they are so easy to grow. All you need for most is a few pots placed strategically by the back door where they are easy to harvest whatever the weather – your own help yourself herb bar

CORIANDER



This is often available in supermarkets as pot-grown plants, but is very easy to grow at home. The pungent leaves are not to everyone's taste, but its powerful aroma and taste is an essential ingredient of Middle Eastern and oriental dishes.

TOP TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Sow the relatively large corky seeds singly or as a small pinch in the middle of large cells in a cell tray or small pot.
- If sowing after the frosts, seeds can be direct-sown outside in a sunny, well-drained position or direct into patio containers outside.
- Avoid sowing during the hottest months of summer as the plants bolt (run to seed) quickly if stressed.
- Sow small batches every two to three weeks for a continuous supply of fresh leaves.
- If plants do bolt collect the seeds for use in cooking or resowing later.
- All parts of the plant, including the flowers, are edible.

CORIANDER AT A GLANCE



SOWING: APR-JUL



HARVEST: JUN-OCT

IN THE KITCHEN

Leaves discolour, wilt and lose flavour fast, so add to dishes at the last minute.

FENNEL



If you love the taste of aniseed, you'll love fennel, but even if you don't this pretty plant with its feathery foliage and heads of yellow flowers is well worth growing for its decorative effect alone. The whole plant, including the swollen leaf bases, is edible. Even the seeds, which have a number of uses both culinary and medicinal, can be eaten. There are two main types – Florence fennel with the swollen leaf bases and bronze fennel with beautiful dark foliage. There are lots of varieties of Florence fennel bred for their superior taste, yield and resistance to bolting.

TOP TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Choose well-drained but moisture-retentive soil in a sunny spot.
- Avoid root disturbance as this will lead to bolting (running to seed) prematurely.
- For the same reason avoid sowing too early as cold soil can also lead to poor growth and bolting.
- For best results sow from April to June where plants are to grow.
- Dig in plenty of organic matter prior to sowing to help retain moisture during the summer.
- For early crops it is possible to sow in cell trays in a warm greenhouse in February/March and to transplant into the soil once well established.
- Harden off young plants well prior to planting out and always move them on before they become too large.
- Plants growing outside and allowed to flower will often self-seed and the flowers are very popular with pollinators.
- Earth up around the stems of Florence fennel to improve the whiteness of the stems.

FENNEL AT A GLANCE



SOWING: APR-JUL



HARVESTING: MAY-NOV

IN THE KITCHEN

Dominant aniseed flavour and slight citrus note that make it perfect with fish. Can overpower a dish and mask subtle flavours so use sparingly.

MINT



Mints are fascinating plants – there are so many varieties all with very different scents, leaf shapes and shades that some gardeners become hooked on collecting them. There are some wonderful fruity selections such as apple, pineapple, and lemon as well as spearmint, peppermint, chocolate and ginger mints. Mints have creeping runners that can be invasive, so are often best grown in large containers.

TOP TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Mints are herbaceous perennials and will die back in winter. However as with chives the season can be extended by lifting clumps in late summer, potting and moving into shelter by the autumn.
- Divide pots of mint every two to three years, split the clump and replant to keep the plants healthy and vigorous.
- Young, healthy shoot tips can also be frozen in ice cubes and dropped into dishes as required.
- Trim occasionally in summer to remove the blooms and to maintain leaf production for as long as possible.
- In pots use a gritty compost and add some controlled-release fertiliser prior to planting to maintain vigour.

MINT AT A GLANCE



PLANTING: MAR- SEP

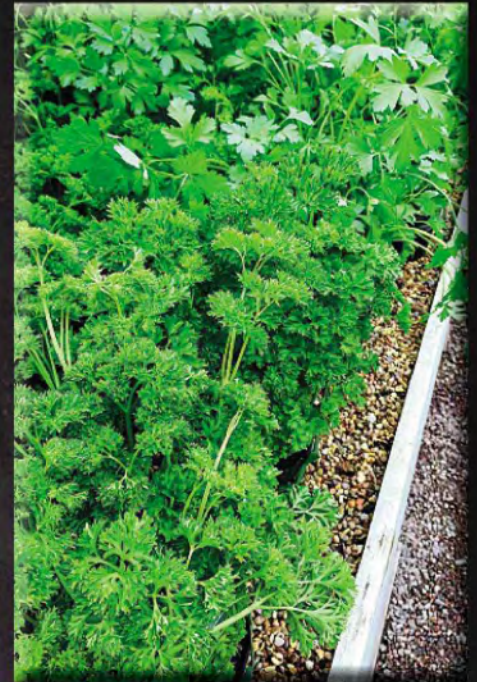


HARVEST: MAY-OCT

IN THE KITCHEN

Ginger mint is good for adding to tomato dishes, lemon mint is good with fruity recipes.

PARSLEY



Of all our herbs parsley is probably the most popular on the allotment, being useful as a garnish but as an ingredient in so many traditional dishes. Rich in iron and vitamin C, parsley is also a valuable source of these and other minerals and has been used in traditional medicine to aid digestion and cure urinary infections. There are several types; curled leaf and flat-leaved, both are very easy to grow from seed and in fact in the garden once sown will often self-seed and pop up all over.

TOP TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Parsley is a biennial plant growing one year to flower and seed the next. It is best therefore to sow new batches each year.
- Sowing in small regular batches ensures a good supply of fresh, top quality leaves.
- Germination can be slow and erratic but is improved if seeds are given a little gentle heat in a propagator (18C/65F) after sowing thinly in pots or cell trays.
- Plant once well established without disturbing the roots as you do so.
- Cover early sowings outdoors with cloches to keep the rows as warm as possible.
- Grow a small pot on the windowsill for a supply of fresh leaves when it is too miserable to venture outside to pick leaves.
- Maintain watering during the growing season and watch for carrot fly which will move to surrounding carrot crops to which parsley is related.
- Growing plants in semi-shade reduces stress and the likelihood of plants running to seed prematurely.

PARSLEY AT A GLANCE



SOWING: FEB-JUN



HARVEST: MAR-SEP

IN THE KITCHEN

Chopped parsley, crushed garlic and melted butter are a match made in heaven. Combine over a gentle heat for a simple sauce to drizzle over fish and vegetables.

ROSEMARY





Rosemary is a real delight in the flower border as well as the herb garden for its wonderful blue (or white) flowers in March/April and sporadically throughout the summer months. Like so many of our beautifully scented herbs, rosemary comes from Mediterranean regions where it has a long history of being used in cooking and medicine. There are several varieties and forms apart from the common type – *R officinalis*. 'Mrs Jessop's Upright' has purple flowers and upright growth while *R officinalis* Prostrate Group has white flowers and lax growth.

TOP TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Choose a sunny, well-drained site for your plant.
- Try it at the back of the border to act as a backdrop for ornamental plants.
- Frost can cut back the growth during the winter, as can cold winds, so choose a sheltered spot for yours or grow in a container and move into shelter.
- Prune after the main flush of flowers is over to prevent plants from becoming straggly, to encourage branching and remove diseased wood.
- A few pests such as leafhoppers and froghoppers can cause problems. Remove with a strong jet of water or treat with an organic insecticide as necessary.
- Take 10cm (4in) long cuttings in July or August and root in pots filled with a 50:50 mix of coir and sand. Hardwood cuttings can also be taken in September.
- Rosemary grows well in a container on a warm patio. Maintain watering during the summer and feed once a week with a liquid fertiliser.

ROSEMARY AT A GLANCE

-  PLANTING: MAR-MAY
-  HARVESTING: JAN-DEC

IN THE KITCHEN

Whole sprigs can be added to slow-cooked dishes and left to infuse and stems can be stripped and used as skewers for barbecues or laid in among the meat as it cooks to add its distinctive flavour.

SAGE





Our familiar garden sages are part of a large family including annuals, biennials and perennials, but those we enjoy in cooking are mainly shrub-forming perennials. There are several popular sorts, all with strongly aromatic leaves and pretty heads of small flowers. All are used as decorative plants as well as for their culinary purposes. Sage has been used in medicine for millennia and was much prized by the Greeks, Romans and Chinese.

TOP TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Sages are from warmer climates than our own and like a sunny, well-drained place in which to grow.
- If you have heavy soil, dig in plenty of well-rotted organic matter and grit prior to planting.
- Plants are short-lived and have a habit of becoming woody and straggly. Cutting shoots for the kitchen keeps them compact and healthy and delays flowering which lowers the quality of the leaves.
- Clip over annually to maintain shape and vigour.
- Since plants deteriorate over time it is a good idea to take a few cuttings each year to replace old stock. These root easily from tip cuttings (just remove shoot tips about 5-7cm (2-3in) long in early summer and dib them into individual small pots or cell trays.
- Some varieties can be produced from seeds and these are best sown in March and April.
- Few pests bother sage. Leafhoppers can be a problem and these should be treated with a strong jet of water or an organic insecticide as necessary.

SAGE AT A GLANCE

-  PLANTING: APR-SEP
-  HARVESTING: MAY-SEP

IN THE KITCHEN

Traditionally used to complement fatty meats and as a stuffing for goose and pork.

TARRAGON





Tarragon is a half-hardy perennial (tender, but grows from year to year) that is very useful in a wide range of dishes. Like many herbs it has a long history attached to it. It is thought to have come to Britain in the middle ages and to have become instantly popular for its pungent leaves, perhaps at the time as a way of covering up the taste of meats that were not particularly fresh.

There are two types – French tarragon and Russian tarragon. The former has the best flavour and is the one to seek out. However you will have to buy a plant from your garden centre or a herb specialist to get you started as the French version does not produce viable seeds.

TOP TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Sow the seeds of Russian tarragon in spring and both sorts can be propagated once established by taking root cuttings or division.
- Although perennial it is best to treat Russian tarragon as an annual and to sow fresh seeds each year.
- In the case of French tarragon take cuttings in late summer and root them in time for the winter. Grow them on in a frost-free place and use them to replace the parents.
- Cuttings root easily in a 50:50 mix of coir and sharp sand or dib them into trays filled with cuttings compost.
- Outside plant tarragon in a sunny border or in a pot in well-drained compost.
- Cut regularly to keep the plants bushy and to avoid straggly growth.

TARRAGON AT A GLANCE

-  SOWING: APR-MAY
-  HARVESTING: MAY-OCT

IN THE KITCHEN

The soft leaves should be picked just before use as they quickly lose their bite. Shred and use raw, or add towards the end of cooking for maximum impact.



In The Fruit Garden

Apples

Apples are easy to grow and so versatile in the kitchen. Grow a range of varieties if you can (possible even in small gardens if growing as cordons) to spread the picking season



DANISH APPLE AND MARZIPAN CAKE

A staple of the Danish kitchen is marzipan, and apples and almonds are simply a match made in heaven. Enjoy this deliciously light sponge cake with a dollop of crème fraîche.

