

A man with glasses and a blue shirt is crouching in a garden, holding a radish. The background is a lush garden with various plants.

GrowVeg

The Beginner's Guide to
Easy Vegetable Gardening

BENEDICT VANHEEMS

Editor of GrowVeg.com

HARVEST
Free Herbs
FOR LIFE

PLANT A
TOWER OF
Strawberries

GROW
YOUR OWN
Jack-o'-lantern

ABRIDGED EDITION

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Secrets to SUCCESS

Growing a great garden isn't difficult, but there are a few things to bear in mind if you want to maximize your results. Here are the essentials that will help you to get the most — and best — from the space you have.

Simple Steps to Boost Growth

You're keen to get growing. But before you even think about reaching for that spade, it's worth getting a grip on a few of the basics. A few moments now could save you a lot of hassle later on.

THE RIGHT SITE

SUN. Let's start with where to grow. Most vegetables need at least some direct sunshine to ensure steady, healthy growth. Watch where the sun falls throughout the day and make a note of those areas that get the most. Fruit needs up to eight hours of direct sunshine a day, root vegetables perform best with a minimum of six hours, while most leafy vegetables are happy with four.

SHELTER. Pick a spot that is sheltered from the prevailing wind but with some airflow. Semipermeable windbreaks such as hedges filter wind rather than stop it entirely, avoiding

the damaging eddies that solid barriers can cause. You can also use taller, sturdier crops such as corn to shelter lower-growing vegetables, but make sure they don't plunge the plants they are protecting into too much shade.

Frost pockets, where cold air collects, are usually found at the bottom of a slope or in shady corners. Areas where frost lingers like this may harm seedlings, delay growth, and kill fruit blossoms, so are best avoided.

WATER ACCESS. Consider how you will water your plants, especially if your climate is very dry. Using rainwater, collected in rain barrels/water butts, is the most environmentally friendly way to water crops, but check if that's allowed in your area. If time isn't on your side or you have a big garden, then a drip-irrigation system can help maintain consistent soil moisture.



From the Ground Up

Any thriving garden starts with good soil. Love and understand your soil, and gardening success will follow. Almost all vegetables prefer the same soil: one that retains enough moisture to give them all the water they need, but drains freely enough that the roots are never sitting in waterlogged ground. The perfect soil has an open, almost spongy consistency that gives a little when stepped on without becoming compacted.

JUST ADD ORGANIC MATTER

Whether your soil is sticky clay or sandy or something in between, the same approach applies to improving soil structure and fertility: add well-rotted organic matter. What you add depends on what you can get hold of. This could be beautifully crumbly garden-made compost, fully matured manure, leaf mold, or some other composted material such as bark chips. There's magic in the muck, and in time regular applications of organic matter can turn what was an unpromising site into one with rich, dark soil that's full of life.

Prepare the ground for planting outside of the growing season, from mid-autumn to late winter. Lay on organic matter nice and thick — at least 1 inch (about 3 cm) deep, preferably twice that. You can then fork this into the soil to incorporate it. Forking helps break up clumps and loosens soil enough for weeds and their roots to be removed. Preparing the ground well in advance of sowing or planting gives it time to settle down. Rake it level in spring, ready for the first crops of the season.

EASY ON THE DIGGING

After the initial preparation, you may want to ease off the digging. Compelling scientific evidence suggests that regular digging does more harm than good. Soil is alive with earthworms and countless microorganisms, including nematodes, bacteria, and fungi, which plants depend on to extract nutrients from the soil. Repeated digging disrupts this subterranean world, tearing apart the delicate network with consequences for plant growth.

By easing off the digging, soil structure develops naturally. The thriving worm population that results will do the digging for you as the wiggly critters go about aerating the soil with their burrows. There are fewer weeds, too, because weed seeds remain buried and all that organic matter keeps them in the dark, inhibiting their germination.

In future years, aim to lay organic matter onto the soil surface and leave it there. Some digging may still be necessary — to dig out perennial weeds or to harvest potatoes, for example — but for the most part, your spade can stay hung up in the shed.


