

YOUR 32-PAGE GUIDE TO SOWING, GROWING & HARVESTING

VEG

AT A GLANCE

11 favourite crops made easy

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Welcome

We hope you are enjoying your summer of gardening and that your plot is burgeoning with wonderful produce. If, however, you feel that you are in need of some more advice or are new to kitchen gardening and feel a little adrift, we hope that this useful 32-page guide will help you.

We've packed it with 11 handy growing guides for many favourite UK crops and you will find all the essential basic information you need to get you started. Alternatively, if you already dabble with home-grown veg, we hope that this guide will help you improve your results.

Keep it handy in the shed or on the bookshelf and, together with the more detailed advice you'll find in the main magazine each month, you'll soon be enjoying more of your own delicious pickings. You'll significantly cut your monthly food bills too.

Steve
KG EDITOR



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BROAD BEANS

Easy to grow and relatively problem free, this vegetable has a melt-in-your-mouth delicacy that other legumes just can't rival

SOW:
October-
November or
February-March

HARVEST:
May-August

Top tip

Pick pods before the beans inside get too big, otherwise you will have woody and bitter-tasting beans. If they are larger than you would like, all is not lost. Just peel away the outer skin of the bean

Easy freezy

Broad beans freeze well so don't be worried about a glut, just look forward to having them on your plate over winter

WATCH OUT FOR

BLACKFLY: These black aphids can be a problem, and you can find that the tops of your plants are suddenly infested with them. Nipping the tops off your plants once pods begin to appear at the bottom is effective in preventing this happening.

CHOCOLATE SPOT: It's not unusual to find brown spots on the leaves of your plants. A severe attack can kill off your crop but generally this problem does not really impact on pod production.

SLUGS AND SNAILS: You will need to protect your young plants, whether grown directly outside or in modules. Slugs and snails will find a way so be vigilant and use your preferred means of prevention such as organic slug pellets, broken egg shells or beer traps.

Did you know?

- Broad beans were cultivated as far back as 6800 BC
- In the US, they are known as 'fava beans', and the botanical name is *Vicia faba*
- They are self-fertile but will do better with insect pollination
- The tops of the plant can be cooked as you would spinach
- The roots are full of nitrogen so dig them back into the soil after harvesting

Though self-fertile, broad beans will produce better yields with insect pollination

FAVOURITE VARIETIES

- **'AQUADULCE CLAUDIA'**: A popular choice for autumn sowing, this variety is a good cropper and perfect for an early harvest. It produces long pods, 23cm (9in) long.
- **'THE SUTTON'**: If you have a windy spot this dwarf variety is ideal as they will not need staking. It can also be grown in containers too and is perfect for small spaces. Height 30cm (12in). Spread: 25cm (10in).
- **'EXPRESS'**: Fast growing as its name implies, this is a good one for spring sowing and produces plenty of early pods.

in the kitchen

Broad beans picked young and tender are delicious on toast mixed with feta cheese and a little fresh mint. Blanch the broad beans first for a few minutes then place on top of the feta cheese. Add a side salad and you have a healthy and tasty snack!



Though you can sow directly into the soil, it's often best to start them off in modular cells as it is easier to protect them from slugs and snails.

They do best in a fertile, well-draining soil that is rich in organic matter and/or well-rotted manure. Avoid windy spots if possible.

GROWING

Plant them out 23cm (9in) apart in rows 45cm (18in) apart. Leave 60cm (24in) between any further pairs of rows. Water regularly during dry spells and keep weed free.

When pods start to form at the base of the plant, pinch out the tops as this will promote pod growth and also prevent blackfly (black aphids).

Taller varieties will need staking as plants have a tendency to keel over when burgeoning with pods.

GROWING UNDER COVER

If you have a greenhouse or polytunnel and sufficient space, you can get an early crop by sowing in autumn. One of the advantages is that you don't have any problems from the wind or from blackfly. Follow the same advice as for growing outside, though when the plants start to flower leave the doors open during the day so insects can gain access for pollination.



HARVESTING

The pods will start emerging at the bottom so you will pick there first when they have reached the required size. It's best to hold on to the main stem as there is always a danger of dislodging the roots of the plant if you're not careful, or just use a pair of scissors!



SUMMER CABBAGE

SOW:
Feb-April

HARVEST:
Late June-
October

Cabbages are one of the kings of the vegetable plot and a long-standing staple for the vegetable gardener, so let's get down to the essentials



Cabbage seeds can be started off in cells or sown directly into a nursery bed

Growing summer cabbage, like any cabbage, takes a little effort. You have to get the soil right and then you have to make sure your precious plants are properly protected. But in the end, can you really beat a summer cabbage freshly picked? Whether shredded and eaten raw in salads or coleslaw, steamed or stir-fried, cabbage is an excellent source of vitamins C and K, iron and potassium.

Cabbages can be started off in mid-February undercover in compost-filled cells, one seed per cell, and covered with 1cm (½in) of compost. The young plants can then be transplanted outdoors in April. Alternatively, sow outdoors in April by creating a nursery bed on your plot, in which case sow thinly in rows 15cm (6in) apart. Plants are thinned out to 7.5cm (3in) apart once the seedlings are large enough to handle.

GROWING

Cabbages like a well-drained, fertile soil with a neutral to alkaline pH level (6.5 to 7.5). If your soil is acidic, you might want to add some garden lime in the winter as this will make it more alkaline and protect against clubroot, a disease that attacks brassicas and thrives in acidic soil.

The young cabbage plants can be transplanted to their final growing position when they have grown to about 10cm (4in) tall and have about five or six leaves. As a general principle, planting distance will depend on the size of cabbage you wish to grow.



Top tip
Nasturtiums grown near your cabbage can attract cabbage white butterflies away from your plants

WATCH OUT FOR

■ **CABBAGE CATERPILLARS:** The notorious cabbage white butterfly (but other butterflies too) will lay their eggs on the underside of leaves. The emergent caterpillars can devastate the plant. Laying Enviromesh or Veggiemesh over your plants is the most effective solution, though if you are vigilant you can crush the eggs and/or caterpillars as they appear, or spray with pyrethrum.

■ **CABBAGE ROOT FLY:** Similar to houseflies to look at, the female cabbage root fly lay its eggs in the soil around the stem of the cabbage plant. The white larvae feed on the roots of the plant, causing it to wilt. One solution is to fit a collar around the stem to prevent eggs being laid.

■ **WHITEFLY:** These very small, moth-like insects can be a real nuisance on cabbages. They leave sticky deposits on leaves that turn into a sooty mould, damaging the leaves. Insect mesh, yellow sticky traps or a spray of pyrethrum are effective controls.

■ **PIGEONS:** These will strip your cabbages bare, leaving nothing but a skeleton of a plant. Protective mesh will keep them out.

■ **CLUBROOT:** This soil-borne fungal disease will cause your cabbage leaves to take on a purple discolouration and wilt. The roots are dramatically affected, becoming deformed and swollen. Clubroot is less likely where the pH level is neutral (around 7) so if your soil is acidic it would be a good idea to dig in garden lime in winter to give it time to work into the soil.



Caterpillars, if not controlled, can devastate a cabbage plant



Collars, which you can make yourself or which can be bought commercially, will provide protection from cabbage root fly

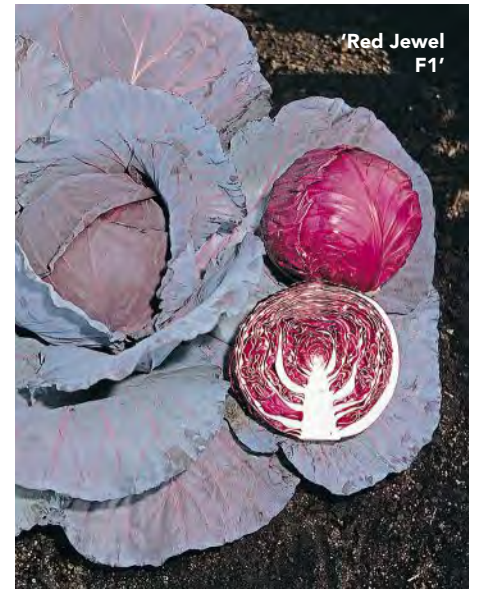
FAVOURITE VARIETIES

■ **'GOLDEN ACRE/PRIMO II':** Does well in poorer soils; firm, medium-sized, round heads; good for smaller spaces. Harvest from July onwards.