SERVES 8

- 100g (3½oz) butter
- 200g (7oz) marzipan
- 2 large eggs
- 100g (3½oz) plain flour
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 2 apples, sliced
- 1 tbsp demerara sugar

1. Preheat your oven to 175C/fan 160C/gas 4.
2. Grease a round baking tin, approximately 20cm (8in).
3. Core and slice the apples into thick slices. Set aside.
4. Cream the butter with the marzipan; then add the eggs, beating well.
5. Add the flour and baking powder, mix until smooth.
6. Pour the mixture into the prepared tin. Then arrange the apples over the top of the mixture, pressing them into the batter as you go along.
7. Sprinkle over the demerara sugar, and bake for 45-50 mins until golden and springy to the touch. Leave to cool for 10 minutes, then turn out of the tin. Cool on a wire rack.



TOFFEE APPLE FRENCH TOAST

This toffee apple dish is certainly for the sweet toothed! But it's quick, easy and fun to serve for a birthday breakfast or as a lazy Sunday morning treat.

SERVES 4

- 2 medium apples, peeled and sliced
- 150g (5oz) brown sugar
- 4 tbsp butter
- 6 slices of soft bread
- 2 free-range eggs
- 120ml (4fl oz) milk
- 4 tbsp flour
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon

1. Add the sugar and butter in a medium-size saucepan. Cook over medium-high heat until dissolved, then add the apples, and cook on low heat for 5 minutes. Set aside.
2. In a large bowl whisk the eggs, milk and cinnamon. Sift in the flour and whisk until smooth.
3. Dip the bread into the mixture, coating both sides.
4. Cook the slices in a large pan over medium heat 1-2 minutes, turning once, until lightly browned.
5. Serve the toast with the apples and toffee sauce poured over.



HARVESTING IN POTS

To test if the fruit is ripe, gently lift it in the palm and give a twist. If it comes away from the tree easily it is ripe, but if not leave it for another few days before trying again. Early varieties should be eaten straight from the tree, but later-ripening types can usually be stored in a cool, dry place until needed.



When planted in pots the trees can be moved around at will to avoid any problems – sheltered when flowering, open when fruiting. In pots it is important to choose the right compost – loam-based compost such as a John Innes no 2 or 3 is ideal since this holds on to water and nutrients better than loam-free compost and breaks down more slowly in the pot.



Contrary to popular advice it is not a good idea to go for trees grafted on to very dwarfing rootstocks. Plants in pots are under stress and very dwarfing rootstocks can increase that stress. The semi-dwarfing rootstock M26 or MM106 is a good choice.

VARIETIES

There are hundreds of varieties to choose from including culinary and dessert and it is a good idea to go to an apple day event in the autumn and taste some to discover your favourites. Some types are better for small gardens than others, such as Minarettes or Ballerina apple trees, and it is important to choose trees which have been grafted on suitable rootstocks. For best results you should grow two or three apple trees to aid pollination.

TOP TIP

Any plant growing in a container is totally reliant on the gardener for food – water, too, during the summer; water regularly during dry spells. Feeding should take place once a month from March to September using a liquid feed.

WATCH OUT FOR

The caterpillars of winter moths will eat the young foliage as the buds burst in spring. The adults overwinter in the soil, the females climbing the trunk between October and March to lay their eggs. Wrap grease bands around the trunk in the autumn to catch them.



AT A GLANCE



PLANTING: NOV-MAR



HARVESTING: SEPT-NOV

In the first year after planting it is advisable to remove any fruit that forms. In subsequent years, if the tree sets a heavy crop, it may well lose some of these at the end of June/early July in a natural thinning process called June drop. If your tree still carries lots of fruit after this, thin the fruits to about 10cm (4in) apart for dessert apples, 15cm (6in) apart for cookers.

PLANTING



Apple trees are very hardy, but the flowers are vulnerable to cold and will be damaged if the frost gets to them while they are waiting to be pollinated. It is important therefore to avoid cold areas of the garden (frost pockets), such as at the bottom of a slope where dense cold air tends to gather. A sunny spot is needed for good fruit set and ripening.

Apples prefer a free-draining soil with plenty of organic matter such as garden compost or well-rotted manure added when planting, but will often manage to produce a reasonable crop in less than ideal conditions.

When planting, make sure that the rootball is buried to the same depth as it was in the pot or in the nursery field – there is usually a soil mark on the stem to tell you. Apples are nearly always grafted (the fruiting part is joined to the roots from another tree to control its growth; the knobble on the stem marking this point must be well above soil level after planting).

When planting bare-rooted plants, dig a hole large enough to take the roots without bending them. You will need to provide a stake to prevent wind rock until the tree is established in its new growing position.

GROWING ON

Trained trees such as cordons and espaliers need hardly any pruning once established and are mainly pruned in August as the fruit is ripening; the sideshoots are simply pruned back to three leaves. In the winter the main shoot is shortened to within three leaves of this season's growth.

Ordinary bush-trained trees need a little more attention, but will produce a reasonable crop if left to their own devices. For best results prune in the winter when the tree is dormant, removing dead wood, crossing branches and those in the middle of the tree which prevent air and light from entering.



One-year-old branches can be left alone, but shorten older shoots that are not wanted to replace old branches to encourage fruiting spurs (stubby shoots on which the apples fruit) to form. Very long branches on the outside of the tree can be tipped back, but do not give the tree a haircut or you will remove some fruit buds. If unsure, leave alone.

Apricots & Peaches

Peaches can be grown outdoors in milder or more sheltered areas of the UK, but their success is reliant on the season. In a mild year peaches can crop very well, but in a cold, wet season they may take a year off. In cooler areas they are best grown under cover.

Apricots are more reliable outdoors and the fruit is so much better than shop-bought alternatives



MOROCCAN CHICKEN TAGINE WITH APRICOTS AND CHICKPEAS

This is a delightfully fragrant dish, with an array of spices that complement the sweet and tart apricots that make this dish so special.

SERVES 4

FOR THE MARINADE:

- 4 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp cumin seeds
- 1 tsp coriander seeds
- 1 tsp ground nutmeg
- 1 tsp allspice
- 1 tsp chilli flakes
- 1 stick of cinnamon
- 1 star anise
- 2 tsp salt
- 4 organic chicken legs

FOR THE TAGINE:

- 2 garlic cloves
- 4 dried or fresh apricots, halved and de-stoned
- 1 onion
- 1 courgette
- ½ butternut squash
- 1 can of chickpeas, drained
- 2 tbsp apricot preserve
- 1 tbsp harissa paste (can be omitted)
- 2 lemon slices
- 400ml chicken stock
- Mint sprigs to garnish

1. On a dry hot pan, toast the marinade spices for a few minutes until fragrant. Place in a large bowl together with 3 tbsp olive oil and salt. Place the chicken into the bowl, and cover the meat with the seasoning. Leave to marinate in the fridge for at least 3 hours, or overnight.
 2. Preheat oven to 190C/ fan 170C/gas 5.
 3. Chop the onion and gently fry in the remaining olive oil. Chop the courgette, garlic and butternut and add to the pan alongside the chickpeas, harissa paste and apricot preserve. Fry for 5 minutes.
- Transfer the vegetables into a tagine, or a casserole dish with a lid.
4. Meanwhile heat the stock, and pour over the vegetables.
 5. Now brown the chicken, skin side down, in a hot pan for a few minutes. Do this in batches if the pan is too small.
 6. Place the chicken on top of the vegetables, and place the lemons on the chicken, cover with the lid.
 7. Pop in the oven for 50-60 minutes.
 8. 15 minutes before serving, prepare a panful of couscous as instructed on the pack.
 9. Serve piping hot, and garnish with the mint sprigs.



PEACH AND FRANGIPANE TART

If you are lucky enough to have peaches growing in your greenhouse or patio, do try this peach tart. Juicy peaches and homemade pastry are a delicious match.

SERVES 6

- 75g/6oz plain flour, plus extra for rolling
- 85g/3oz cold unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
- 1 tbsp caster sugar
- 2 organic egg yolks
- 140g/5oz butter
- 2 organic eggs
- 140g/5oz ground almonds
- 50g/1oz plain flour
- 3-4 peaches, skinned and halved
- Apricot jam, for brushing
- Crème fraîche, to serve

FOR THE FILLING

- 100g/3.5oz caster sugar

1. To make the pastry, rub together the flour and butter until it looks like fine breadcrumbs, then mix in the sugar. Add the egg yolks and 1 tsp cold water and mix until the dough just comes together. Wrap in cling film and refrigerate for 30 minutes.
2. Heat oven to 200C/fan 180C/gas 6.
3. Roll the pastry out on a lightly floured surface until big enough to line a 23cm tart tin.
4. Cut away the excess pastry. Line with greaseproof paper, fill with baking beans, then bake for 10 minutes. Remove the paper and beans, then prick the base of the tart with a fork.
5. Bake for another 10-15 minutes until golden.
6. Meanwhile make the filling. Whisk the sugar and butter together until pale. Beat in the eggs then add the almonds and flour.
7. Spoon the mixture into the pastry case, arrange the peach halves on top of the frangipane and bake for 30-40 minutes until golden.
8. When cool, brush with apricot jam. Serve with crème fraîche.



Peach 'Peregrine'



Apricot 'Tomcot'

HARVESTING



Harvest the fruit when they have coloured fully and feel soft to the touch when pressed very gently (take care not to bruise them). They may also give off a delicious sweet smell when fully ripe. Pick and eat immediately or use in sweet recipes or preserves.



Cover with fleece or old net curtains to keep birds from ripening fruit

IN POTS

These fruits are ideal for growing in pots since they can be moved indoors into a frost-free greenhouse, conservatory or polytunnel when flowering from February onwards and then brought out into a sheltered spot in the garden once the frosts are over.

There are also some great dwarf varieties available now. As with many fruit trees, peaches and apricots are usually grafted on to special rootstocks which control their growth and ultimate size.

Grow in a large 38-45cm (15-18in) pot filled with John Innes No 3 compost and keep on a sunny, sheltered patio during the summer. In the autumn move the tree into a greenhouse or, if this is not possible, a shed, garage or simply close to the house wall where the tree will be sheltered from the worst of the winter wind and cold.



PLANTING

Choose a site which is both sheltered and sunny on free-draining soil and which holds plenty of moisture during the summer. Improve dry soils by digging in well-rotted organic matter such as garden compost or manure prior to planting.

This treatment should also be given to the soil before planting in the conservatory border.