MULCH YOUR WAY TO GOOD SOIL

Mulches are layers of material placed on top of the soil surface or onto the potting mix in containers. Mulches of organic matter are biodegradable and need to be replaced regularly, but they release nutrients and improve soil structure as they rot down. Nonbiodegradable materials such as landscape fabric, river rock, and gravel last a long time and can

look decorative, but they won't contribute to soil fertility or structure.

All mulches help suppress weeds, but in the edible garden the organic mulches rule. As well as offering the benefits already mentioned, they encourage useful soil organisms such as ground beetles, deter some pests, and buffer roots from extreme cold and heat.



A close-up photograph of a person's hand, with fingers slightly dirty from soil, carefully placing a small seed into a black plastic seedling tray. The tray is filled with dark, rich soil. The background is blurred, showing more of the soil and the tray.

Get a jump on the
growing season by
starting seeds indoors.

Sowing Direct

To “sow direct” means simply to sow seeds where they are to grow, usually outdoors into prepared ground.

Check that the soil is warm enough beforehand. The calendar may say it is spring, but if the soil is still cold and wet, seeds will only rot, whatever the seed packet says. Soil should be warm and moist, and crumble between your fingertips. This is your cue to begin sowing.

Break up any clumps in the soil and remove any rocks. Rake the soil in one direction then across in another to provide an even finish and a fine, crumbly texture. Mark out a furrow in which to sow seeds using a stick or the corner of a hoe. A string line can help you achieve straight, evenly spaced rows. Water along the furrow if it is dry, then sow the seeds thinly along the bottom before covering them to the recommended depth.

Starting Seeds Indoors

Sowing seeds indoors — in a greenhouse, in a sunroom, on a bright windowsill, or under

grow lights — is a fantastic way to get a head start on the growing season while it’s still cold outside. In regions with a short growing season, early sowings are essential to give tender crops such as tomatoes enough time to reach maturity.

Sow larger seeds such as pumpkin individually into their own pots. Smaller seeds can be sown into small pots or plug trays in pinches of two or more seeds, then thinned once they have sprouted to leave the strongest seedling in each plug. Many vegetables may also be planted out as clusters of seedlings.

Use fresh, clean potting mix. Seed-starting mix contains fewer nutrients, which is best for more delicate seedlings, but a quality all-purpose mix is fine for most large seeds. A seedling heat mat, though by no means essential, can speed up germination and is especially useful for starting tender crops. Grow lights can be useful for early sowings made in late winter when natural light levels are still weak.

A HELPING HAND

Getting planting dates correct is important, but it can be confusing. Some plants such as onions and peppers must be started indoors early in spring to ensure they have a long enough growing season. Others like squash are fast growers best started indoors toward the end

of spring so they are still a manageable size when transplanted. If you are unsure when to sow and plant, check the free plant-growing guides on GrowVeg.com, which use data from your local weather station to calculate the best time to plant.

TLC: Time, Love, and Care

We all need TLC to thrive, and plants are no different. Keep crops watered, fed, and free of competing weeds. Give them the support they need, and protect them from pests and weather extremes. Devote a little time and attention to your plants and they'll respond with bountiful harvests.

WATER

Watering can't be hurried. It is better to water really thoroughly once or twice a week than to do a daily rushed job. The "little and often" approach encourages roots to grow close to the soil surface, making them more reliant on you. When you provide more water less frequently, roots stretch deeper into the soil so plants become more resilient and better able to cope in drier weather.



TRANSPLANTING

Starting seedlings and young plants indoors protects them from the cold and wind. But before moving plants outside, they first need to be acclimatized, a process known as hardening off.

To transplant seedlings, dig a hole large enough to accommodate the rootball. Fill the hole with water if the soil is dry, then let drain. This creates a cool, moist environment around the roots. Support the top of the pot with one hand and turn it upside down. Squeeze the sides with the other hand and gently shake to detach the rootball. Slide it out of the pot and into the waiting hole, filling the soil back around the rootball and firming it in with your fingertips as you fill. Poke seedlings from plug trays by pushing them up from the drainage holes with a pencil. Give the planting area a final watering to further settle the soil.



The time you spend watering gives you a chance to inspect plants for pests and other potential problems that may arise.