■ **'HISPI F1':** This pointed variety can be grown in small spaces and has good bolt resistance; sweet flavour. Crops later summer into autumn.

■ **'JERSEY WAKEFIELD':** A heritage variety with conical-shaped heads, uniform shape and pale green hearts; good for the smaller garden. Harvest from late July onwards.

■ **'RED JEWEL F1':** An attractive variety that produces ruby-red leaves with crisp, tightly packed hearts. Harvest from late July to October.



For earlier harvested (and therefore smaller cabbages), plant at a distance of 35cm (14in) each way, while for larger cabbages, the distance should be 50cm (20in). About a week before planting add a general fertiliser to the soil.

LOOKING AFTER YOUR PLANTS

Water the young plants regularly and keep the rows weed free, or simply add some organic mulch to the beds, which will keep the weeds down and also help to retain moisture in the soil.

You will really need to protect your cabbages as there is a range of pests that like your cabbage even more than you do. Throughout the growing season provide cabbages with a commercial nitrogen feed or even a home-made nettle tea feed.

HARVESTING

Summer cabbage can be harvested late June to October. Once the hearts of the cabbages are firm, dig up the whole plant or cut through the stem at the base. If you want to produce further leaves, carve a cross on the head of the remaining stump.



in the kitchen

Make a red cabbage coleslaw with broccoli florets and rocket leaves, then sprinkle with almonds

CARROTS

A firm favourite on the veg plot and in the kitchen, so let's get growing

**SOW
(OUTDOORS):**
April-July

HARVEST:
June-October

Did you know?

Carrots are packed with healthy goodness. They contain beta-carotene which is a natural precursor for vitamin A, essential for healthy skin, eyes and the immune system

FAVOURITE VARIETIES

■ **'AMSTERDAM FORCING 3'**: This is one of the earliest varieties and good for pots, tubs, raised beds or under cloches. The roots are orange, cylindrical and round at the end. A good variety for freezing.

■ **'ESKIMO'**: A cold-tolerant variety, this produces orange, cylindrical roots and can be left in the ground over winter, tolerating -10C (14F).

■ **'FLYAWAY' F1 HYBRID**: A carrot fly-resistant variety, the roots are smooth, broad shouldered and blunt ended.

■ **'PARMEX'**: This variety is good for containers and, because they are small and round, do better in clay soils than their long-rooted counterparts.

■ **'PURPLE SUN' F1 HYBRID**: A purple variety (inside and out) with long, tapering roots, good for juicing.





CARROTS IN CONTAINERS

Carrots can be sown under cover as early as February in pots or containers, which should be at least 25cm (10in) deep. These can then be moved outside later when the weather is warmer. Use multi-purpose compost, sow thinly and cover lightly with compost. Thin them out if necessary and, once the seedlings are 10cm (4in) tall, they will need regular watering and will benefit from a high-potash (tomato) feed every couple of weeks.

Top tip

Grow short-rooted varieties if your soil is stony or heavy clay

Carrots are a must-have crop. Cooked or raw, they are a staple in the kitchen, bringing a cheery brightness to any plate and, unlike some of those leafy greens, even kids like them. Although relatively easy to grow, they do require a fair degree of aftercare, especially in the early stages.

GROWING

Carrots like a light, stone-free soil which hasn't been manured for at least 12 months. Add some general fertiliser and rake this before sowing. Make a V-shaped drill with a hoe or the corner of a rake to about 1cm (½in). Sprinkle seeds thinly along the trench and then cover them lightly. Rows should be about 15cm (6in) apart. Sow successively every couple of weeks to ensure a continuous supply.

Once the seedlings are large enough to handle, thin them out, leaving a gap of about 7cm (3in) between those that remain. It's best to do this in the evening when there are fewer carrot fly about, and watering the rows straight afterwards will help cover up the smell. Remove your thinnings from the site.

LOOKING AFTER YOUR PLANTS

Make sure you water your carrots thoroughly during very dry spells, but otherwise they don't need a lot of watering. Although you can use the hoe to weed between rows, you will also need to hand weed immediately next to plants to avoid lopping off the carrot tops inadvertently. It is easy – especially with young seedlings – for carrots to be overwhelmed by faster-growing weeds.

HARVESTING

Lift your carrots from June onwards, depending on when they were sown. Best to ease them out rather than just pull them. If the soil is hard, loosen it up with a small fork so that you don't only pull up half a carrot. Carrots lifted in October can be stored until as far on as March. First cut off the foliage to about 1cm (½in) above the top and then place in layers of sand in a wooden box. Store in a dry place, e.g. a shed. Make sure the carrots aren't touching each other.



Sow rows
15cm (6in)
apart



in the kitchen

HONEY GLAZED CARROTS

After boiling your carrots for 10-15 minutes drain and set aside. In a pan melt a couple of ounces of butter and honey and one tablespoon of brown sugar. Melt over a low heat then add a squeeze of lemon juice. Add the carrots and stir until all the carrots are covered and are warmed through, then serve.

WATCH OUT FOR

■ **CARROT FLY:** The low-flying female lays her eggs in the soil next to carrots and when these hatch, the larvae burrow into the carrot roots. You can buy resistant varieties but a traditional method is to surround your carrots with a 60cm (2ft) high insect netting or polythene barrier, or cover them with a protective fleece.

■ **FORKING:** 'Fanging' as it is also sometimes called is not the end of the world as forked carrots

are perfectly edible, but it's not really what you're looking for. Carrots will fork in stony soil or soil that has manure less than 12 months old.

■ **SPLIT CARROTS:** This is a result of lots of watering after a very dry spell, or after heavy rain. Make sure you water through a drought rather than after one.

■ **GREEN TOP:** If the crowns of your carrots look a little green it's because they're being exposed to sunlight. This is easily remedied by earthing up around the carrots so that the crowns are covered.





DRYING BEANS

One way of ensuring a supply of beans throughout the winter is by allowing the pods to grow to full maturity and then letting them dry out. It couldn't be easier

SOW:
April-June

HARVEST:
August-October



Young plants can be started off in Roottrainers

Beans are a great vegetable for supplementing your winter store. Popping them in the freezer is one option but another way is to leave them to dry, something that requires little effort as they can be just left on the vine until the pods turn brown and the seeds start to peep out. Popular beans for drying include Borlotti (white beans with streaks of pinkish-red), and cannellini (an Italian, white, kidney-shaped bean), though if you find yourself with too many runner beans you can always leave these to dry too.



The ever-popular wigwam

GROWING

Growing beans for drying is generally the same process as growing runner beans or French climbing beans. Seeds can be started off undercover in April and then planted out at the end of May/early June when the risk of frost has passed. Alternatively, they can be planted straight into the ground from mid-May to mid-June. However, for drying beans you're looking at a long season so if you're growing for this purpose, sow as early as you can in April.

If sowing undercover, use Roottrainers or 7.5cm (3in) pots filled with multi-purpose compost and then move young plants to their outdoor position once the risk of frost has passed. Sow each seed 5cm (2in) deep, 10-23cm (4-9in) apart depending on variety, and in rows 45cm (18in) apart. Beans like a fertile soil so in the autumn dig in plenty of well-rotted compost and add some lime too if the soil is on the acidic side – a pH of 6.5-7.5 is ideal.



An A-frame offers good support

in the kitchen

BEAN SALAD

Having soaked and cooked the beans and allowed them to cool, mix with yellow peppers, cucumber, cherry tomatoes, rocket, mizuna, chopped parsley, fresh basil and a drizzle of lemon.

BEAN AND VEGETABLE SOUP

Cook onion, celery and garlic in a few tbsps of oil until soft. Add vegetable stock, chopped carrots, beans (already soaked and boiled) and peas. Bring to the boil then simmer until carrot is soft. Add salt and pepper to taste. Garnish with cress.



LOOKING AFTER YOUR PLANTS

Prior to planting ensure you have a framework in place, traditionally an A-frame of bamboo canes for the plants to climb up, though other designs are possible, such as wigwams. Use 2.4m (8ft) canes and make sure you push each one about 30cm (1ft) into the ground. The structure of the frame needs to be strong, not only to support the ever-burgeoning plant once it starts to produce pods but also to withstand strong winds which have the potential to blow the whole structure over.