Grow peaches inside in the north

GROWING ON

If growing as a fan, buy a tree which is three years old and already partly trained. Before planting fix some strong wires to the wall with vine eyes at 45cm (18in) intervals to support the framework of branches as they grow.

As with cherries and plums, pruning should not be done in the winter, but in late spring or early summer once the sap rises as this helps to avoid problems with bacterial canker and silver leaf.

Bushes are trained in much the same way as plum trees but for fans cut back any branches growing away from the wall or into it, and then thin the sideshoots on each branch by pinching off every other one. In May cut back the growth from the remaining sideshoots to five or six leaves. Finally, after fruiting cut back to the lowest shoot on each side branch, removing all but the lowest shoot. This is the replacement shoot – the one on which fruit will develop next season.

The fruits of peaches may require thinning in stages during the summer if the crop is heavy until 20cm (8in) apart. This ensures that the fruit that eventually matures is of a good size and quality.

Give your tree a dressing of Growmore or pelleted chicken manure in the spring before mulching with well-rotted garden compost. In pots add a new layer of fresh compost to the top of the pot and feed every 14 days, as the fruit is developing, with a high-potash tomato food.

VARIETIES

PEACHES

Some varieties are better suited to our climate than others. The most famous varieties of peach, and the most reliable, are 'Peregrine' and 'Rochester'. These can be grown in the open in warm or sheltered areas, but are more reliable when grown as fans against a warm wall. The dwarf variety 'Crimson Bonfire' has deep red leaves

APRICOTS

Fruit specialists now list several varieties worth a try in more favoured areas of the country. As with peaches the trees are usually hardy; it is the flowers that suffer from our frosty climate. However, there are new kids on the block such as 'Tomcot', a self-fertile French variety bearing large fruit, and 'Goldcot', an early fruiting variety which is said to be very hardy and so less prone to cold damage. 'Flavourcot' is a Canadian variety which flowers late and so avoids the frosts.

TOP TIP

In spring protect the blossom with some fleece if the tree cannot be found a home inside. Although both peaches and apricots are self-fertile, they fruit when few insects are on the wing to pollinate them, so they may need some help to set fruit in the form of a soft brush to transport pollen from one flower to another.

AT A GLANCE



PLANT: OCT-MAR



HARVEST: JUL-SEP

The planting dates above relate to bare-rooted trees, but it is also possible to buy trees that have been grown in containers. These can be planted almost any time, although the best time is in the autumn.

WATCH OUT FOR

Peach leaf curl causes the leaves to become thickened, pink and wrinkled. The variety 'Avalon Pride' has some resistance. Cover small trees in spring as the buds burst to protect them from airborne spores.

Blackberries

A walk along any hedgerow in late summer and autumn will bring a tasty harvest of delicious berries from the brambles that weave their way through the undergrowth. If you love the taste of these wild berries, you will love cultivated blackberries, too



MIXED BERRY AND WHITE CHOCOLATE CHEESECAKE

SERVES 8

- 200g digestive biscuits
- 50g amaretto biscuits
- 125g butter
- 400g full-fat cream cheese, at room temperature
- 300g mascarpone at room temperature
- 200g white chocolate, chopped
- 100g icing sugar, sifted
- 1 vanilla pod, seeds of
- 100g of mixed berries plus a few extra for the filling
- 2 tbsp sugar

1. Place the amaretto and digestive biscuits into a sealable freezer bag. Push the air out and seal. Crush the biscuits using a rolling pin.
2. Next heat the butter in a medium-sized pan, until just melted. Then add the crushed biscuits and stir until well combined and all the crumbs are coated.
3. Place the crumb mixture into a 20-25cm springform or loose-bottomed tin, and press down to firm the mixture into place. Pop in the refrigerator for at least 1 hour, preferably 2.
4. Put the mixed berries into a pan with 2 tablespoons sugar and 1 tablespoon of water and gently cook for 5 minutes until the mixture turns into a syrup. Leave to cool.
5. Split and remove the seeds from the vanilla pod, and add alongside the chopped chocolate to a bain marie, gently heat until melted. Leave to cool slightly.
6. In a separate bowl, beat together the cream cheese, icing sugar and mascarpone to form a smooth consistency. The mixture should be light and fluffy, but do not over beat, as this may cause the cake not to set properly
7. Add the melted chocolate, and mix in.
8. Remove the biscuit base from the fridge, and place the extra berries on the base.
9. Spread the cream cheese mixture over the biscuit base and smooth the top with a palette knife or spatula. Cover with cling film and chill in the fridge for at least 4 hours.
10. Serve the cheesecake topped with the berry syrup.



AUTUMN BERRY VENISON CASSEROLE

SERVES 4

- 600g venison shoulder, diced
- ¼ bottle dry red wine, such as a Rioja
- 2 small onions, diced
- 3 carrots, diced
- 3 celery sticks, diced
- 1 clove of garlic, minced
- 400ml game stock (or alternative)
- 100g berries, such as brambles
- 4 tbsp plain flour, seasoned with salt and pepper
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 4 thyme sprigs
- 2 sage leaves
- 2 rosemary sprigs
- 2 tbsp rowan or apple jelly

1. Preheat the oven to 180C/160C fan/gas 4.
2. Place all the vegetables into a heavy cast-iron casserole dish, and gently fry on the hob for a few minutes in the olive oil.
3. Coat the diced venison in the flour mixture, then add to the pot. Turn up the heat and fry until lightly browned. Place the veg and venison on a plate, and set aside.
4. Deglaze the pot by pouring the wine and stock into the hot pot and loosen off the bottom with a wooden spoon.
5. Place the venison and vegetables back into the pot, then add the jelly and herbs. Bring to the boil, then cover and transfer the casserole to the oven for about 2 hours or until tender.
6. Serve with boiled or mashed potatoes.



PLANTING

Well-drained but moisture-retentive soil is essential for good results although these tough plants will produce at least some fruit even if given only a bare minimum of attention.

Choose a site in sun or semi-shade and make sure that there are adequate supports in place to tie the strong, vigorous canes to. The traditional way, as with raspberries, is to use strong wires, about 45cm (18in) apart, stretched between vine eyes. However, any strong support will do and, in fact, both blackberries and raspberries can be used as an effective screen in the summer to shelter other crops, or even as an attractive barrier between veg plot and ornamental garden.

Remove weeds, especially deep-rooted perennials, and dig in plenty of well-rotted organic matter prior to planting. Be sure to add lots more around the roots each year in spring after applying a dressing of general fertiliser.

Plants need plenty of space to grow as diseases can be encouraged by overcrowding. Look at the suggested spread of the variety chosen and use this as a guide to planting. If a plant is likely to grow 1.8m (6ft) in a season, this is the distance that your plants should be spaced in the row.

GROWING ON

There are lots of ways to train the canes and the method chosen depends largely on how vigorous the variety is. In the case of very fast-growing types, the canes can literally be woven around the wires so that they take up less space. Less vigorous varieties can be taken horizontally along the wires in the same way as raspberries. In either case training is made much easier by separating the new growth (canes which will fruit next season) and the canes fruiting this season, either by running the new growth in a different direction along the wires to the old or by running them above the old canes. Tie in the canes regularly. Once the fruit has been picked the old growth is removed completely at ground level, leaving the new growth to fruit next year.



The long canes need support to flourish

Some varieties produce too many canes and the excess can be removed to improve the quality of the crop on those remaining. Aim to leave 20-25 canes on each plant depending on vigour, removing the rest in May or June.



VARIETIES

Choose your variety carefully as some are very vigorous; the long canes are often well armed with sharp thorns. However, many modern varieties are more compact, some making a comparatively modest 1.8m (6ft) in a season, such as blackberries 'Loch Ness' and 'Oregon Thornless', which as its name suggests has smooth stems. 'Helen' and 'Waldo' are both reasonably compact, thornless varieties, while if you have more space and thick gloves, 'Fantasia' might be for you.

Blackberry 'Loch Ness'



AT A GLANCE

-  PLANT: NOV-MAR
-  HARVEST: JUL-SEP

Plants may crop for up to 15 years so it is important to spend a little more and to buy good stock that is certified free of viruses, such as those supplied by all good fruit specialists.

WATCH OUT FOR

Birds love the fruit of blackberries and hybrid berries and netting and various other deterrents can be used to keep them at bay. However, cropping is usually so heavy at a time when there are plenty of other things for them to eat that this is seldom necessary.

HARVESTING

Pick the berries while still a little firm, but they should come away from the stalk easily. Eat, cook or freeze as soon as possible.

IN POTS

Blackberries are usually grown in the soil since they enjoy a deep, moist root run. They can be grown in large pots however, providing they are kept well watered at all times. Place a saucer underneath the pot to be sure. The variety 'Reuben' is compact and upright-growing so ideal for large containers.



TOP TIP

Water well during the growing season, especially as the berries are swelling, to maintain their size and the general health of the canes. Top up the mulch around the roots if the weather is very dry in summer.

Blueberries

Blueberries are so easy to grow and the plants are genuinely very attractive, plus they are compact enough to grow on the patio in a large tub. They provide a visual treat all year round

BLUEBERRY SALAD WITH TURTLE BEANS AND SWEETCORN

In this colourful dish, tangy blueberries and earthy turtle beans make for an exciting side salad.

SERVES 4

- 400g/14oz turtle beans
- 2 corn cobs, husked
- 150g/5oz blueberries
- 2 tbsp apple cider vinegar
- 2 tbsp red wine vinegar
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tbsp honey
- ¼ tsp salt

1. Soak the beans overnight, or for 12 hours.
2. Bring a large pan of boiling water to the boil, and add the beans, cook for 1.5 hours.
3. Drain and set aside to cool.
4. After removing all the outer leaves of the corn, use a sharp knife to cut the corn from the cobs. Place in a large bowl.
5. Add the cooled beans, and blueberries. Lightly mix to combine.
6. Put the vinegars, oil, honey, and salt in a large bowl and whisk, then pour over the salad, and serve.



HARVESTING

Harvest the berries as soon as they change colour and before the birds get to them! Pick over the plants regularly and leave unripe berries to soften.

IN POTS

Blueberries are the ultimate fruit for growing in pots. Simply buy a bag of lime-free compost from any garden centre. If you wish you can add a little grit to the mixture for drainage, but otherwise it is fine straight from the bag; if you can get John Innes Ericaceous compost, so much the better.



Plants should thrive in the same pot for some time if well cared for; be prepared to rake away the surface of the soil each year and to replace with fresh material and a little controlled-release fertiliser.



WATCH OUT FOR

Net plants as the fruit ripens to keep birds, such as blackbirds, at bay.