While Mother Nature may do most of your watering for plants in the ground, plants in containers can't seek out more water when the potting mix is dry, so they will need more attention from you.

Water early in the morning or later in the afternoon or evening so water doesn't evaporate before it has a chance to filter down to the roots. Aim water close to the base of the plant and avoid splashing the foliage and wasting water.

Drip-irrigation systems or soaker hoses laid at ground level deliver water exactly where it's needed — at the roots — and can save you time. But watering by hand with a garden hose or a watering can provides an ideal opportunity to inspect your fruits and vegetables as you water, determining which plants need attention and acting quickly on outbreaks of pests or diseases.

FEED

As your plants grow, they will use up the nutrients contained within the soil or potting mix. Don't let them go hungry! Add organic matter regularly, both in preparation for each new growing season and then as a top-up mulch during summer to help replace the nutrients crops have consumed. Some especially greedy vegetables, such as tomatoes, benefit from a boost of fertilizer, while all container-grown crops need regular feeding once the nutrients contained within the potting mix are exhausted.

Synthetic fertilizers are like junk food for plants and are best avoided. Organic fertilizers, on the other hand, provide slower-acting nutrients that encourage robust and healthy growth — the equivalent of a healthy, balanced diet. An organic feed containing a balance of



Hand weed in between crops.



Use row covers to protect plants from flying insect pests.



Invite beneficial insects. This ladybug larva is good news for pest control.

the main plant nutrients — nitrogen (N) for foliage, phosphorus (P) for root growth, and potassium (K) for flower and fruit development — together with “trace” elements for general health is suitable for most crops. Feed fruiting vegetables such as peppers with fertilizer that is higher in potassium to encourage those all-important fruits.

WEED

Remove weeds when you see them, and always before they set seed and spread. New vegetable gardens require more weeding, but the weeds will begin to tail off as your garden establishes itself, so persevere! Use a sharp hoe to sever weeds at ground level or pull out weeds around shallow-rooted crops, being careful not to disturb the plants you want to keep. Perennial weeds like bindweed and dandelion should be dug out to remove their roots, which can resprout if left in the ground.

Mulches help suppress weeds. Add them around all fruits and vegetable plants, but take care not to swamp seedlings. Dried grass clippings make a convenient and readily available mulch during the growing season.

PROTECT

Keeping plants cozy is important at the start of the season and can extend harvests at the end. Lay row covers or horticultural fleece over just-planted vegetables to help them make the transition from indoors to out. It’s also a great idea to place clear plastic covers in the garden bed a week or two before sowing or planting to help warm up the soil. This also encourages weed seeds to germinate; hoe those weed seedlings to leave a clean bed, and you are one step ahead.

In hot climates, the pounding summer sun can be more of a problem. Set up shade cloth or netting to protect vulnerable crops, including cool-season vegetables like leafy greens and lettuce.

Pests have a habit of crashing the party just as it’s reached full swing! Barriers such as row covers and insect mesh can prevent them from compromising your hard-won harvests. Gardens that include flowers and habitat for beneficial bugs, birds, and beasties such as toads will help keep pests in check, avoiding any need for harmful pesticides.



Dependable FAVORITES

Here are some of the best popular and reliable crops to grow on their own or as part of a delicious and diverse kitchen garden.

Your First Vegetable Patch!

Breaking ground on your very first vegetable garden stirs a mix of emotions. Raw excitement, wonder, curiosity, trepidation even . . . it's all there as you get started and dig in. Clichéd as it sounds, you never stop learning, and growing your own food is definitely a journey, not a destination.

If you select an open site that receives at least some direct sunshine, and you take the time and effort to prepare the ground properly, then you can look forward to plenty of genuinely impressive harvests.

Gardening is as much about confidence as it is skill. When planting your first garden,

ease in gently. Start small with just a couple of crops, then add more as your confidence grows alongside your plants. The crops listed on the following pages 14 and 15 are what I consider to be some of the tastiest easy-to-grow vegetables. All of them are relatively undemanding and promise a hefty haul from a relatively small area.

I'm excited for you! Once you pick or pluck your first harvest and see how good it tastes, your culinary mind will be blown. Honestly, you're in for a treat!