As the plants twine up the bamboo canes, give them a little help initially by tying them to each cane, though not too tightly. Water regularly, especially in dry weather, and keep weeds down and help to retain moisture by applying a mulch around them, such as well-rotted compost. When the plant reaches the top of the frame, nip off the tips so as to encourage growth below.

HARVESTING

For drying purposes, you don't have to do very much at all. Just tend to the plant as normal but don't pick the pods, leaving them to mature and dry naturally. In some cases, the pods will be dry enough when you pick them; otherwise,

FAVOURITE VARIETIES

■ **'LINGUA DI FUOCO' (FIRE TONGUE):** A Borlotti variety whose pods certainly brighten up your plot, though note that the striking colour disappears from the beans when cooked.

■ **'DOLICO DELL OCCHIO':** This is a French climbing bean which produces white beans with black eyes, hence the common name black-eyed bean.

■ **'SORANO':** This is a cannellini variety which produces white beans with a hint of yellow.

■ **'CZAR':** A runner bean variety producing flavoursome white beans. Long pods and very prolific.

■ **PEA BEAN:** This produces attractive two-tone beans in cream and brown. Heavy yielding.



they may need to be brought inside to dry out completely – it largely depends on the climate in your area. When the pods are completely dry you can shake out the beans inside and leave the beans to dry out completely – room temperature is fine – before placing them in an air-tight glass jar and in a cool place.

PREPARING FOR COOKING

Before eating dried beans you must soak them for about eight hours, otherwise they can give you a stomach upset. After this, boil them from a cold water start for about 30 minutes and then simmer until soft.

WATCH OUT FOR

■ **APHIDS:** Greenfly on shoots and leaves can be a problem as these will suck sap and leave sticky deposits. Crush with thumb and forefinger or, if they are particularly problematic, spray with pyrethrum.

■ **SLUGS AND SNAILS:** These can destroy young plants, so often it's best to start off plants under cover first so that they get a head start.

Top tip

Stop picking beans in September to allow the pods to mature and dry out





PLANT:
autumn/spring

HARVEST:
June-August

GARLIC

Garlic has become a valued ingredient for so many dishes these days that no respectable kitchen should really be without it

A member of the allium family of onions and shallots, though sometimes referred to as a herb, garlic is not difficult to grow and is quite easy to maintain. It can be grown directly in the ground or in containers, so is quite a versatile plant which can be accommodated in whatever space you have available.



Garlic is purchased as bulbs and split into cloves

GROWING

Garlic for planting is bought as a bulb, usually two or three to a pack. The bulbs need to be split into cloves first and planted with the flat bottom part of the clove downwards. Garlic likes a fertile, well-drained soil, so apply plenty of well-rotted manure and organic matter in autumn for spring planting, and in early summer for autumn planting. If you have recently harvested a crop on the same patch which was well manured, garlic could be used as a follow-on. If your soil is acidic, add lime to increase the alkalinity of the soil (up to about 6.5 pH).

Cloves should be planted 5cm (2in) deep, 7.5cm-10cm (3in-4in) apart and 20cm (8in) between rows. Alternatively, you can grow them



Plant cloves 5cm (2in) deep in fertile soil

in 40cm (16in) pots. Some growers prefer to start their garlic cloves off in modular cells to get them off to a good start and then plant them out a few weeks later or even overwinter them for planting out in spring.

LOOKING AFTER YOUR PLANTS

Garlic requires very little maintenance other than watering if the weather turns dry and regular weeding. Even though cold is good where garlic is concerned, if the weather turns very cold, say below -5C (23F), a little mulching around the plants will help protect them, or cover with fleece or a cloche until the weather warms up a little.



Hoe regularly to remove weeds

in the kitchen

FINGERLING POTATOES WITH GARLIC AND SAGE

Cut potatoes longways and place in an ovenproof dish, add olive oil, garlic and sage. Cook at 220°C/425°F/gas mark 7 until potatoes are roasted (use rosemary or thyme in addition to or instead of sage if preferred).



Harvest when the leaves die back. You could plait the leaves to form a string for storage (right)



WATCH OUT FOR

Garlic tends to be relatively problem free but can experience the same problems that also affect other members of the onion family.

■ **ALLIUM LEAF MINER:** This is a relative newcomer, first appearing in the early years of the 21st century in the southern half of the UK, but spreading fast. The fly lays eggs on the plant and the maggots burrow into all parts of the plant. The resulting pupae are brown. Covering with fleece or fine insect netting will keep the flies out.

■ **LEEK MOTH:** The caterpillars of this moth feed on the leaves, causing serious damage to the plant and consequent rotting. Covering with fleece or fine insect netting will keep the moths out. Clear the debris away from around the plant too as adult moths are likely to overwinter there.

■ **ONION WHITE ROT:** This can devastate a crop and is more likely in hot, dry summers with the leaves turning yellow and the base of the bulbs showing fluffy white fungus. Nothing much to be done here other than avoiding growing any of the onion family on the same patch for five years or more as this is a soil-borne disease.

■ **RUST:** This is an unsightly fungal disease which shows itself as orange-red-brown pustules on leaves (below). Unless seriously affected, the bulbs themselves will be perfectly edible.



FAVOURITE VARIETIES

Hardneck types produce large cloves that don't store as well as softneck types which produce more cloves too. Hardneck varieties often produce scapes (flower stalks) which should be cut off – though they are edible and can be used to flavour savoury dishes. Elephant garlic, which belongs to the leek family and is therefore not a true garlic, produces mild-flavoured, very large, whole bulbs which don't divide into cloves.

■ **'ELEPHANT GARLIC':** This aptly named variety of the leek family produces whole bulbs that dwarf garlic bulbs. Suitable for both spring and autumn planting.

■ **'GERMIDOUR':** A purple-streaked softneck variety with a mild flavour. Suitable for spring and autumn planting.

■ **'PROVENCE WIGHT':** This softneck variety produces large bulbs. Suitable for autumn planting.

■ **'RED DUKE':** A hardneck variety which produces purple-tinged bulbs with a strong flavour. Good for autumn planting.

HARVESTING

Garlic is ready for lifting when the leaves begin to turn yellow and start to bend over. Leave the bulbs in too long and the cloves will start to split, though if you lift them too early they will have had insufficient time in the ground to dry out and will not store so well, so monitor closely come harvest time.

Use a fork to loosen the soil around the roots before lifting and then spread the bulbs out on trays to dry for a few days, or under cover if it's wet. If you keep the stalks on you can plait or string them and then hang them up to dry in a cool, frost-free shed.

Top tip

Water at the base of the plant rather than from above to lessen the likelihood of fungal diseases





PARSNIIPS

As a roast vegetable, a mash, grated in salads or one of the essential vegetables in a winter stew, the parsnip is more versatile than is sometimes thought and, with a little care, quite easy to grow

It's possible that parsnips are something of an underrated veg, taking second place it seems to carrots. But a roasted parsnip is as delicious as it gets. Parsnips also require a long growing period, sowing in spring and not lifting until autumn-winter but this shouldn't put you off, as they hardly need any looking after once they have established themselves.

GROWING

Parsnips like a fertile, well-draining soil but not one that has been recently manured, so they do well as a follow-on crop from brassicas, for example, otherwise they will tend to grow legs rather than a single root. They also do best in soil that is relatively stone free. Add a general fertiliser before sowing and if your soil is acidic, add some lime – a pH of 6.5-7 is ideal.

Seeds can be sown directly where they are to grow. Sow seeds in threes 15cm (6in) apart, 1cm (½in) deep with rows 30cm (12in) apart. Cover with a fine layer of soil then water them in using a fine rose attachment to your watering can so as not to flush the seeds out of position.

When the seedlings are tall enough to handle, lift the two weaker ones and discard or use them in a salad.

Germination can be a bit hit or miss with parsnips so some gardeners will start them off in the airing cupboard in a clear polythene bag of moist compost or even on a wet paper towel in a lidded plastic box. If choosing this method, it's important to move

FAVOURITE VARIETIES

■ **'GLADIATOR F1'**: Produces long tapering roots with smooth skins. Good canker resistance. High yielding and good for heavy soils.