PLANTING

The one thing that blueberries must have is acid compost. So unless your garden is on a naturally acid soil such as peat or some sands, you will have to decide whether to grow your crop in a raised bed filled with peaty compost or in pots using an ericaceous (lime-free) mixture (see below). Choose a sunny, sheltered spot for your plants.



The attractive red stems offer winter interest



The flowers are attractive, too

GROWING ON

Blueberries are self-fertile, but produce heavier yields if there is more than one plant. Grow yours on a sunny, sheltered patio and water well during dry spells, keeping the compost moist but not wet. Use rainwater when possible.

Pruning is simple; there is none in the first two years after purchase, then each year after that remove up to a third of the oldest shoots in the winter, cutting right down to soil level. Any dead, overcrowded or crossing shoots can be cut out at any time.

Blueberries are very hardy; however, when growing in pots the roots are vulnerable to winter frosts so make sure they stand in a sheltered spot. You could even wrap the pots in bubble wrap to give them extra insulation.

VARIETIES

'Earliblue'

Ripens earlier than most and produces a good crop of pale blue berries.

'Brigitta'

Ripens from late August and produces good yields of large berries.

'Bluecrop'

The most popular variety, easy to obtain from fruit specialists.

'Herbert'

Ripens in mid-August.

'Pink Lemonade'

Unique pink berries. Very sweet.



TOP TIP

Plants are so decorative that even if you do not have an area set aside for fruit and vegetables in your garden, you can still include them by placing your potted bush among your ornamental plants.

AT A GLANCE



PLANT: OCT-MAR



HARVEST: JUL-AUG

Blueberries can be purchased bare-rooted in autumn and winter, but are more often supplied in pots.

Cherries

The wonderful taste of ripe, juicy cherries, whether on their own or in tarts, pies and jams, is simply mouth-watering; and thankfully this is one fruit that has everything going for it as far as our climate is concerned. However, like many other fruits, the flowers are prone to frost and so it is important not to plant them in exposed sites

ROASTED CHERRY YOGHURT POTS

These yoghurt pots are fantastic to serve for brunch, and the cherries and toasted almonds can be made the night before to make things a little easier.

SERVES 4

- 400g/14oz cherries, pitted
- 2 tbsp balsamic vinegar
- 4 tbsp flaked almonds
- 225g/8oz Greek yoghurt
- Honey to drizzle

1. Preheat oven to 170C/fan 160C/gas 5.
2. Toss cherries in the balsamic vinegar and marinate for 30 minutes.
3. Place the cherries in a roasting tin, and evenly spread out. Roast for 25 minutes. Set aside to cool.
4. On a separate baking sheet, spread the flaked almonds and add to the oven and bake for 5 minutes. Set aside to cool.
5. Finally layer the yoghurt and cherries evenly between 4 glasses and top with the toasted almonds and a drizzle of honey.



HARVESTING

Harvest the fruit as soon as they ripen and eat immediately.

IN POTS

Cherries do lend themselves to growing in pots and this allows the flowers to be protected during the spring. Aim for a pot size of at least 60cm (2ft) in diameter and depth.

They should not be kept in a heated greenhouse or polytunnel however, since like most fruit trees they need a period of cold to be able to fruit successfully.



Plant using a loam-based compost and top up with 2.5-5cm (1-2in) of fresh material each spring after removing the old surface layer. A sprinkling of controlled-release fertiliser will also help to keep the tree growing and fruiting well. Keep well watered particularly at fruit time.

AT A GLANCE



PLANTING: NOV-FEB



HARVEST: JUN-AUG

Container-grown trees can be planted at any time, but avoiding hot/dry conditions. Support the young tree until the roots are well established. When planting fan-trained trees, plant about 23cm (9in) from the wall and angle towards the support.

WATCH OUT FOR

Amber gum oozing from the stems and wilting shoots indicates bacterial canker. Remove infected branches as soon as possible and burn them.

PLANTING

Although not fussy, cherries prefer well-drained soil in sun and it is important not to plant in parts of the garden where frost may collect, such as at the bottom of a slope, since the flowers may be damaged by the frost.

In colder gardens, grow cherries as fan-trained trees and for convenience it is best to pay a little more and buy a ready-trained fan rather than trying to train it yourself.



The flowers can be damaged by frost



The protection of a wall guarantees the best crops

GROWING ON

Pruning should be kept to a minimum and carried out as for plums (see page 121-123). This must also be done in the summer when the risk of bacterial canker and silver leaf entering the pruning cuts is reduced.

Cover the fruit with netting as it begins to ripen to keep the birds at bay – much easier with a smaller tree – or they will strip it within days. Harvest as soon as they are ripe and if you intend to keep them for a few days before eating, leave the stalks attached.



Net the fruit against hungry birds

Feed your tree with a thick mulch of well-rotted garden compost or manure in the spring. This will also help to maintain the soil in good condition and hold water during the summer months. Apply a dressing of superphosphate (available from your garden centre) every second year.

VARIETIES

There are two main types; sweet cherries and sour or cooking varieties. The most familiar varieties are:

'Morello'

A sour or culinary variety.

'Stella'

A sweet type ripening in late July/early August.

'Celeste'

This is a self-fertile variety which is said to be naturally compact.

'Summer Sun'

Is a modern red-fruited variety which is good for areas which are perhaps a little colder and more exposed.

'Merton Glory'

This offers an alternative to the usual red types. The fruits are white flushed with orange/red and large, but the tree is not self-fertile so requires a pollination partner.

Look out too for fan-trained trees and also 'family' trees with more than one variety grafted on to the same roots.

TOP TIP

With dwarfing rootstocks such as 'Colt' and more recently 'Gisela 5' and 'Tabel' trees of little more than 2m (6ft 6in) are possible. This makes picking easy, but also helps to solve one other problem – that of birds. They love the fruit as much as we do, but with smaller trees we are now able to cover and protect the fruit as it ripens.



Currants

Red, white and blackcurrants might be small, but they are extremely tasty and packed with health-promoting vitamins and antioxidants. They are simple to grow, thrive in all parts of the UK and require very little attention



REDCURRANT COSMO

Great to serve at garden parties, this little cocktail is bursting with fresh flavours of redcurrants and sweet amaretto.

SERVES 2

- 100ml (3½fl oz) amaretto
- 100ml (3½fl oz) vodka
- 100ml (3½fl oz) cranberry juice
- ½ lime, juice of
- 1 bunch redcurrants
- 1 tbsp sugar

1. Make a syrup by adding the redcurrants to a small saucepan together with the sugar and 1 tbsp water. Bring to a simmer, for 2-3 minutes. Set aside to cool.
2. Next, add the amaretto, vodka, cranberry juice, lime juice and syrup mixture to a cocktail shaker or lidded jar.
3. Place 2-3 ice cubes into the shaker and shake vigorously.
4. Strain into two chilled cocktail glasses, discarding the ice and redcurrant stalks/pips.
5. Finish with a garnish of redcurrant berries.
6. Serve immediately.

PAIN PERDU WITH CHAMPAGNE REDCURRANT SYRUP

This delightful take on pain perdu, or French toast, is a breakfast to serve on a special occasion! Champagne-infused berries and silky brioche make this a very indulgent dish.

SERVES 4

- 1 loaf of brioche
- 4 large eggs, free range
- 400ml (14fl oz) double cream
- 100g (3½oz) sugar
- 2 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1 tsp ground nutmeg
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 250ml (9fl oz) Champagne
- 75g (2½oz) sugar
- 200g (7oz) redcurrants
- 100g (3½oz) blackcurrants
- A few raspberries
- 4 tbsp crème fraîche

1. Cut bread into 12 diagonal slices.
2. Whisk together the eggs, cream, sugar and spices until well blended.
3. Place the bread into a small baking dish and pour the egg mixture evenly over the slices.
4. Let it stand for 10-15 minutes or until the liquid is absorbed.
5. Meanwhile, simmer the Champagne in a saucepan over high heat until reduced by half.
6. Add the sugar and berries, and cook over a low heat for 5 minutes. Set aside.
7. Remove the bread slices from the egg mixture and cook, in batches, in a lightly greased pan over medium-high heat for 2 minutes on each side or until golden.
8. Arrange the bread slices on serving plates; top with the Champagne berry syrup, raspberries and crème fraîche.



PLANTING

Like most fruits, currants need a free-draining but moisture-retentive soil in a position that gets some sunshine. However, red and white currants are happy to grow in partial shade and cooler conditions and are suitable therefore for north-facing walls and gardens where few other fruits will thrive. Blackcurrants will crop better in a sunny spot.

In both cases dig in plenty of well-rotted organic matter prior to planting and each year in spring give plants a feed with sulphate of potash at the rate of 50g per sq m (2oz per sq yd), before topping up the mulch again.

GROWING ON

Pruning is simple; however, there are a few differences that you need to be aware of before tackling them with the secateurs. Red and white currants can be trained into various forms, such as cordons (usually single, straight stems planted against a wall or fence). They can also be trained into fans and espaliers (branches growing straight out from a main stem). Standards (plants grown on a single stem) offer a good way to grow red, white and pink currants in pots. Blackcurrants are generally grown only as bushes and are happier in the soil.

All are self-fertile, meaning you could grow just one plant and it will still bear fruit.



PRUNING

Red and white currants usually grow on a single short stem, although stool-type plants (where shoots emerge from below ground level with no main stem) are common. Pruning takes place in winter from November to March when the bushes are dormant and again during the summer. In winter the new main shoots produced during the last growing season are cut back by half and the sideshoots to about 5cm (2in). At the same time any diseased or badly angled or crossing shoots are cut out completely. In late June/July, all the sideshoots are cut back to four or five leaves from the base.

Cordons are easy to prune; cut back the leading shoot to one bud above last season's growth in late winter and trim all the sideshoots back to four or five leaves in summer as above.

In the case of blackcurrants which grow as a stool, these too can be pruned in winter, but it is easier to cut out about a quarter of the oldest shoots completely at harvest time or just afterwards.

Diseased and weak shoots can be taken out too. In this way no shoot remains which is more than four years old.

VARIETIES

There are a number of pests and diseases that can shorten the life of currants and so it pays to look for modern varieties that are resistant to them.

'Ben Hope' (blackcurrant)

Resistant to big bud mite – tiny creatures which cause the buds to swell and also spread reversion virus.

'Rovada' (redcurrant)

Heavy-yielding maincrop red currant, producing long strigs of berries.

'White Versailles' (whitecurrant)

A vigorous, heavy-cropping white currant. Freely available.

'Pink Champagne' (pinkcurrant)

An attractive fruit. Heavy yielding.



HARVESTING

Pick over plants as the berries ripen, taking those showing most colour and leaving the rest to ripen further. In the case of blackcurrants you can cut the whole branch if it is due for removal and pick the fruit indoors.