BEN'S TOP 10

Help, where do I begin?! Try these easygoing veggies.



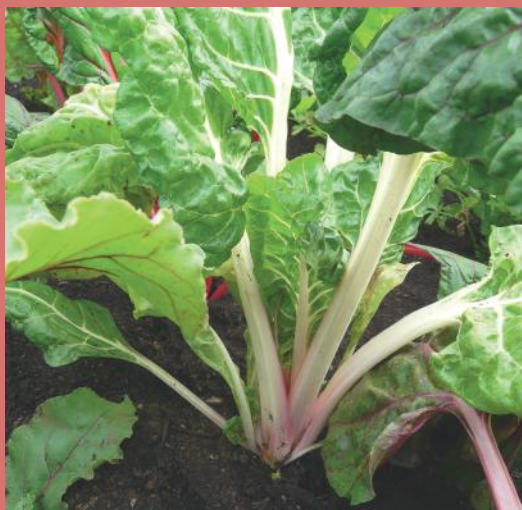
1 ZUCCHINI/COURGETTE
Prolific fruits



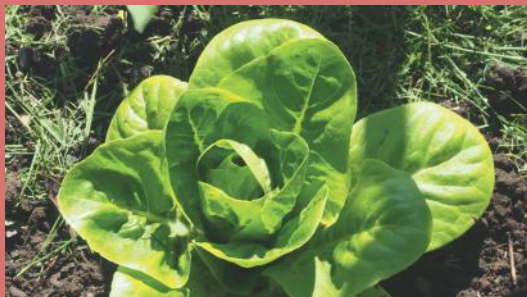
2 BUSH/DWARF BEANS
No need for supports



3 POTATOES
Lots of spuds from fail-safe plants



4 SWISS CHARD
Plenty of leaves over a long period



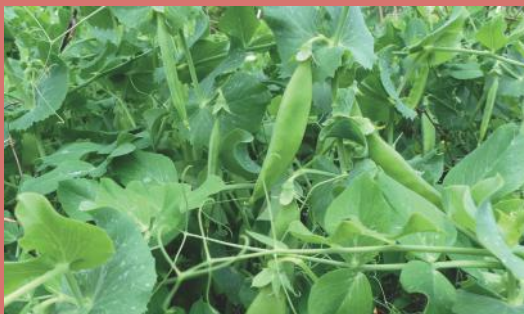
5 LETTUCE
Quick-growing salad staple



6 ONIONS
Trouble-free bulbs



7 CELERY
Steady supply of versatile stems



8 PEAS
Great for the kids!



9 BEETS/BEETROOT
Delicious roasted roots



10 KALE
Hardy winter staple

Plant Your First Garden

Winter or early spring is the logical time to begin a new garden, but since there's always something to plant, get started as soon as you can. The goal is to prepare the ground ahead of planting, which begins as soon as the soil has warmed up enough. Dig in lots of organic matter, such as garden compost or well-rotted manure.

Tending a vegetable garden isn't a plant-and-forget job. Stay on top of weeds, water in dry weather, and keep those harvests coming by having young plants in the wings ready to take the stage as soon as old crops exit.



SUPPLIES

- Vegetable seeds
- Plug trays and pots
- All-purpose potting mix
- Twiggy branches or garden stakes with netting (for peas)

TIMINGS

- **Sow indoors:** From late winter
- **Sow outside:** From early spring
- **Harvest:** Year-round, in some locations

BEN'S TOP TIP

Pick prolific vegetables such as zucchini/courgette and chard regularly to encourage them to produce even more.



1 Rake and wait for warmth. Rake your soil level to a fine, crumbly texture. Begin sowing as soon as the soil has warmed up; for most crops this means at least 50°F (10°C).



2a Direct-sow root veggies, such as radishes, in prepared soil. Mark out a furrow and sow the seeds very thinly before covering back over. Or . . .



2b Start other vegetables in plug trays for precise planting. Starting crops like lettuce in plug trays reduces seed waste. Young plants can then be spaced out precisely, so there's no need to thin excess seedlings.