■ **'PINNACLE F1'**: A British-bred variety. Slender roots with good resistance to canker, smooth skins and shallow crowns.

■ **'TENDER AND TRUE'**: This is a popular variety which produces large, long roots.

■ **'WHITE GEM'**: An older variety, this produces medium length roots, so is good for shallow soils. It has cream-coloured flesh.



SOW:
March-May

HARVEST:
Oct-Dec

the seedlings to their final bed when the roots are no more than 6mm (¼in). Seed tapes are another option. With these the seeds are already embedded at the required distance and the strip is then placed in the drill. These are certainly less fiddly than sowing in the traditional way.





LOOKING AFTER YOUR PLANTS

There's very little maintenance involved in growing parsnips. Weeding is the main task and watering if the weather turns very dry – irregular watering will result in the roots splitting. If hoeing, you need to be careful not to damage the crowns so hand weeding is usually a better option.

Parsnips can be grown in containers with one part sand and three parts multi-purpose compost, though pots should have a depth of 40cm (16in) to allow for root depth. As with most container plants, water regularly as compost can soon dry out.



Water rows the day before lifting



Harvest roots as required

WATCH OUT FOR

- **CARROT FLY:** Parsnips, like carrots, are prone to this pest if not protected. The carrot fly lays eggs in the soil next to the roots and the emerging larvae burrow into the roots. Cover plants with insect netting.
- **FORKING:** As for carrots, avoid planting in stony soils or those that have been freshly manured.

■ **SPLITTING:** This is a result of irregular watering. Make sure you water parsnips regularly when the weather is dry.

■ **PARSNIP CANKER:** This tends to start at the crown with orange, purple, brown or black blotches. Buying canker-resistant varieties is one solution. Also make sure that you water regularly, that soil is not too rich and avoid any damage to the crown when weeding.



Stony soil means forked roots

Top tip

Parsnip seeds don't keep well so it's always better to use fresh seeds each year

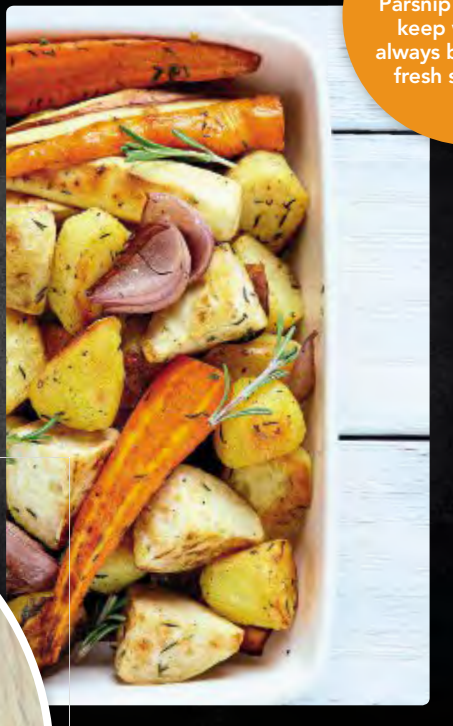
in the kitchen

ROAST VEGETABLES WITH ROSEMARY:

Parsnips are great slowly roasted along with potatoes, carrots, beetroot and garlic. Add a couple of sprigs of rosemary to enhance flavour.

PARSNIP AND CARROT CRISPS:

Slice vegetables finely using a mandolin or vegetable peeler and lay flat on a baking tray. Coat with oil and cook in oven, 15-20 minutes, 160°C/fan140°C/gas 3. Turn half way through. When cooked, sprinkle with fine sea salt and then leave to cool.





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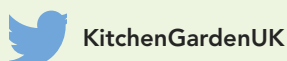
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PLANT:
Mid March – end April, again August – September

HARVEST:
June – October inclusive

POTATOES

Potatoes are fun and rewarding to grow. Here is all the advice you need to make them a success



Always buy quality seed potatoes

You don't need an allotment or large veg patch in which to grow potatoes – you can produce a delicious tasting in no more than a large pot or old compost bag.

SOURCING YOUR SPUDS

It is important to buy fresh new tubers each year from a reliable source since these should be virus free. They can be found in all the larger seed catalogues, from specialists, online or via one of the many potato days which are held around the country.

WHAT NEXT?

Having obtained your seed potatoes you must store them until they are ready to plant. This is done by placing them with their eyes (buds) uppermost in a cell of a module tray, an egg carton or in a seed tray. Next

begins the process of chitting your potatoes.

Chitting is the process of encouraging shoots to develop prior to planting and this gives the crop a head start when in the ground. It is important to keep the trays in a light, frost free (preferably 10C/50F) and dry place until needed. In this way they will produce a number of short, stocky green shoots.

SOIL PREPARATION

Potatoes are not fussy about soils and this makes them much easier to grow than many other crops.

They do prefer a sunny spot and being hungry plants are best grown in soil that was manured the previous autumn or which had garden compost dug in. Avoid land which has just been limed as this can give rise to scab – corky patches on the potato skins.

EARLY, MAINCROP OR LATE?

- Earlies will take around 13-15 weeks from planting to harvest and second earlies 15-17 weeks. These are best lifted as soon as they're ready for that great new potato taste. They are the least prone to potato blight.
- Maincrops will take about 17-20 weeks from planting to harvest. This group is the best for winter storage, but most prone to potato blight.
- Salad potatoes are ideal for serving warm or cold in salads and can be from early or maincrop groups.
- Second cropping: These are potatoes planted (usually in containers or under cover to avoid blight) in early August and for harvesting about 11 weeks later or storing for Christmas.



Chitting should produce short, green shoots



in the kitchen

PATATAS BRAVAS

This quick and easy classic tapas dish is wonderful served as a side dish with many fish, meat or other tapas-style dishes

SERVES 4

FOR THE SAUCE:

- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, chopped

- 227g (8oz) can chopped tomatoes
- 1 tbsp tomato purée
- 2 tsp sweet paprika
- pinch chilli powder
- pinch sugar
- chopped fresh parsley or coriander, to garnish

FOR THE POTATOES

- 900g (2lbs) potatoes
- 2 tbsp olive oil

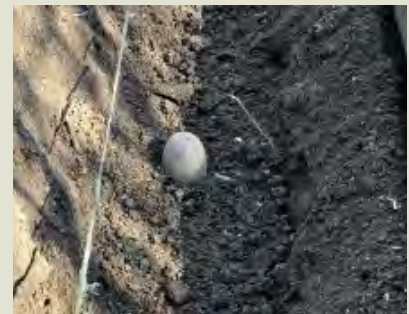
METHOD

1. Heat the oil, add the onion and fry until soft. Add the garlic, tomatoes, tomato purée, paprika, chilli powder, sugar and salt and bring to the boil, stirring. Simmer for 10 minutes until broken down.
2. Cut the potatoes into cubes and pat dry with kitchen paper. Spread over a roasting tin and add the oil, season to taste. Roast at 200C/gas 6 until the potatoes are crisp and golden.
3. Tip the potatoes into dishes and add the reheated sauce. Garnish with the herbs.

STEP BY STEP Planting potatoes



STEP 1. Sprinkle some potato or general fertiliser into the trench prior to planting



STEP 2. Place the tubers carefully in the trench, shoots uppermost



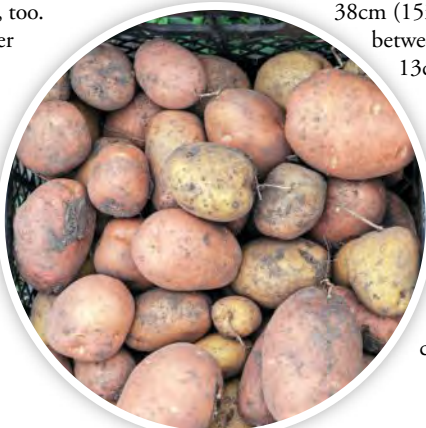
STEP 3. Cover the tubers carefully using a rake or spade

PLANTING OUT

Potatoes are tender plants and while the tubers will often survive the winter in the soil, the tops are quickly killed by frost. It is important therefore not to plant too early. Cold, wet soils such as heavy clay can cause the tubers to sit and rot, so in a wet spring on heavy soil you may wish to delay planting here, too.