IN POTS

It is possible to grow red and white currants in a pot at least for the first three or four years, although they are generally happier in the garden where they can keep their roots in cool, moist soil. If you do attempt to grow them in containers, ensure that the soil is kept moist, but not wet, at all times.

TOP TIP

The jostaberry is a cross between a blackcurrant and gooseberry and is resistant to many of the problems to which blackcurrants are prone. The berries are black, larger than those of the blackcurrant, and bushes are very high yielding. Pruning is carried out in the same way as for blackcurrants.

AT A GLANCE



PLANTING: NOV-MAR



HARVEST: JUN-AUG

Blackcurrants will grow on reasonably heavy soils and all types do need some shelter from cold winds in the early part of the season when flowering to encourage pollinating insects to visit the blooms.

WATCH OUT FOR

Aphids (greenfly) will attack the plants, especially early in the season, and can spread viruses which shorten the useful life of the plants. Spray as necessary with a suitable insecticide or wash off with a strong jet of water.

Figs

Taste a fresh fig and you will immediately be transported to warmer climes where the sun beats down all day, ripening this exotic-looking fruit to a deep, rich brown. However, you don't need to live in the Med to enjoy the fig's wonderful, sweet flesh since they will grow very well in many areas of the UK

FIG AND GOAT'S CHEESE FILO TART

This is a really elegant and pretty dish to serve, perhaps as a starter or light lunch.

Make sure the figs are nice and ripe before using.

SERVES 4

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 4 sheets filo pastry, each one halved
- 75g/3oz half fat crème fraîche
- 125ml semi-skimmed milk
- 30g/1oz Italian hard cheese, grated
- 3 medium organic eggs
- A handful of fresh thyme
- 125g/4oz goat's cheese, crumbled
- 4-5 fresh figs, halved
- Black pepper to taste

1. Preheat the oven to 180C, fan 160C, gas 4. Brush an 18cm round loose-bottomed cake tin with a little of the oil, then line with 1 sheet of the filo pastry.
2. Layer the remaining sheets of pastry, laying the sheets on top of each other, brushing with oil between each layer.
3. Place the crème fraîche, milk, grated hard cheese, eggs and most of the thyme in a large bowl and mix well to combine.
4. Next, stir in the crumbled goat's cheese, season with black pepper, then pour the mixture into the tart.
5. Arrange the halved figs, cut-side up, over the top and scatter over the remaining thyme. Bake in the oven for 45 minutes, until golden and set.
6. Let the tart cool slightly to firm up, then serve.





PLANTING

As mentioned figs are very vigorous and it is often recommended that they are planted into a 'container' with paving slab sides or old bricks to restrict the roots when in the border soil. However, this is really only necessary if the conditions are likely to give rise to excessive growth, i.e. if the soil is deep and rich. A generally dry soil, which is low in nutrients, can do the same thing. It is best therefore not to add organic matter or manure to the soil prior to planting, but simply to plant in a hole a little larger than the rootball and to firm in well.

Figs do not like to have their feet wet for long periods in heavy soils, so on a clay, break up the base of the hole with a fork prior to planting and add some grit to both the hole and the soil used to fill in around the roots.

GROWING ON



Figs larger than your little finger nail should be removed when the leaves fall



In March remove unwanted branches

If your plant has just one stem, prune it back to a healthy bud to encourage branching. Otherwise, pruning of these vigorous plants is carried out twice. In March, shape the plant, cutting out overcrowded, thin and crossing branches and removing the tips of the young shoots. In June/July, pinch out the tips of all the new growth to encourage fruits to form.

When the leaves drop, remove all the developing figs that are larger than the nail on your little finger as these won't survive the winter and will reduce the crop next year.

HARVESTING



Harvest the fruit as soon as it softens

Harvest your figs as soon as they become soft as they will quickly become overripe or the birds, or wasps, will get them first!

IN POTS



Figs grow well in containers

Figs can be grown in large containers and indeed this is a good way of keeping them in check as, given a free root run, they can become very vigorous and need lots of pruning to keep them in check.

Pot using John Innes no 3 compost and maintain watering during the summer months. A sunny, sheltered spot is best and in the winter the extra protection that comes from a warm wall or a few layers of fleece should increase the early harvest the following year.

Feed pot-grown plants every week with a half-strength solution of tomato fertiliser from April to September.

TOP TIP

Cover the young fruits at the tip of the branches on plants growing outside on frosty nights to keep them happy and healthy.

AT A GLANCE

PLANT: NOV- MAR

HARVEST: AUG-SEP

Greenhouse-grown plants are less liable to damage by frost and may even produce two crops each year. Alternatively, plants can be grown in pots and moved inside for the winter.

WATCH OUT FOR

Fig plants are generally trouble free, but the fruits may be damaged by birds and insects. Harvest when just ripe and cover the shoot tips overwinter with fleece.

VARIETIES

Over the many centuries that figs have been cultivated, lots of varieties have been bred, but not all are suitable for our climate or readily available from nurseries, although if you have a greenhouse the choice is much greater.

Try the old favourites 'Brown Turkey' and 'White Marseilles', both of which are reliable and easy to get from garden centres or fruit specialists. For the greenhouse there is 'Rouge de Bordeaux', and for the patio compact 'Panachee' with variegated fruit.

Gooseberries

Gooseberries are delicious in pies and jams with plenty of sugar and the dessert varieties can be very sweet if they get enough sun to fully ripen the berries

GOOSEBERRY & ELDERFLOWER FOOL

Make the most of your gooseberries with this delicious, but very simple dessert that is sure to please a hungry crowd.

SERVES 4 - 6

- 450g/15½ oz gooseberries
- 2½ tbsp caster sugar
- 4 tbsp elderflower cordial
- 1 lemon, juice of
- 300ml double cream
- 4 meringue nests, crushed

1. Wash the gooseberries, then top and tail them. Place in a heavy-bottomed pan with the sugar, elderflower cordial and lemon juice. Simmer over a gentle heat until the gooseberries are soft. Tip into a bowl and refrigerate until cool.
2. In a large bowl, lightly whip the cream to soft peaks, set aside.
3. Remove the gooseberries from the fridge, then gently mix into the cream, creating streaks. Spoon into glasses, alternating between gooseberry cream and crushed meringues.
4. Serve.



PLANTING

Gooseberries prefer a deep, moist soil which is reasonably fertile, so it is well worth digging in plenty of well-rotted manure or garden compost prior to planting. Each year scatter 25-50g (1-2oz) of Growmore or pelleted chicken manure around the roots prior to adding a layer of organic matter each year in spring.

Choose a sunny site and since gooseberries flower and fruit earlier than any other soft fruit in our gardens, avoid areas at the bottom of slopes or next to solid walls or fences where cold air and frost are likely to gather early in the season forming a frost pocket.

GROWING ON

Regular pruning is important to give the best yields. This is done in two stages in the winter and summer. Prune to maintain an open, vase shape to the bush which allows lots of air and light to reach the centre of the plant. In winter, between October and March, cut back the shoots produced in the previous season by about half, while the sideshoots arising from these are pruned back to 5cm (2in) to a point just above an outward-facing bud. Old, diseased or damaged wood is cut out at the same time and branches on lax varieties growing close to the ground can be shortened to prevent the fruit from trailing on the soil prior to picking in June or July.



Regular pruning is essential

In late June the sideshoots are cut back to five leaves from their base and this removes much of the soft growth, which is likely to become infected with mildew.

Gooseberries can also be grown as cordons and should be pruned in the same way as currants (see pages 109-111).

VARIETIES


'Invicta' (culinary/green)

Good resistance to American gooseberry mildew, a common nuisance on these plants.

'Pax' and 'Rokula' (dessert/red)

Modern, heavy-cropping varieties with good disease resistance to replace 'Whinham's Industry'.

AT A GLANCE

 PLANT: OCT-MAR

 HARVEST: JUN-AUG

When planting gooseberry bushes, space about 1.2m (4ft) apart. Cordons can be closer at about 45cm (18in) apart.



HARVESTING



Pick the berries as they begin to soften and change colour. Net the plants at this time to prevent birds from stealing the berries.

IN POTS

Gooseberries generally do best when planted in the open soil. However, they do make good standards (bush plants grown on a long stem) and these can be grown in the border as a decorative plant to add height or in a large tub on the patio. However, it is essential to provide plenty of water and food throughout the growing season not only to avoid the problem of split berries but also because dry plants are more vulnerable to American gooseberry mildew.

When growing in pots, use a loam-based compost such as John Innes no 2 or no 3 since this will hold water well and being heavier than peat-based composts, there is less chance of the bush being blown over.

TOP TIP

Even watering is important to prevent the fruit from splitting should it receive a sudden downpour after a dry spell.

WATCH OUT FOR

In spring look out for signs of green caterpillars with black spots. These are the caterpillars of the gooseberry sawfly and can quickly strip the leaves from the whole plant. Pick them off if seen or spray with a suitable insecticide.



Grapes

Grapevines have been grown in the UK for centuries having, like so many things, been introduced by the Romans. In more recent times our climate has only really been suitable to grow reliable crops in greenhouses in many areas of the UK, apart from the south. But with the global climate warming, it is becoming more of a practical proposition to grow grapes outside in more and more areas of Britain



GRAPE AND RICOTTA CROSTINI

These little delights are fantastic as part of a party spread, or as a light lunch – and go well with a glass of chilled white wine.

SERVES 4

- 175g/6oz seedless grapes, halved
- 1 tbsp sugar
- 2 tbsp balsamic vinegar
- 1 tsp coarsely ground black pepper
- 4 slices of rustic bread
- 100g/3½ oz ricotta
- Parsley, chopped (for serving)
- A dash of olive oil

1. Under a hot grill, toast the bread for a minute on either side, or until golden all over. Set aside.
2. Bring sugar and 2 tbsp of balsamic vinegar to a boil in a small pan. Stir to dissolve the sugar. Add the grapes and black pepper. Cook until grapes are glazed and start to soften, about 3-5 minutes.
3. Spread the toasted bread with a good helping of ricotta, then top with the grape mixture and drizzle with olive oil and parsley.



PLANTING

The key to good grapes is sun, sun, sun. This is because sunlight is essential if the fruit is to produce the sugar necessary to make the berries sweet. Vines must therefore have a sunny sheltered spot to grow and one of the best and most convenient places to grow them is against a warm wall supported by strong wires.

The soil should be well drained and reasonably deep and fertile. Dig in plenty of well-rotted garden compost or manure at least a month prior to planting and fork over the base of the hole to improve drainage. Scatter some Growmore or pelleted chicken manure over the planting area.

GROWING ON

There are very many ways to prune grapes and getting to grips with pruning is essential if your vine is not to take over the garden, producing a mass of leaves and stems, but very little fruit.