3 Support floppy crops. Some vegetables, such as peas, need supports to stop them from flopping over and smothering their neighbors. Twiggy branches, netting, or wire mesh work well.

WEED YOUR VEGETABLE GARDEN little and often. Hoe or pull weeds as you come across them, and never let them produce seeds or they will quickly spread!



Keep 'Em Coming

Your first foray into tending a vegetable garden is sure to give you the grow-it-yourself bug! Bask in the warm glow of success — briefly, though, because as soon as your first vegetables are settled in, it's time to consider the next batch. These succession plantings (also known as follow-on or second crops) will provide fresh pickings throughout the second half of the growing season and on into winter. Resilient reliables such as leeks, kale, and winter-hardy varieties of lettuce should keep the party going.

THE NEXT STEP

Follow early vegetables with second crops. For example, you could follow early varieties of potato with kale.

SECOND CROPS	SOW IN PLUG TRAYS	PLANT INTO THE GROUND
Kale	Late spring	Midsummer
Winter lettuce	Summer	Summer to early autumn
Leeks	Spring	Early summer
Carrots	Best sown direct	Summer
Bush/dwarf beans	Early to midsummer	Summer
Asian greens	Late summer	Late summer to autumn

Succession Planting



1 Harvest the previous crop, then top-dress the soil with organic matter or organic fertilizer such as these chicken manure pellets. Rake level.



2 Plant your second crop. These kale plants are following on from an earlier crop of salad potatoes. They will provide pickings right through until next spring.

3 When autumn arrives, protect vegetables and encourage them to crop for longer using a warming row cover such as this garden fleece.







Raised Beds Rock!

WHAT'S THE POINT OF A RAISED BED?

Why go to the bother of constructing and filling a raised bed when you can easily grow your veggies at ground level? It's a fair question, so let me convince you.

Well-ordered raised beds help divide growing areas into manageable chunks. It's a simple way to make vegetable gardening a little less daunting. And, I'm sure you'll agree, they look pretty neat, too.

But there's more to it than that. The raised soil level means beds drain better and warm up quicker in spring so you can get growing that little bit sooner. They are easier to cover to protect against pests or the cold; they make gardening more accessible because there's less distance to bend; and by designing beds so you can reach the middle from the sides, you'll never have to step on your soil again.

Raised beds have the potential to offer a superior growing environment for your crops, especially salad greens and fleshy herbs, which will respond to the cosseted conditions with a cornucopia of luscious leaves.

Build a Raised Bed for Salad Greens and Herbs

There's no need to overcomplicate a raised bed. Ours uses thick, pressure-treated pine boards simply screwed to each other to create a sturdy frame. If you'd prefer not to use treated wood, try decay-resistant woods such as cedar, redwood, larch, and cypress, each with its own hue and patina. Position the raised bed directly onto cleared ground or on close-cropped lawn topped with cardboard to kill off the grass. Fill your bed with compost or well-rotted manure followed by a layer of finer-textured potting mix that you can plant straight into.



SUPPLIES

- 2 boards, each 1 x 6 inches x 36 inches (2.5 x 15 cm x 90 cm)
- 2 boards, each 1 x 6 inches x 60 inches (2.5 x 15 cm x 150 cm)
- Drill and drill bits
- 8 (4-inch/10 cm) wood screws
- Compost or well-rotted manure (optional)
- All-purpose potting mix
- Salad and herb seeds and/or plants

TIMINGS

- **Sow/plant:** Early spring to early autumn
- **Harvest:** Late spring to winter

BEN'S TOP TIP

Drill pilot holes into the boards before screwing them together. This stops the wood from splitting and makes screwing a lot easier.



1 Align the raised bed sides so that each board overlaps the end of the next.



2 Drill two pilot holes through the sides and into the ends at each corner. Screw in the wood screws to firmly secure the boards in place.



3 Move the frame into position on flat ground. Start filling with manure, if using, then potting mix. Pack down the contents to firm, then rake level.



4 Plant and/or sow your bed with a tempting combination of salad ingredients and herbs. Replace plants as you harvest, to keep the pickings coming.

NONTOXIC WOOD STAIN or preservative helps beds last even longer by sealing wood from the elements. Choose a natural treatment such as raw linseed oil.