It does take time however for the shoots to emerge from the soil and they can be further protected by earthing up (covering with soil) and by using fleece, so that a March or April planting is possible in many areas.

Open trays allow air to circulate around the tubers



To prepare for planting in the open soil sprinkle 56g (2oz) of Growmore or pelleted chicken manure over the bed and rake in, then either dig a trench or, if planting in raised beds, make individual holes for each tuber. Earlies are planted 30cm (12in) apart with 60cm (24in) between rows. Maincrops are planted 38cm (15in) apart with 76cm (30in) between rows. Both are planted 13cm (5in) deep.

If your potatoes suffer from common scab disease (raised corky patches on the skins), you might choose to line the trench with grass clippings or to add a handful to each individual hole. The extra acidity as the clippings break down can

help to deter the disease. It's a good idea to sprinkle some potato fertiliser such as Chempak Organic Potato Fertiliser into the trench prior to planting. Cover the tubers with soil, making sure the shoots remain uppermost and water in well.

EARTHING UP

The process of earthing up or drawing soil over the newly emerging shoots serves several purposes. It protects the tender shoots from frost, encourages longer stems from which more tubers will grow, kills germinating weeds and helps to prevent tubers developing near the surface from turning green and therefore being inedible. Once the shoots are 15-23cm (6-9in) tall simply pull soil up against the stems to leave just the tops of the shoots poking through. Repeat if the shoots grow rapidly and are in danger of frost damage or cover with several layers of fleece.

FAVOURITE VARIETIES

Here are just a few of our favourites:

BLIGHT RESISTANT

'SARPO AXONA': A red-skinned, white-fleshed late maincrop. A great all-rounder, but is a favourite baker.

'SARPO MIRA': Late maincrop. Tubers are less even than 'Axona', but a good multi-purpose spud.

'BLUE DANUBE': Early maincrop with attractive purple skins and white flesh. Good all-rounder.

'SARPO KIFLI': Early maincrop, but described as the 'year-round salad' due to its new potato taste. Good for containers.

'CAROLUS': Pale yellow skin and flesh with a red patch over the eyes. Good blight resistance and a lovely chipper and baker.

EARLIES

'SWIFT' (FIRST EARLY): White skin and flesh. Very fast-maturing, produces large baking tubers if left in the ground.

'JAZZY': (Second early). Large numbers of small, white, waxy tubers. These taste lovely boiled.

'CHARLOTTE': (Second early). Similar to 'Jazzy' but with larger pear-shaped tubers. This variety grows well in containers.



MAINCROP

'LADY BALFOUR':

An early maincrop with attractive pink-tinged, white tubers.

'BLUE BELLE': Early maincrop. A good baker and masher with attractive white, purple-splashed uniform tubers.

SALAD POTATOES

'BELLE DE FONTENAY'

(Early maincrop): Long, yellow waxy tubers with a delicious flavour.

'ANYA' (Second early): Finger-shaped white tubers. Waxy flesh, great hot or cold.



Photo T&M



The foliage of more vigorous varieties may require some support when in pots

GROWING ON

Remove weeds until the leaves cover the soil and smother them and should the weather become dry – or if you have very free-draining soil – give the rows a good soaking to prevent wilting and to encourage the tubers to grow and swell. Before the top growth becomes too dense it is also beneficial to scatter some more general fertiliser or potato fertiliser lightly around the rows.

HARVESTING

Flowering is often cited as a sign that your crop is ready to harvest. However, not all varieties readily produce flowers. If they do then it is a good time to have an exploratory dig around one of the plants to check progress, but you can do this anyway if you think it should be about time for them to be lifted.

As mentioned, early varieties are best lifted and used as soon as ready, however, maincrops can be left in situ until needed. If slugs are a problem, lift and store the crop to reduce losses. Similarly, if blight attacks or is known to be in the area, the haulms should be cut to ground level immediately and the tubers lifted.

If intending to store your crop, leave the tubers on the surface of the soil for a few hours during warm weather for the skins to harden and dry. This will help to deter storage rots.

STORING

Once completely dry, tubers should be stored in a cool, dark place until needed. Preferably, store in hessian sacks or open trays, which allow better air circulation, but remember to prevent any light from reaching the crop.

It is important not to store tubers which are damaged or showing any signs of disease – use these immediately. Check even the sound tubers occasionally, removing any which are rotting. ■



Earthing up offers several advantages

GROWING IN POTS

Purpose-made potato planters are easy to find online or you can use potato bags or even old compost bags. Fill the base with any good multi-purpose compost before placing a single tuber into the centre and covering with 7cm (3in) of compost.

Water well and maintain watering to keep the compost moist (not wet). As the shoots develop, add more compost until the container is full. For the best crops feed your potatoes every other week using your favourite feed – either a potato fertiliser as mentioned above, Growmore or liquid feed, such as a tomato food.



SOW:
March-April inclusive

PLANT:
May (indoors),
June (outside)

HARVEST:
July-October
inclusive

TOMATOES

Tomatoes are easy to grow. Here are some top tips to help you get the best from your crop

No crop is more versatile: tomatoes come in a range of colours, shapes and sizes.

According to variety you can grow them outside in the soil, in containers or baskets, or inside in the greenhouse, mini greenhouse or polytunnel. Everyone has the space for a few tomato plants.

GROWING

Sow your seeds from January to the end of March, but time it to suit the conditions you can provide. Tomatoes can't be moved outside until the frosts are over and, sown too soon and without enough light, they will quickly stretch and the first truss lost.

It's better to delay sowing until March/early April when light levels and temperatures are naturally higher.

Sowing is the same for all tomatoes. Sow into individual 8cm



STEP BY STEP Planting outside

Prepare the soil by digging over to remove any weeds and raking down to a fine consistency. Add 56g (2oz) per sq m/ yd of general fertiliser such as Growmore or pelleted poultry manure a week before planting. Then:

STEP 1. Dig a hole large enough to take the rootball and deep enough to bury the stem to a point just below the seed leaves or deeper if the stem has become stretched.

STEP 2. Firm in and stake securely, tying carefully so as not to damage the stem.

STEP 3. Water thoroughly and continue to water until the plants are established. If any sideshoots have developed on cordon-type plants, remove these as soon as possible.



STEP BY STEP Planting in growing bags



STEP 1. Loosen the compost in the growing bag and make sure it is evenly dispersed.



STEP 2. Cut the bases from three large pots – flower buckets from a supermarket are ideal.



STEP 3. Cut out a circle of plastic and push the base of the pot gently into the compost.



STEP 4. Plant your tomato plants into the pots. Bury the stem to just below the first leaves.



STEP 5. Stake your plant securely and water well. Continue to tie in the plant as it develops.

(3in) pots or cell trays. Use fresh propagation or multi-purpose compost to fill your pots, firm gently by tapping on the bench and water thoroughly. Make a small hole or indentation with your finger in the compost 6mm (¼in) deep. Cover gently and label before watering again and transferring your pots to a heated propagator set to 18-21C (65-71F).

Cover the propagator to conserve heat and moisture. As soon as your plants emerge give them as much light as possible. Once most have germinated (usually seven to 10 days) remove the covering and reduce the temperature to around 15C (60F). This ensures that the plants stay short and stocky.

Once the first true leaf appears the heat can be reduced further and the plants grown on at around 13C (55F) until those that are destined for growing outside can be hardened off (accustomed to outside temperatures).

LOOKING AFTER YOUR PLANTS

You will find that your plants need potting on before they are ready for planting in their fruiting positions and 13cm (5in) pots are ideal for this. Again use a fresh multi-purpose or potting compost and if growing cordon types on a single stem, provide support in the form of a thin cane and some string or soft wire rings. Water regularly as required to keep the compost just moist.

Did you know?

Tomatoes are good for you. They are packed with lycopene, a powerful anti-cancer agent (antioxidant), as well as vitamins C, K and A, a good range of minerals and dietary fibre



These young plants will soon be ready for potting on

Once the first flower opens on the first truss your plants are ready for planting. This should more or less coincide with the end of the frosts in your area if you wish to plant outside. If not, give your plants a dose of liquid fertiliser and keep them inside for a little longer.