Regular tying and trimming is essential

The easiest way to prune grapes is to grow them as a cordon (single straight main stem or rod) or multiple cordon (several straight main stems arising from the same plant). These main stems arise from horizontal branches running along the bottommost wire and are kept as a permanent framework on which the fruiting sideshoots are formed.

As the sideshoots grow they are trained out either side of the main rods and once a bunch begins to form, the shoot is pinched back (has its tip removed) two leaves beyond the bunch to concentrate the plant's energy on the fruit.

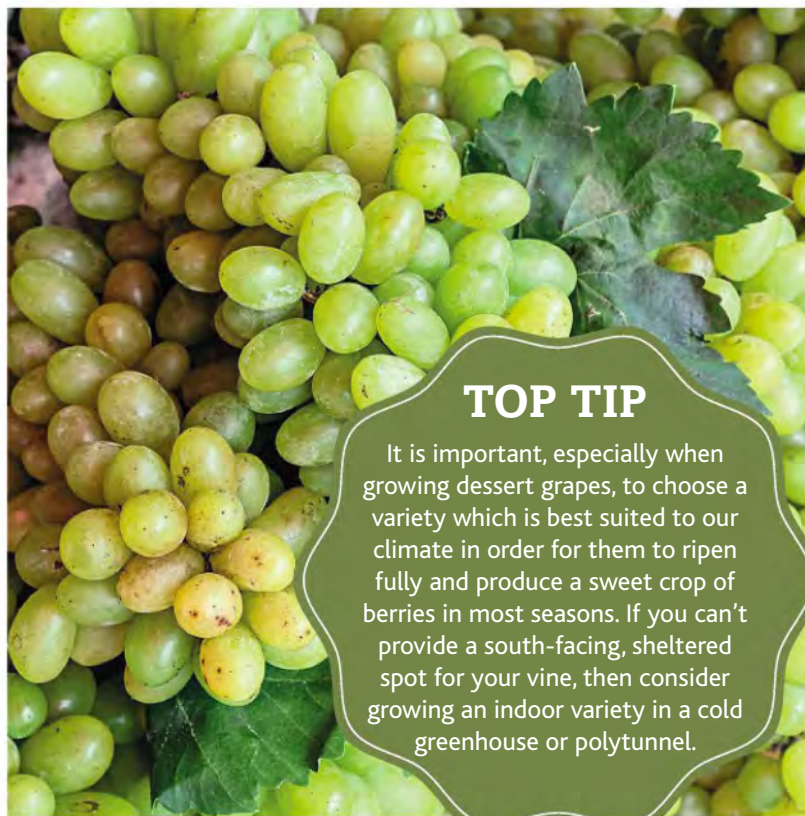
During the winter, the tip of the rod is cut back by half of the growth made in the previous year and as the rods age they can be replaced with suitably placed rods which form on the horizontal branches.

In the case of a dessert grape, if the bunches have set lots of berries, some may need to be thinned to improve the size and quality of the remainder. This is done in several stages and begins when the fruit is the size of a pea. Eventually there should be 1cm (1/2in) between the berries.

Although grapes like to grow in well-drained soil, watering during the summer is important to maintain even moisture levels and to help prevent the fruit from splitting and also to deter mildew. This is the reason why, traditionally, the roots of greenhouse grapes were planted outside the greenhouse, the stem running underneath the wall and into the structure.

TOP TIP

It is important, especially when growing dessert grapes, to choose a variety which is best suited to our climate in order for them to ripen fully and produce a sweet crop of berries in most seasons. If you can't provide a south-facing, sheltered spot for your vine, then consider growing an indoor variety in a cold greenhouse or polytunnel.



HARVESTING



Check for ripeness by eating a few berries

To test whether grapes are ripe it is best to taste them. Once they are soft and sweet, harvesting can begin. The bunch is literally snipped out of the stem by cutting it half an inch or so either side of the main stalk.

Handled carefully, your grapes may store for six to eight weeks if kept cool with the cut end in water.

AT A GLANCE

 PLANTING: FEB-MAR, OCT-NOV

 HARVESTING: SEP, OCT

Plant and prune when the vines are dormant to reduce stress on the plant. November to February is the best time to get out the secateurs. Pruning then also reduces bleeding (loss of sap) from the pruning cuts.

WATCH OUT FOR

Grapes grow rapidly and if not pruned regularly the lack of air movement around the bunches can encourage botrytis (grey mould). Trim as necessary and ventilate greenhouses and polytunnels to reduce humidity.

IN POTS

Grapes can be grown in containers very successfully, but do need additional care. Vines will need to be kept reasonably moist during the growing season and should be fed regularly with a high-potash tomato food from April to September.



Pruning is different too and rather than relying on a system of permanent rods, all growth is cut back to within a bud during the dormant season to maintain a tight head.

As with most other fruit in pots, choose a loam-based John Innes compost for your grapevine and a large pot or tub. Place the pot on a sunny, sheltered patio during the summer, but bring the plant indoors into an unheated greenhouse or polytunnel for the winter where it will be sheltered from cold winds and heavy frosts.

VARIETIES

Over the many years and in the many countries that grapes have been cultivated, lots of varieties have been bred. Not only do you have the choice between dessert and wine grapes, but also there are indoor and outdoor varieties and black or white-berried vines.

For outdoor planting consider:
'Boskoop Glory'
A delicious black dessert or wine grape.

'Madeleine Angevine'
A heavy-cropping white wine grape.

'Strawberry grape'
A dessert type.

'Siegerrebe'
A white dual-purpose variety.

For indoor planting consider:
'Black Hamburg'
One of the best-known dessert varieties.

'Thompson's Seedless'
A vigorous white dessert variety

'Buckland Sweetwater'
A compact, sweet-berried variety.

'Chasselas'
A white early-ripening variety with a sweet flavour.

Pears

Pears will crop heavily in most seasons, but if you live in the north of the UK or garden on an exposed site, it is best to grow them as a fan or cordon against a warm south or west-facing wall or fence to protect the flowers from frost.



PEAR, LEEK AND SAUSAGE STUFFING

When it's cold outside, and you're stuck indoors, comforting food is the way forward! Try this stuffing recipe with your next roast chicken, or serve the vegetarian version as a side dish. With sweet pear, and tangy leeks, it's a delicious winter warming dish.

SERVES 4

- 4 free-range pork sausages, or 4 vegetarian sausages, chopped
- 2 slices of crusty bread
- 1 medium leek, chopped
- 1 pear, diced
- 1 small bunch of parsley
- 4 sage leaves
- 1 tbsp red wine vinegar
- 1 tbsp currants
- 1 tbsp pumpkin seeds
- pinch of chilli
- 1 egg
- Salt and pepper
- Olive oil

1. In a large pan, gently fry the leek, pumpkin seeds and chopped sausage in a little olive oil for a few minutes. Add the vinegar, chilli seeds, currants, and chopped parsley, stir in.
2. Roughly chop or tear the bread into chunks, add to the pan and heat through.
3. Take off the heat and transfer into an ovenproof dish, mix in the egg, sage leaves, salt and pepper. Bake at 180 degrees for 20 minutes until golden.



PEAR AND MARZIPAN TARTLETS

Making sweet pastry on a blustery, cold day can really lift the spirits. These little tarts are a perfect teatime treat, for friends and family to enjoy on a grey day.

MAKES 8 TARTS

FOR THE PASTRY

- 225g plain flour
- 100g butter
- 80g sugar
- 1 large free-range egg
- ½ lemon, zested

FRANGIPANE FILLING:

- 170g sugar
- 170g ground almonds

- 50g marzipan
- 1 tbsp flour
- 1 large free-range egg
- 1 tsp almond extract
- ½ lemon, zested
- 3-4 pears, sliced
- 2 tbsp almond flakes
- 5 tbsp lemon marmalade, heated

1. Add the cold butter and flour to a food processor and blitz to breadcrumbs. Add the sugar and egg, and blitz until just combined. If the dough is too dry, add 1 tbsp of ice cold water to the mixture.
2. Wrap in plastic, and refrigerate for one hour minimum.
3. Meanwhile make the filling. Whisk together all the filling ingredients to a smooth paste, and set aside.
4. Divide the pastry into 8 equal pieces, and roll out to 3mm thickness, and press lightly into 10cm tartlet tins, prick the pastry with a fork, and refrigerate again for 30 min.
5. Once chilled, scoop 1 tbsp of filling into each of the tartlets, making sure to fill any gaps. Press slices of pear lightly into the filling and bake at 170 degrees for 25-30 minutes until golden and baked through.
6. Brush heated lemon marmalade over the tarts, and sprinkle with a few almond flakes. Leave to cool.



PLANTING

Follow the planting and training advice given for apples on page 98 and you won't go far wrong. However, pears are rather fussier than apples when it comes to site. The very early flowering means that it is more important to find a sheltered spot, especially when growing bush trees in the open. If this is not possible, stick to trained types such as cordons, fans and espaliers, which can be grown against a warm wall.

They do have the advantage of tolerating heavier soils than apples, but dislike chalky conditions. Choose a reasonably free-draining, moisture retentive soil and when planting make sure that the graft union is at least 13cm (5in) above the surface to prevent the fruiting wood from rooting into the soil and bypassing the roots.



Pears can be trained into a variety of shapes, such as this espalier

HARVESTING

Pears should be harvested when nearly ripe, since if left to become overripe they won't store very well. Most tend to turn from a very acid green to a slightly lighter hue when ready for picking and some acquire a rosy blush, but colour is not always a good guide. To pick simply lift and gently twist; if they come off without resistance they are ready.



Take great care not to bruise the fruit and if you intend to store them, lay them out in a single layer in a paper-lined tray.

IN POTS

Pears are well suited to growing in large pots and containers. As with other trees, plant using loam-based John Innes no 3. Stand your tree in a sunny, sheltered position and water well during the growing season.

Feed your tree each week between April and September using high potash feed to encourage fruit formation and ripening. Supplement this by adding some controlled release fertiliser, available from garden centres.

AT A GLANCE



PLANTING: OCT-MAR



HARVESTING: SEP, OCT

If buying a fan-trained tree it is worth paying a little more and looking for one which is three years old and partly trained, since this saves much time in terms of getting a crop back for your efforts. Plant against a warm wall.

TOP TIP

Protect the open flowers from frosts if possible using fleece or old net curtains on very cold nights.

VARIETIES

Pears have been grown for many centuries and as a result lots of varieties have been bred, giving us a wide choice today. The main groups are culinary (cooking) and dessert (eating), although many dessert pears can in fact be cooked or used raw in puddings. Among the most popular varieties of pear are:

'Beth'

An early pear cropping in September. Not self-fertile.