EXPAND YOUR SALAD BAR

GREENS

- Arugula/rocket
- Lettuce
- Mizuna and mibuna
- Mustard greens

HERBS

- Basil
- Chives
- Cilantro/coriander
- Parsley
- Sorrel

EXTRAS

- Baby beets/beetroot
- Finger carrots
- Nasturtium
- Radishes
- Scallions/salad onions



Keep It Coming

As with the beginner's vegetable garden project, you'll want to keep the harvests coming. The secret lies in growing plants in plug trays away from the bed, ready to pop in as soon as an earlier salad green or herb is finished.

Asian greens and winter-hardy salad greens such as mustards, mizuna, and pak choi are natural follow-on plants joined by winter radishes and hardy scallions/salad onions, which will continue cropping well into autumn and beyond.



PICK. Select one or two leaves from each plant each time you harvest.



WEED. Remove weeds as they appear, to keep the soil clear and clean.



REPLACE. Transplant plug-grown plants as space becomes available.





THE Salads THAT KEEP ON COMING

SALAD GREENS ARE INCREDIBLY VERSATILE, stunningly intricate, and take up very little space in the garden, so growing a selection of greens for the salad bowl should be a no-brainer. Delve in and explore the incredible variation of tongue-tastic textures and give your taste buds a wake-up call. See you later, iceberg lettuce!

Most loose-leafed salad greens can be harvested repeatedly by picking just a few leaves per plant on each occasion. Plants then grow some more, ready for another cut within a week or two. And so it continues. Known as the cut-and-come-again technique, this way of harvesting extends the cropping period from weeks to months, ensuring a steady supply of leaves.

Pick and Mix

Use the cut-and-come-again technique for a wide range of salads. Grow a few different types or try one of the many salad green mixes that contain a selection of compatible plants.

Balance taste and texture by pitting smooth and mild against robust and spicy. In the mild camp are spinach, baby chard, and nonheading varieties of lettuce, while on the spicy side there are the likes of mustard greens, mizuna, and arugula/rocket. Bring them together for super-satisfying salads that'll have you hankering for the next cut.

Grow a Salad Basket

With their shallow roots and compact size, salad greens are an obvious choice for growing in containers. Using an old wine crate or basket like this one adds an interesting touch.

Sow the seeds by broadcasting (scattering) them thinly over the potting soil instead of sowing in straight lines. While still taking care not to sow too thickly, you can space seeds fairly close to each other because the plants won't be reaching full size. Sow a salad greens mix or mix your own — ours is a simple combination of red and green 'Salad Bowl' lettuce.

SUPPLIES

- Basket
- Landscape fabric or burlap/hessian
- Potting mix
- Salad greens seeds

TIMINGS

- **Sow indoors:** Early spring
- **Sow outside:** Mid-spring to late summer
- **Harvest:** Late spring to autumn



BEN'S TOP TIP

Start sowing indoors a few weeks earlier than outdoors. Your salad basket can be moved outside once the weather is milder.



1 Line the basket with landscape fabric to keep the potting mix from washing out. Cut it to fit or fold in the edges.



2 Fill with potting mix and pat level. Sow the seeds across the surface. Cover with a fine layer of potting mix, and water in.



3 Keep the soil moist (but not saturated) at all times. Germination takes one to two weeks.



4 Start harvesting once plants are 4 inches (10 cm) high. Individual leaves may be carefully cut, twisted, or pinched off.

SLUGS LOVE TENDER LEAVES. Growing salads in containers raises them above the ground so they're less of an easy target.

Grow a Tray of Pea Shoots

Pea shoots take about three weeks from sowing to harvest, making them one of the speediest salad greens of all. For a really early picking, try sowing them in late winter under cold protection such as a greenhouse. While peas are surprisingly hardy, they do take longer to germinate at colder temperatures, so start them off indoors if necessary. There's no need to splurge on expensive seed, either. Dried peas from the grocery store will produce the flush of pea-flavored leaves we're after.