PLANTING

You can now plant your young tomatoes into growing bags, pots or self-watering trays in the greenhouse or into the greenhouse or polytunnel border soil, or you may intend to grow them outside. If the latter be aware that the disease tomato blight often attacks

crops outdoors and choose your variety carefully, preferably selecting a blight-resistant one.

Planting in the soil under cover provides the plants with plenty of root room and usually allows them to find adequate supplies of water to reduce their reliance on the watering can. The alternative is to plant in containers and growing bags are very popular. Standard bags don't contain enough compost for fast-growing, thirsty tomatoes and so we prefer to 'plant' bottomless pots (see top of page).



Self-watering pots such as these make summer watering a breeze

TRAINING AND TRIMMING

As mentioned, bush or trailing plants require very little if any training and bush types in particular are ideal for planting in hanging baskets where their long branches can hang over the sides. Cordon types (those growing from a single straight stem) do require regular training and tying in. Sideshoots will appear regularly and these should be removed while still small.

Keep tying in the main shoot to the stake until your plant has set five trusses outside, or once it has reached the eaves of the greenhouse inside. Once this happens pinch out the growing point. The plant will respond by producing new leading shoots, but remove these as they appear.

Once the fruit is ripening on the first truss the leaves are removed to a point just below that truss and this treatment continues as each truss is picked. Removing the leaves in this way allows sunlight and air to the ripening fruit, reducing disease and speeding the ripening process.

HARVESTING

Pick fruit as soon as it is ripe to encourage its neighbours to ripen more quickly. Store in the fridge for up to a week. ■



WATCH OUT FOR

TOMATO BLIGHT: This is a devastating disease which is especially common on outdoor crops. Choose a blight-resistant variety such as 'Crimson Crush' or 'Mountain Magic'.

WHITEFLY: Little white moths feed on the undersides of the leaf. Use sticky yellow traps soon after planting and introduce encarsia biological control as soon as you spot an individual whitefly.

BOTRYTIS (GREY MOULD): Usually more of a problem late in the season. Ventilate the greenhouse well and remove old leaves and fallen/damaged fruit.

RED SPIDER MITE: This tiny pest is hard to spot but gives the leaves a peppered appearance. You may also see fine webbing under the leaves. Introduce phytoseiulus biological control as soon as the problem is seen.

BLOSSOM END ROT: The blossom end of mainly greenhouse-grown fruit turns black and sunken. The rest of the fruit may still be edible. Caused by uneven watering. Water regularly or consider self-watering trays or irrigation.



FAVOURITE VARIETIES



Photo: D T Brown



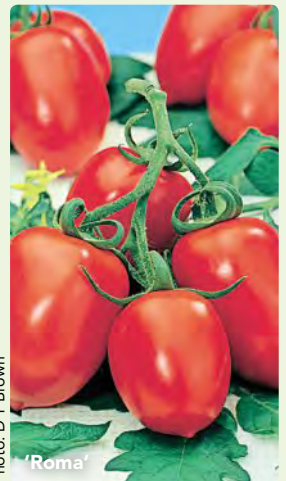
Photo: D T Brown



Photo: T&M



Photo: D T Brown



BEST FOR BASKETS:
'Tumbling Tom': a reliable basket type which produces heavy yields of cherry-sized fruits. Bush type.

BEST FOR BLIGHT:
'Crimson Crush': a medium to large-sized variety with a great flavour and disease resistance. Cordon type.

BEST MEDIUM-SIZED FRUIT:
'Moneymaker': produces medium red fruits. Indoors or out. Cordon.

BEST BEEFSTEAK:
'Marmande': an award-winning variety that fruits early and has great flavour. Semi-bush, which means it may need some support, but little training. Grow indoors or out.

BEST CHERRY TOM:
'Sungold F1': the very sweet orange fruits are produced in abundance. Cordon type. Indoors or out.

BEST FOR SAUCES:
'Roma': an old Italian variety that is great for making pasta and pizza sauces and soups. Indoors or out. Available from Seeds of Italy, D T Brown

in the kitchen TOMATO SAUCE

If you have a glut of tomatoes why not make them into a sauce? Simply cook finely chopped garlic gently in some oil to infuse the oil well with the garlic. Add finely chopped onion, oregano and chopped tomatoes. Season with salt and pepper and simmer for 15-20 minutes then allow to cool, bag up in small portions and freeze.





SOW:
March-August

HARVEST: May-
September

SUMMER RADISHES

Fast growing, requiring little space and never failing to bring a bit of zing to the kitchen table, summer radishes are a must-grow vegetable

The radish is actually a member of the brassica family (cabbages, cauliflowers and Brussels sprouts) and has been cultivated for centuries, arriving in England at the beginning of the 16th century. It is often one of the first vegetables that children are given to grow as it germinates so quickly, is a colourful vegetable and is easy to pick. It has long been a key ingredient in basic salads but in recent years its use in the kitchen has become much more adventurous.

GROWING

Grow radishes in a sunny site if possible, or at least light shade if planting during the summer months. Radishes like a fertile soil but if your soil is acidic, add a little lime prior to sowing.

Unlike some seeds, radishes are easy to handle between thumb and forefinger. Sow them 2.5cm (1in) apart, 1cm (½in) deep and in drills 15cm (6in) apart. To get a steady supply, sow successively at fortnightly intervals from mid-March to mid-July, though if growing under cover, you can extend the sowing season by a few weeks at either end. Sowing later than July may result in plants bolting however. Seedlings take about 10 days to germinate and are ready for picking in four weeks or so.

LOOKING AFTER YOUR PLANTS

Radishes require very little aftercare, apart from weeding and watering, though if some seedlings emerge too close together just thin them out,

leaving the remaining ones sufficient space to expand. If watering is irregular, you will find that the roots are liable to splitting, so make sure they do not dry out during warm spells.

HARVESTING

The leaves of radishes can be used in salads on a cut-and-come-again basis. The roots will reach maturity four weeks or so after sowing. The important thing is to pick them when they reach the appropriate size for their variety – leave them too long and they will turn woody and taste bitter. What you're looking for is a radish that is both moist inside but has retained its peppery sharpness, unlike some of the ones you buy from supermarkets that can be bland and watery. Radishes can be picked by gently tugging them out of the soil.

GROWING IN POTS

If you don't have a lot of space, consider growing radishes in pots at least 10cm (4in) deep (check the requirements of the variety) using multi-purpose compost. Sow seeds 2.5cm (1in) apart, 1cm (½in) deep and keep them well watered. Another method is to use growing bags – the kind you would use for tomatoes.



Top tip

Grow mint near your radishes to deter flea beetle



INTERSOWING

Because radishes grow so quickly they can be intersown (or intercropped) with slower-growing vegetables such as onions, parsnips or carrots. This makes best use of ground that would otherwise be empty and also helps to indicate where the adjacent row of slower-growing crops will emerge.

WATCH OUT FOR

SLUGS AND SNAILS: These can be a real nuisance and it's very difficult to keep your radishes completely slime monster free. There is a range of methods you can use to protect your plants such as copper tape, beer traps, nematodes, crushed egg shells, porridge oats and organic slug pellets.



FLEA BEETLE: The tell-tale signs are holes in the leaves of your plants which can check growth, more serious with seedlings. You can protect your plants with insect netting such as Enviromesh and waving yellow sticky cards (commercially available) which will catch the 'fleas' as they fly up when they are disturbed.



FAVOURITE VARIETIES

Because radishes don't require a lot of space and grow so quickly, why not indulge yourself by trying out a range of varieties?