'Conference'

The most popular variety and partly self-fertile.

'Concorde'

A late variety cropping in October/November.

'Williams' Bon Chretien'

Great flavour. Crops in September, but does not store well. Both 'Beth' and 'Conference' will pollinate it.

GROWING ON

When the plants are flowering, keep some fleece handy to cover the flowers that can be reached easily – wall-trained trees can sometimes be covered completely with a sheet suspended over the top, but be sure to uncover during the day when insects are flying. Mulch each year in the spring after applying a general fertiliser. If crops are heavy, it may be necessary to thin the fruit to improve the quality of the remainder.



WATCH OUT FOR

Look out for pear midge which can cause the young fruitlets to turn black and fall off before they reach maturity. When opened the little fruitlets may have a tiny maggot inside. Pick up fallen fruit and burn or otherwise dispose of it.

Plums

Plums are addictive. Just plant a tree in your garden, wait for it to become heavily laden with ripe juicy fruit, as it surely will, and try to resist eating one, then another, then another...



PINK FRITTERS AND SPICY PLUM SALSA

There are still plums to be had in October to make this spicy plum salsa, which is a great accompaniment to fritters or a juicy burger. It can easily be made a day in advance and kept in the fridge.

SERVES 4

FRITTERS:

- 2 medium courgettes
- 1 small beetroot
- 1 medium carrot
- 2 large eggs
- 100g sweetcorn
- 1 red onion
- 4 tbsp plain flour
- 2 tbsp cornflour
- ½ tsp red peppercorns, crushed
- ½ tsp salt
- 2-3tbsp organic sunflower oil

PLUM SALSA:

- 4 plums
- ½ cucumber, de-seeded
- A couple of sprigs of dill
- 1 lime, juiced
- 1 tbsp green jalapeños
- 1 radish

1. Grate the courgette, carrot, onion and beetroot into a large bowl and add the sweetcorn and eggs, mix well. Add the flour, cornflour and spices and mix again until combined. Using two large spoons, gently drop the mixture into a large oiled frying pan set on medium heat. Cook the fritters for 5-6 minutes on each side, or until lightly golden and crispy. Tip: You can keep the cooked fritters warm in a low temperature oven, while cooking the remaining batch.

2. Make the salsa by finely chopping the plums, cucumber, radish and jalapeños and add to a bowl. Squeeze over the lime juice, add the dill and mix the ingredients together.

3. Serve the fritters with the salsa and pitta bread.



GRILLED PLUMS WITH ICE CREAM AND MAPLE SYRUP

Invite your friends and family round for an autumn barbecue and bonfire and serve them hot grilled seasonal plums. Or if there are no dry days in sight, simply cook indoors on a hot cast-iron skillet, and serve with ice cream.

SERVES 4

- 7-8 ripe plums
- 8 scoops of ice cream
- A few sprigs of mint
- 2 tbsp maple syrup

Cut the plums in half and remove the stones. Place the fruit on to the grill or hot skillet and cook for 4-5 minutes. Serve with ice cream, mint leaves and maple syrup drizzled over.



PLANTING

Trees are planted during the dormant season (October to March) and are quite tolerant of poor growing conditions; however, to do well they need a sunny, sheltered spot where cold winds as well as frost won't damage the beautiful blooms. If possible, plant near the house so you can see the lovely display of flowers in a good year.

Although some varieties such as 'Victoria' and the cooking variety 'Czar' are self-fertile, many others are not and you will need to check with your supplier as to whether another tree will be necessary to ensure good pollination.

Dig in plenty of organic matter such as garden compost or manure prior to planting as this helps the soil to hold on to water during the dry summer months once it has rotted down well. Make sure that the graft (join between the roots and fruiting wood) is well above soil level, using the water or soil mark on the trunk as a guide. Fans, cordons and other wall trained forms will need to have horizontal support wires installed before planting and these should be positioned about 45cm (18in) apart.

GROWING ON



Plums do well as trained trees such as fans and cordons

No pruning is carried out immediately after planting plums in the winter. In fact all pruning is carried out from April to June and is kept to a minimum – in the case of an established bush tree it is restricted to removing crossing, damaged or dead branches. There are good reasons for only pruning in the summer months and it is to do with two damaging diseases – silver leaf and bacterial canker – both of which can be, although rarely are, fatal to the tree.

VARIETIES

There are lots to choose from, including culinary (cooking), dessert (eating) and dual-purpose varieties and also the closely related damsons and gages.

Of the desserts, the most popular variety for many years has been 'Victoria'. A very heavy cropping variety, its one disadvantage was that it previously made a large tree and was not really suitable for small gardens. However, dwarfing rootstocks such as St Julien A and Pixy have helped to make it, and other varieties, more manageable. But there are many more varieties available, some relatively new, which all have their own flavours and characteristics.



HARVESTING



Harvest the fruit as it softens and when it comes away easily from the tree and use as soon as possible.

TOP TIP

If frost is a problem in your garden, then look to gages, which are a little less prone to frost damage than plums.

IN POTS



Plums are not ideal for growing in pots, although they will survive and crop reasonably well. Growing in large containers does have the advantage of allowing the trees to be moved into a greenhouse or polytunnel out of the frost when flowering, but it is best to take the tree back outside once the flowers have set fruit. Choose a large container or tub and plant in John Innes no 3 potting compost.



Blossoms are prone to frost damage

AT A GLANCE

PLANTING: OCT-MAR

HARVESTING: JUL, AUG, SEP

Covering the flowers of small trees and trained forms at night when frost is expected can help reduce the damage. Use some horticultural fleece or even old net curtains.



WATCH OUT FOR

Wasps can also be a problem, taking advantage of damage caused by pecking birds. Cover low-growing clusters of fruit with netting and hang wasp traps in the tree.

Raspberries

Raspberries are a mainstay of the fruit garden and no patch is complete without them. Apart from their great taste and easy-going nature which makes them so easy to grow, they are heavy cropping and versatile in the kitchen

VEGAN RASPBERRY TART

This is a rich and luxurious chocolate tart topped with fresh raspberries, which is quick and easy to prepare. Great to serve to vegan friends, or just treat yourself to some dairy-free goodness.

SERVES 6-8

- 1 pack ready-rolled shortcrust pastry
- 200g/7oz dark chocolate 70%
- 240ml organic soya milk
- 100g/3.5oz raspberries

1. Preheat oven to 170C/fan 160C/gas 5. Gently press the pre-rolled pastry into a 23cm/9inch loose-bottomed pastry tin, ensuring to press the pastry into all the grooves. Trim away the edges and chill for 30 minutes.
2. Line the pastry with baking paper and fill with baking beans, blind bake for 15 minutes. Remove from oven and carefully lift paper and beans out. Return pastry to oven and cook for another 5 minutes or until the base and sides are golden and crisp. Set aside to cool.
3. Roughly chop the chocolate and place in a large bowl.
4. Place the soya milk into a small pan, and bring to the boil, then pour over the chocolate. Stir until melted and smooth.
5. Pour the chocolate mixture into the cooled pastry, and place in the fridge. Leave to chill for 1 hour.
6. When ready to serve, arrange the raspberries over the top. Serve.



PLANTING

Dig in plenty of well-rotted garden compost or manure to help the soil hold water during the summer months and rake in some general fertiliser such as Growmore or pelleted chicken manure about a week prior to planting.

Traditionally posts and wires are used to support the canes, but it is possible to grow them against a wall or fence using trellis or wires held taut with vine eyes. The wires should be 45cm (18in) apart up the supporting wall, fence or posts and 5-7cm (2-3in) from any supporting wall. Plant the canes (plants) 45cm (18in) apart with 1.5m (5ft) between the rows.



GROWING ON

Apply a layer of garden compost or manure (mulch) to the plants every year in March after feeding with a dressing of general fertiliser such as pelleted chicken manure or Growmore. Tie in the canes as they grow to prevent wind damage.

Plants fruit on canes produced in the previous season, while also growing the canes which will fruit next year, so the easiest method is to train the fruiting canes one way and the new canes the other and attached to the wire supports. In the case of summer-fruiting varieties all the fruited wood is cut down to ground level after the fruits have all been picked.



Traditionally posts and wires are used to support the fragile canes

Autumn fruited are pruned in late winter, about February time, with all the shoots being cut down to ground level. They do not need permanent supports and can simply be kept neat by tying around with a length of string and some canes. Once the canes have been cut down apply a top dressing of superphosphate or a mulch of garden compost.

HARVESTING

Harvest the berries while still slightly firm but when they come away easily from the 'plug' that holds them to the stem.



IN POTS

Raspberries can be grown in pots but need to be given plenty of water during the summer. Compact new variety 'Ruby Beauty' has been bred for this purpose. Fill a large pot with John Innes no 3 compost and after planting cover the surface with a bark mulch. Place it in a partly shaded spot and keep well watered. Tie some string around the canes for support.

VARIETIES

There are two main groups of raspberries, those that fruit in the summer and those fruiting from August to October. By choosing the right ones it is possible to be picking over a number of months. For example, you could choose:

'Glen Moy'

One of the earliest varieties for July.

'Glen Ample'

Follows the above in July-August.

'Octavia'

A great variety for mid-July to late August.

'Allgold'

Sweet and yellow-fruited. Crops mid-August to mid-October.



TOP TIP

Raspberries love moisture and will grow well against a shady wall, but are not good in a very hot, sunny position unless given lots of water and a thick mulch (layer of organic matter) over the roots every spring to cool them.

AT A GLANCE

 PLANTING: NOV-MAR

 HARVESTING: JUL, AUG, SEP, OCT

Raspberry canes are best planted or moved when dormant. This is any time during the winter when the canes have no leaves.



Rhubarb

Rhubarb is probably the easiest of all fruit and veg crops to grow since by and large it can simply be left to produce a harvest of colourful leaf stalks without much help from us. However, the best thick and tasty sticks will have been given just a little attention during the season

RHUBARB JAM BUTTERFLY CAKES

Sweet, elegant and very tempting, these little cakes are making the most of this season's rhubarb. They are great for kids to help out with too.