SUPPLIES

- Shallow trays, at least 2 inches (5 cm) deep with drainage holes
- Landscape fabric or burlap/hessian (if needed, to line your container)
- Potting mix
- Dried peas or pea seeds

TIMINGS

- **Sow indoors:** Late winter to late summer
- **Sow outside:** Early spring to late summer
- **Harvest:** Spring to autumn

BEN'S TOP TIP

Pick pea shoots just above their lowest leaves.

That way many of the shoots will regrow for a second harvest.



1 Line your tray with landscape fabric if necessary, then fill with potting mix to within about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch (1 cm) of the top.



2 Sow your peas fairly densely. Aim to leave just a slight gap between each pea seed. You don't need to be too exact.



3 Cover the seeds with more potting soil to a depth of about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch (0.5 cm). Gently water.



4 Check for moisture every few days and water in warm weather. Shoots are ready once they reach about 4 inches (10 cm) tall.

SOAK YOUR DRIED PEAS in water for up to 24 hours before planting, to help them germinate quicker.





GOURMET Garlic

GARLIC, IN ALL ITS potent pungency, is by far my favorite vegetable. Some people need only a suggestion of this strong-tasting bulb — but for me, the more the merrier.

Garlic is a great crop to grow at home because it doesn't take up masses of space and isn't especially tricky to establish. Plant your gourmet garlic in the ground or in containers from autumn to spring, ready for a summer harvest of beautiful bulbs.

There are two types of garlic to grow, each with its own advantages. Hardneck varieties produce flower stalks called scapes — a tasty bonus crop before the bulbs themselves mature. Softneck varieties, on the other hand, are better keepers, enabling you to dip into your store of garden-grown bulbs for longer.

Whatever you grow, choose a sunny spot and plant into soil or potting mix that is well drained. You can expect your first delicious bulbs as soon as early summer.

Grow Garlic

Autumn-planted garlic has the advantage of soil that still holds some of summer's residual warmth. This encourages roots and short, sturdy sprouts to appear ahead of winter, so young plants are settled in before cold slams the brakes on growth till spring. Then when warmer weather finally returns, your garlic will be poised to race away, rewarding you with an earlier harvest of bigger bulbs.

SUPPLIES

- Garlic bulbs for planting

TIMINGS

- **Planting:** Mid-autumn
- **Harvest:** Early to late summer



BEN'S TOP TIP

Use garlic bulbs sold specifically for planting.

They are more likely to thrive and carry less risk of plant disease.



1 Peel away the papery outer layer and separate the bulb into individual cloves. Each clove will grow into a new bulb.



2 Plant so the pointy tip faces up and barely cover with soil. Space the cloves 6 inches (15 cm) apart in rows 1 foot (30 cm) apart.



3 Lay an organic mulch around the plants in time for winter. This helps protect the young plants from hard frosts.



4 Weed regularly as growth resumes in spring, and water plants in dry weather to encourage bulb development.

BIGGER CLOVES TEND TO GROW into bigger bulbs, so don't bother planting tiny cloves.

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU MISS AUTUMN PLANTING

It's best to plant garlic in autumn. But if that isn't an option, you can still get ahead by sprouting cloves indoors toward the end of winter. Simply plant cloves in pots of potting mix so just the tips are showing, then water them in. Keep the pots in a bright, warm place; shoots will appear within a week or two. In spring, move plants to a sheltered spot outdoors to harden them off before planting.



How to Harvest

SCAPES. Cut off the curled scapes that form on hardneck varieties, to concentrate the plant's energy on bulb formation. Remove scapes while they are still quite young because the longer they are left, the spicier and tougher they get. Scapes are a gastronomic delight rarely found in the grocery store. Use them as you would scallions or sauté them for an indulgent garnish.

BULBS. The bulbs are ready when the leaves begin to yellow and die back in summer. Ease them from the ground with a garden fork, then dry them on racks for about two weeks or until the outer skins are crisp to the touch.



STORE SOME FOR LATER

Store garlic bulbs somewhere cool, dry, and well ventilated so they don't turn moldy.

- A. HUNG OUT.** Hang them up in bunches. In the right conditions, garlic can keep until the following spring.
- B. STRUNG OUT.** Feeling crafty? Try weaving a traditional garlic string.
- C. TRUSSED UP.** A simple garlic grappe (bundle) is a great way to portion out garlic bulbs. They make charming gifts, too.