■ **'AMETHYST':** This globe-shaped variety's attractive purple roots contrast with a crisp white flesh inside. A good one for pots and containers. (Mr Fothergill's)

■ **'CHERRY BELLE':** A round, mild-flavoured variety, quick to mature with bright red skins. (The Organic Gardening Catalogue, D T Brown, Simply Seed)

■ **'FRENCH BREAKFAST 3':** This variety continues to be a popular choice, producing long, cylindrical roots, with crisp texture. Crimson red roots with white tips. (Mr Fothergill's)

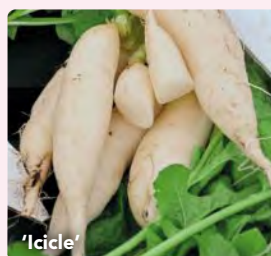
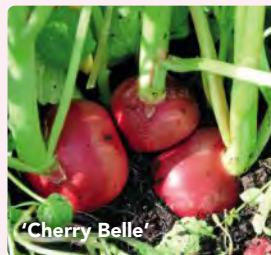
■ **'ICICLE':** This heirloom variety produces long, tapering, white-skinned roots. Looks like a winter radish but is for spring and summer sowing. (Kings Seeds)

■ **'LUTEA':** For something different, this new arrival from the Czech Republic is yellow skinned, and oval shaped when picked young. (Real Seeds)

■ **'PINK SLIPPER':** This oval-shaped variety produces pink radishes with crunchy white flesh. Less peppery than other varieties. (Plants of Distinction)

■ **'SCARLET GLOBE':** This is a popular variety producing vibrant scarlet roots and crisp, white flesh. (Suttons, D T Brown)

■ **'WHITE BEAUTY':** Distinctive white, round radishes with a mild flavour. (Simply Seed)



in the kitchen

RADISH WITH CHEESE ON TOAST:

A simple snack. Toast bread of your choice, add grated cheese and top with sliced radishes and chopped cucumber. Add flat-leaved parsley as a garnish. Salt and pepper to taste.



ROCKET

Something of a standard addition to salads these days, rocket has a unique flavour. We show how easy it is to cultivate, whether growing it in the open ground or in containers



SOW:
April-September

HARVEST:
June-December

GROWING IN POTS

Like other salad leaf plants, rocket can be grown in a range of containers. You can even plant rocket in the compost left in growing bags at the end of the tomato season, but they can also be grown in pots or window boxes to make an attractive, leafy display. Ensure the compost is 10cm (4in) deep and don't let it dry out as this may well cause your plants to bolt.



Gone are the days when salads were made up of a few 'Little Gem' lettuce leaves next to the usual suspects: cucumber, tomato, spring onion and beetroot. Nothing wrong with that but these days most don't seem to be happy unless their salad plate has an array of different flavours and colours, including oriental mustards, 'Lollo Rossa' lettuce, watercress and, of course, rocket. But rocket is not just for salads – use it to make pesto, and add it to pasta dishes, stir-fries and soups too.

GROWING

If you're sowing rocket outside, it's best to wait until April but you can extend sowing October though to March if you have a greenhouse, polytunnel or cold frame. For germination the seeds need a minimum temperature of 7C (45F). Sow seeds 5mm (½in) deep in fine soil or compost. If your soil is stony, you can give it a top dressing of multi-purpose compost to give the seeds a good start or simply make the drill a little bit deeper and sprinkle in a layer of compost.

Aim to sow thinly – ideally, 3cm (1½in) between seeds and then thin seedlings to 15cm (6in) apart when big enough to pick. Rows should be 30cm (12in) apart. Don't worry if you sow some too close together as young seedlings can be picked to make space for others and used as a garnish or in salads.

Rocket grows best in partial shade and in moisture retentive soil. As it is a member of the brassica family, don't sow where brassicas have

been growing in the previous two years. Sow successively every two weeks – you'll find that seed packets of rocket usually contain quite generous quantities.

LOOKING AFTER YOUR PLANTS

There's not too much you need to do with looking after rocket. Weed between rows and the plants themselves, and water during dry spells. You can also add a mulch of organic matter between rows to help conserve moisture in the soil. If growing rocket outside, cover with a cloche from autumn onwards.

HARVESTING

Rocket can be ready as quickly as four weeks after sowing depending on conditions. With rocket you have the option to use it as a cut-and-come-again crop or to pick plants entire. If plants start to flower, nip the buds so that they continue to produce leaves. Alternatively, let them flower – not only are the flowers edible, they have a beautiful star-shaped formation, and they are a great plant for attracting garden-friendly insects and butterflies.





Top tip

Feeding your plants with a fertiliser high in nitrogen will encourage vigorous growth so that there is too much foliage for flea beetles to keep up with



If you let your plants flower they will self-seed, providing you with a new crop the following year

in the kitchen

ROCKET AND BASIL PESTO:

Add rocket leaves, basil leaves, crushed garlic, pine nuts, olive oil, lemon juice and finely grated cheese to a food processor and work it until the mixture turns into a thick paste. Add to pasta, salads, or use as a sandwich spread.



FAVOURITE VARIETIES

Wild rocket varieties (*Diplotaxis*) have a stronger peppery flavour than standard, sweeter rocket varieties (*Eruca sativa*).

■ **'APOLLO'**: This is a fast maturing, standard variety with a peppery flavour. More suited to cut-and-come-again and for eating when the leaves are still young. (D T Brown, Mr Fothergill's, T & M)

■ **'SKYROCKET'**: A strong peppery flavour – a standard variety but having some of the punch of wild rocket. Slow to bolt and high yielding. (D T Brown)

■ **'VOYAGER'**: This is a wild rocket variety, with dark green 'oak-leaved' edges. Slow to bolt. (Unwins, Marshalls)

■ **'WASABI'**: This is a new variety and hot. Can be grown as a cut-and-come-again or to full maturity. (Exclusive to T & M)

WATCH OUT FOR

■ **FLEA BEETLE**: These can be a nuisance, creating holes in the leaves and impacting on seedlings in particular. Protect your plants with insect netting such as Enviromesh. Waving yellow sticky cards (available from garden centres) above the crop will catch the pests as they jump up.

■ **BOLTING**: If watering is irregular, rocket has a tendency to bolt so don't let the soil or compost dry out. Keep these moist but don't overdo the watering either as this will reduce the flavour of your leaves.



SWEET CORN

Sweetcorn is a great crop to grow and picking it straight from the plant provides for a far sweeter, more succulent edible than you can ever expect from the supermarket

SOW:
April-May

HARVEST:
July-October



Both sweetcorn kernels and whole cobs freeze really well and retain much of their sweetness. Blanch cobs for 4-5 minutes in boiling water and cool prior to freezing.



Sow sweetcorn in deep cells such as Rootainers or loo roll inners



Plant sweetcorn in blocks to aid pollination

Unlike wine, sweetcorn doesn't improve with age. The longer it's left from plot to pot (or eaten raw if you prefer), the more its sugars turn to starch, making it far less delectable to the palate. Providing you have a little space to spare for it on your veg patch, there is no reason not to grow it and enjoy the delicious harvest you can expect.

GROWING

We prefer to start ours off undercover in Rootainers (loo roll inners are good too) filled with multi-purpose compost in late March-early April, one per cell. Sow to a depth of 2.5cm (1in) with a temperature of 18-20C (64-68F) for germination in 7-10 days, after which a temperature of 13C (55F) or above will suffice.

Plant out when the risk of frost is past in early June. By this time the plants should be 10-15cm (4-6in)



high. If sowing directly outside, leave it till late spring or early summer the further north you go. Prior to sowing or planting them out, rake in some general fertiliser such as chicken pellets or Growmore. For plants started off under cover, harden them off (acclimatise them to outdoor conditions) by leaving them outside in the day and bringing them in at night before planting out for good.

PLANTING

When sowing directly into the soil or planting out, sweetcorn needs to be arranged in blocks, 45cm (18in) apart rather than in single rows. This helps pollination, with the wind blowing pollen down and across from the 'male' flowers ('tassels') to the awaiting female flowers ('silks') below, which will eventually form the cobs. To facilitate pollination you can also tap the male flowers.

Avoid growing more than one variety as cross-pollination can reduce the sweetness of the cobs. If you're on an allotment plot, it may be best to confer with your close allotment neighbours and see if you can agree on the same variety. ➤

FAVOURITE VARIETIES

■ **'LARK F1'**: A mid-season, tendersweet variety. Good performer in cooler conditions. (D T Brown, Kings)

■ **'MINIPOP F1'**: Produces 5-6 cobs per plant, 10cm (4in) in length. No pollination is required to produce cobs. Perfect variety for stir-fries and salads. (SimplySeed, Dobies)

■ **'MIRAI PICNIC F1'**: A supersweet variety producing cobs up to 15cm (6in) in length, so smaller than usual. Can be eaten raw (as it is in Japan), or good lightly steamed or barbecued. (Suttons, D T Brown)

■ **'SWIFT F1'**: Good for an early harvest, this supersweet, robust variety produces very sweet and succulent cobs. (Suttons, Kings, Mr Fothergills)



A male flower at the top of the plant



Cob and emerging silk on the lower stem

Mini sweetcorn

If you prefer, you could always grow some baby sweetcorn for use in stir-fries. Sow these in the same way as sweetcorn but they can be planted in a line, 20-30cm (8-12in) apart and 45cm (18in) between rows. These are picked pre-pollination, just as the silk tassels appear.