MAKES 12

- 100g (3½oz) butter
- 100g (3½oz) caster sugar
- 2 large free-range eggs
- 100g (3½oz) self-raising flour
- 1 level tsp baking powder

FOR THE JAM:

- 180g (6¼oz) rhubarb, chopped
- 60g (2oz) sugar
- ½ lemon, juice and zest off

FOR THE FILLING:

- 200ml (6¾fl oz) whipping cream
- 1 tbsp icing sugar

1. Heat the oven to 180C/fan 160C/gas 4. Line a cupcake tray with 12 paper cases.
2. Beat the butter and caster sugar together until light. Then add the egg, followed by the flour.
3. Beat well for 2-3 minutes, or until the mixture is well blended and smooth.
4. Fill each paper case with about a tablespoon of mixture.
5. Bake in the preheated oven for about 15-20 minutes, or until the cakes are well risen and golden.
6. Let the cakes cool completely on a wire rack.
7. Meanwhile, make the jam. In a saucepan, combine the rhubarb, lemon juice and zest and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low, and simmer for 10 minutes. If there is a lot of liquid, cook a bit longer over low heat.
8. Next, add the sugar and cook for a further 10-15 minutes. Leave to cool.
9. Once the jam is cool, whisk the whipping cream and icing sugar together, then spoon in 2 tablespoons of jam and mix in. Place the cream mixture into a piping bag. Set aside.
10. When the cakes are cool, cut a disc from the top of each cake leaving a little gap around the edge and cut this slice in half to create a butterfly.
11. Spoon a teaspoonful of rhubarb jam into the dip of each cake. Then pipe a swirl of the cream filling on top of the rhubarb jam and place the half slices of cake on top to resemble the butterfly wings.
12. Dust the cakes with icing sugar and serve.





PLANTING

It is possible to grow rhubarb from seed, but the best plants are of named varieties grown by dividing existing crowns. Plant from October to February. Choose an open, sunny site for your rhubarb and feed the soil with plenty of well-rotted garden compost or manure.

GROWING ON

Spread a thick layer of organic matter around the plants every year in the winter and water well in the summer. Feed once harvesting ceases to boost plants for next season. Although it's not essential, plants remain more vigorous if you dig them up and divide them every three years in the winter when they are dormant, making sure that each of your new plants has at least one bud and some healthy roots.

Left to their own devices, rhubarb should begin to crop from March until July at which time harvesting stops to allow the plants time to recuperate. It is possible, however, to harvest a little earlier by forcing.

This merely involves popping an upturned bucket, dustbin or rhubarb forcer over the plant in January, thus excluding light and protecting the crowns to encourage earlier sticks.



Lift and divide crowns when dormant



Force crowns for an early crop



HARVESTING

Do not harvest newly planted crowns until their second season in and always stop by the end of July. To pull the sticks push your forefinger down the front of the stalk and as far into the base as you can and give a gentle tug. The stalk should come away from the crown without snapping and leaving a snag.

IN POTS

Rhubarb is generally best grown in the soil where the large, hungry roots can search out and find water and nutrients. However, there are a few varieties which are more compact and can be grown in large containers.

TOP TIP

Rhubarb leaves are quite poisonous and should never be eaten. However, they can be composted since by the time the leaves have broken down in the heap the toxin (oxalates) will have disappeared.

WATCH OUT FOR

Plants may flower prematurely in early summer and if the long flower stalks are left to set seeds will tend to drain the energy from the crown and reduce the quality of the sticks. Snap them off as they appear.

VARIETIES

'Timperley Early'

Is a good one for forcing, producing pale pink stems.

'Victoria'

A late variety producing red stems in late spring.

'Fulton's Strawberry Surprise'

Suitable for a large container.

'Livingstone'

Can be harvested from spring to autumn.

AT A GLANCE



PLANTING: OCT-FEB

Keep crowns well watered during the summer and top up mulches of well-rotted organic matter regularly to help retain moisture in the soil.



HARVESTING: MAR-JUL

Strawberries

Strawberries are among the easiest and most adaptable fruits we can grow since they are just as happy in a strawberry pot on the patio or a hanging basket as they are in the soil.

Yet they are expensive in the shops and once you have tasted a home-grown strawberry you will never want to buy supermarket punnets again

STRAWBERRY SWIRL MERINGUES

The strawberry season is one of the highlights on the harvesting calendar for many. Try using some of your strawberry jam in these pretty meringues, and serving them up with whipped cream.

- 2 organic egg whites
- 100g (3½oz) caster sugar

FOR THE JAM

- 200g (7oz) hulled strawberries
- 200g (7oz) granulated sugar or equal to strawberry weight
- 1 tsp lemon juice, freshly squeezed

1. Put the strawberries in a large saucepan and gently mash with a wooden spoon over a low heat for a couple of minutes.
2. Add the sugar and lemon juice.
3. Heat gently, stirring until all the sugar has dissolved.
4. Bring to the boil and cook for 5-7 minutes, stirring occasionally.
5. Skim any scum off the top with a spoon.
6. Pour into a bowl, and set aside.

MAKE THE MERINGUE

1. Preheat the oven to 110C/fan 90C/gas ¼.
2. Using an electric whisk, make the meringue by whisking the egg whites in a large bowl until soft peaks form.
3. Add the sugar gradually, whisking in between additions.
4. Once stiff and glossy, gently fold in 1 large tbsp jam, making swirls.
5. With 2 large spoons, divide the mixture into 4 large dollops, spacing them well apart on a lined baking tray.
6. Bake for 1 hour.
7. Once baked and completely cool, serve with whipped cream and extra strawberry jam.





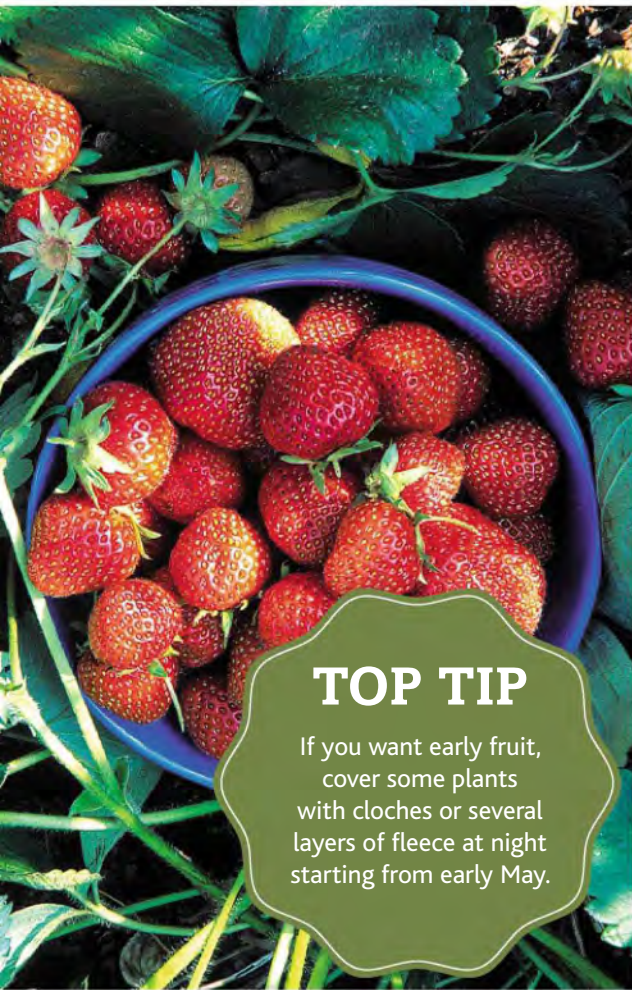
STRAWBERRY AVOCADO SMOOTHIE

This is a great recipe to start the day with. It's light and fruity, and the flavour of your home-grown strawberries really comes through in this smoothie.

SERVES 4

- 250g (9oz) strawberries, hulled, washed
- 1 avocado, peeled and stone removed
- 450ml (16fl oz) almond milk
- 200g (7oz) flavoured yoghurt
- 1 tbsp honey

1. Place the strawberries, avocado, almond milk, honey and yoghurt in a blender or food processor and blend until smooth.
2. Pour evenly among 4 serving glasses.



TOP TIP

If you want early fruit, cover some plants with cloches or several layers of fleece at night starting from early May.

PLANTING

Strawberries can be grown easily and cheaply from seeds and these will produce plants very quickly when sown in the spring to give a small crop in their first year. However, it is more usual to buy strawberries as ready-grown plants called runners.

When buying strawberry plants it is important to get them from a reliable source since a good grower will only obtain plants from virus-free stock, and it is well worth paying a little extra for these as they will fruit better and for longer.

Although you can buy plants in pots it is quite common for mail order runners to arrive as bare-rooted plants. On receipt place the roots in a small bucket of water for a few hours before planting.

You will notice a chunky crown just below the canopy of leaves. Plant the crown about half way so as not to bury it.



Plant strawberries through a ground cover fabric to suppress weeds

GROWING ON

Choose a free-draining site in the garden. Simply plant into previously dug soil which has had some well-rotted organic matter such as manure or garden compost incorporated the previous year. Remove any weeds prior to planting. As a safeguard, plant your strawberries through a mulch of polythene or ground-cover fabric to prevent weeds from building up.

Feed in spring with sulphate of potash at the rate of 15g per sq m (1/2oz per sq yd) to give them a boost in preparation for fruiting.

In the autumn after fruiting remove all the old growth before plants begin to send up new leaves and remove runners, which tend to sap the plants' energy. If your plants are healthy with no signs of virus, some of the best-rooted runners can be planted in pots or in rows on the plot to make new plants for fruiting next year.



After fruiting, remove all old growth

VARIETIES

Buy strawberries in October/November when they are freshly lifted from the nursery or again from March to July using plants which have been held in a cold store. The latter often fruit in as little as 60 days from planting.

There are lots of summer and perpetual strawberries available; check the catalogues before buying. They fall into three main types:

SUMMER FRUITING

Early fruiting varieties crop from mid-June to early July, mid-season varieties a week later. Late fruiting types begin to crop in July.

PERPETUAL

These produce a small amount of fruit in summer with the bulk from mid-August to mid-October.

ALPINE

Grown from seed alpine strawberries are sold by most seed companies. The plants are decorative and ideal for pots or as a productive edging for the flower border.



Alpine strawberries can be easily grown from seed

HARVESTING

Cover your plants with netting to deter the birds as the berries start to change colour and pick over the plants daily through the summer so as not to miss any berries as they ripen.



IN POTS

If growing in containers, plant in any fresh potting compost – though a John Innes type is best; make sure that the growing point stays just above the level of the compost. You can buy special strawberry pots and these have holes in the side so you can plant one runner in each. Alternatively plant three in a hanging basket or four or five into a growing-bag. You can also plant in rows in the garden, allowing about 30cm (12in) between each plant. Choose a sunny spot.



AT A GLANCE



PLANTING: OCT-JUL



HARVESTING: JUN-OCT

You can buy strawberries in October/November when they are freshly dug from the soil by the nursery or again from March right through to July using plants which have been held in suspended animation in a cold store.

The latter often fruit in as little as 60 days from planting.

WATCH OUT FOR

After three to four years, plants will become less productive and may show signs of distorted growth and abnormal flowers. Lift and replace on a regular basis.

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