LOOKING AFTER YOUR PLANTS

It's best to grow sweetcorn in a sunny, sheltered spot, especially as their roots are shallow and strong winds may well uproot them. Otherwise, be prepared to do some staking. The soil for sweetcorn needs to be fertile and moisture retentive, so in the autumn prior to planting the plot will benefit from the addition of organic matter and well-rotted manure. Add a mulch around the plants as they grow too to keep the soil moist.

Throughout the growing period, make sure the plants are well watered, especially when the cobs start to develop, and weed carefully around the base and in between.

WATCH OUT FOR

MICE: These can help themselves to newly planted seed so this is one of the reasons for starting plants off under cover where they can be protected more easily.

BIRDS: These can be a nuisance, pecking at the young plants or the cobs themselves later on, so netting your sweetcorn will help.

SLUGS AND SNAILS: Inevitable that these slimy garden monsters will want a piece of the action so be prepared using your preferred method of prevention.

in the Kitchen

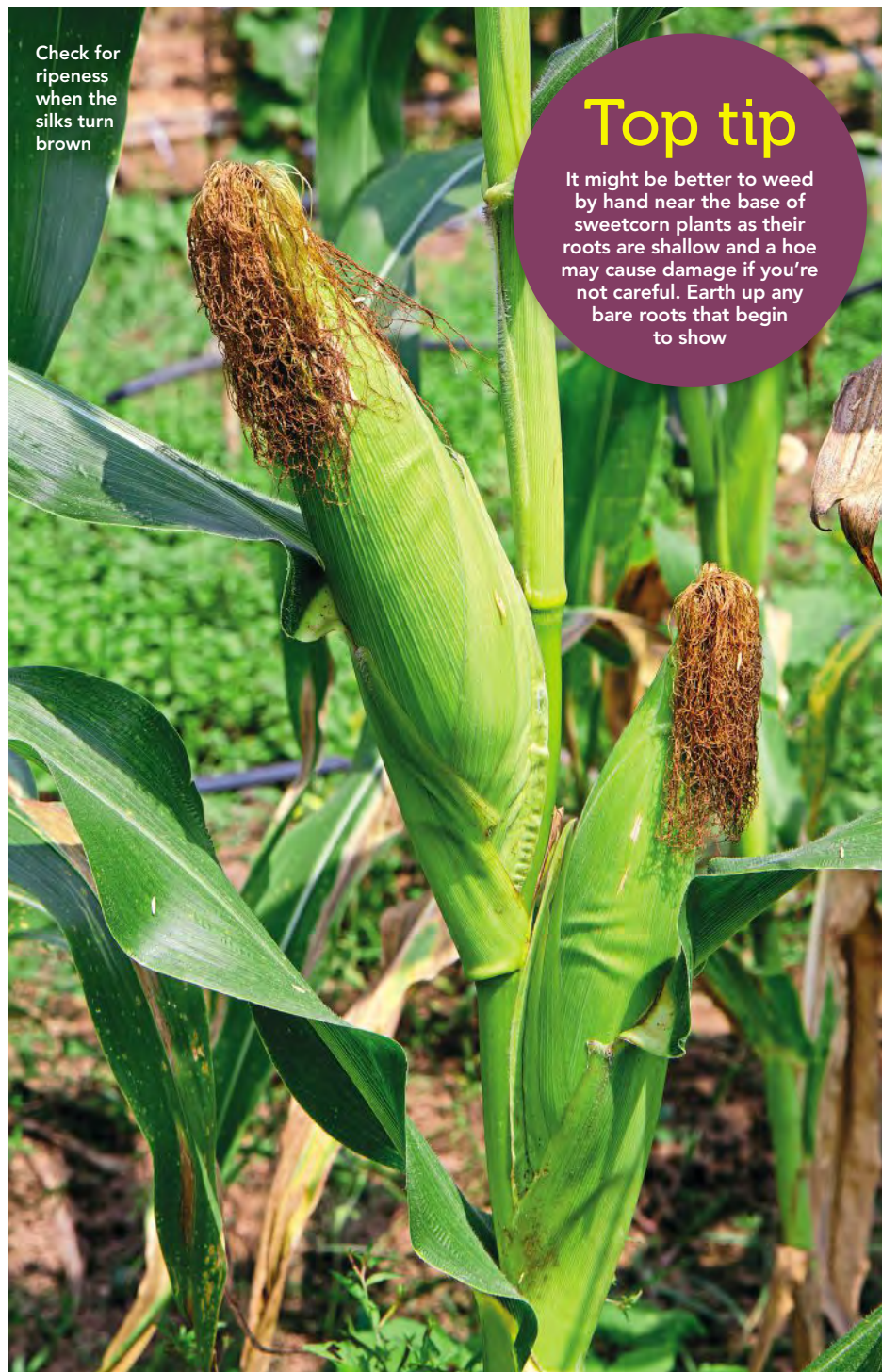
GRILLED SWEETCORN WITH CHILLI, CORIANDER AND LIME

Mix fresh coriander, finely chopped red chilli and lime zest with a knob of butter. Grill the sweetcorn gently until cooked then spread the butter over the cobs, adding a squeeze of lime. Serve with mashed potatoes and peas.



HARVESTING

The main harvesting period is August-September, though you can get some earlier or later depending on when you sowed them. The first sign they are ready is when the female silks turn brown. To test further, peel back the husk of each cob a little and test one of the kernels inside by digging your thumbnail in. If it emits a milky substance, the cob is ready – if the liquid is clear it's not ready yet and if it's more like a paste then it has gone past. All you need to do is twist the cob downwards making sure that it snaps off at the join between cob and stem. ■



Check for ripeness when the silks turn brown

Top tip

It might be better to weed by hand near the base of sweetcorn plants as their roots are shallow and a hoe may cause damage if you're not careful. Earth up any bare roots that begin to show

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2017



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Tulip Red Riding Hood Low growing long lasting flowers. Very long hood is perfect for planting in rock gardens and at the front and sides in any garden. Plant March/April. Height 18cm (7"). 25 bulbs 93028 £2.20	Tulip Pastel Double Mixed Magnificent double clusters of yellows and pinks. Height 30cm (12"). 25 bulbs 93155 £3.65	Tulip Rocky Mixed Light Low growing lilies with light blooms. Ideal for rock gardens and borders. Prefers sun and partial shade. Flowers March/April. Height 30cm (12"). 25 bulbs 93071 £3.65
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Tulips should be planted September to December for April and May flowering.
Bulb size 10/11cm
Last orders 15 August 2017
DELIVERY DATE end August for all bulbs

Autumn extras

Electric Windowill Propagator The Super 7 is ideal for starting your seed on a window sill. Measures 70cm (27") x 13.5cm (5") x 14.5cm (6") with a power rating of 1.3 watts. The carbon fibre heating element pierces with 7 mini-ventilator clear tops and trays. £37.40	Malch Mats Retains moisture and warmth in the soil, which also protects crops from soil and dry winds. Slugs and is ideal for strawberry plants. Use year after year. 10 mats 45999 £6.25 20 mats 46000 £8.65
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1 pack of 32 cells 46063 £12.95
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Autumn extras

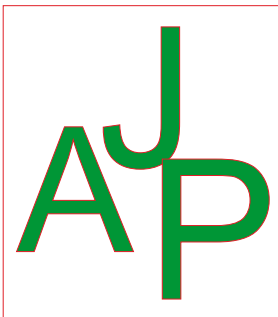
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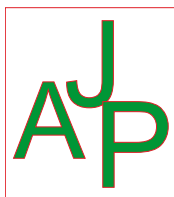


GROWERS

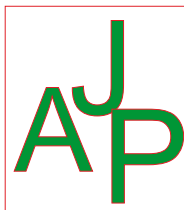


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