Move TO THE Beets!

BEETS ARE SASSY ROOTS bursting with beauty and bombast. In fact, for all-round showmanship, it's no exaggeration to declare that beets can't be beat!

I love these gorgeously earthy roots mainly because they offer such extraordinary value for the time and space they occupy. At the peak of the growing season, you could be pulling up beets within 60 days of sowing, and every part is edible.

Use thinned seedlings or baby leaves as pretty additions to salads, or steam the leaves of mature beets just like spinach and enjoy completely different crops for the effort of one. I'm not espousing laziness, but you know what? If there's a way to grow more for less, I'm first in line!

By growing your own beets, you open up all kinds of flavor opportunities. Choose from round or cylindrical. Select bloodred roots or hunt out white, golden, or candy-striped cultivars complete with pink-flushed stems. Baby beets are especially tender. Harvest any beets young or, for perfectly proportioned baby beets, sow a variety specifically bred for this purpose.

The Best Beets

Grow beets in containers or fertile soil improved with plenty of compost. Sow directly outside as soon as the soil is no longer cold to the touch, or begin sowing a few weeks earlier indoors into plug trays or pots of potting mix. Transplant once roots are showing at the drainage holes.



SUPPLIES

- Beet/beetroot seeds
- Mulch, such as grass clippings

TIMINGS

- **Sow indoors:** Early spring to late summer
- **Sow outside:** Mid-spring to late summer
- **Transplant:** Mid-spring to early autumn
- **Harvest:** Summer to autumn

BEN'S TOP TIP

Speed up germination early in the season by soaking the seeds in lukewarm water for up to an hour before sowing.



1 Rake soil to a fine texture, then draw seed furrows 1 inch (about 3 cm) deep and 8 inches (20 cm) apart. Sow one seed every 4 inches (10 cm), then cover and water.



2 Thin seedlings to leave the strongest at each position. Add the tender beet thinnings to your salad.



3 Remove weeds as they appear, and water plants in very dry weather. Grass clippings offer a ready supply of free mulch, slowing the loss of soil moisture.



4 Harvest beets up to tennis ball-size. Larger can become tough. Ease them from the ground, then twist off the leaves (cut roots bleed and stain!).

TEMPERATURE HAS A MAJOR INFLUENCE on bolting (early flowering) in beets. Avoid sowing very early when it is still too cold. In hot climates, you can use shade cloth to protect crops from strong sunshine, or plan to harvest roots before the hot and humid height of summer.





Supersize YOUR Halloween

BIG, BOLD, BOMBASTIC — there's nothing like an outsize pumpkin to get your Halloween festivities off to a roaring start! But have you ever considered growing your own?

Well, I throw down the gauntlet and challenge you, sir or madam, to go for broke and go large. Very large. Supersize your Halloween with a homegrown pumpkin that'll strain the scales and turn a few witches' heads while it's at it. Scare the little ones and shock the grown-ups with your horticultural wizardry!

Short on space? Pumpkins and other sprawling squashes can be trained skyward to save on space, though the trade-off is smaller fruits. Nevertheless, the fruits can still be very heavy, so improvise slings to support them. Train the vines against a trellis, over an archway (see page 183), or up a tripod made of sturdy poles.

Hungry Appetite

Growing a monster pumpkin depends on three things: the right variety, beautifully rich soil, and a little attention from you. Get it right, and there's every chance of a weighty pumpkin or two to carve this fall.

Nutrient-rich soil is important because pumpkins grow fast, making them among the hungriest plants with the heartiest appetites. Improve soil with well-decomposed organic materials — compost or manure works best. As well as feeding your pumpkins, it will encourage consistent soil moisture, so plants grow on without so much as a hiccup.

Grow a Carving Pumpkin

Choose a sunny spot for rambunctious pumpkins and plant into soil enriched with organic matter. It's hard to overfeed pumpkins, so don't worry about adding too much organic goodness. Once they are growing well, rake in some wood ash or apply regular feeds of liquid seaweed or a tomato fertilizer (diluted) to keep plants romping away and producing big, healthy fruits.

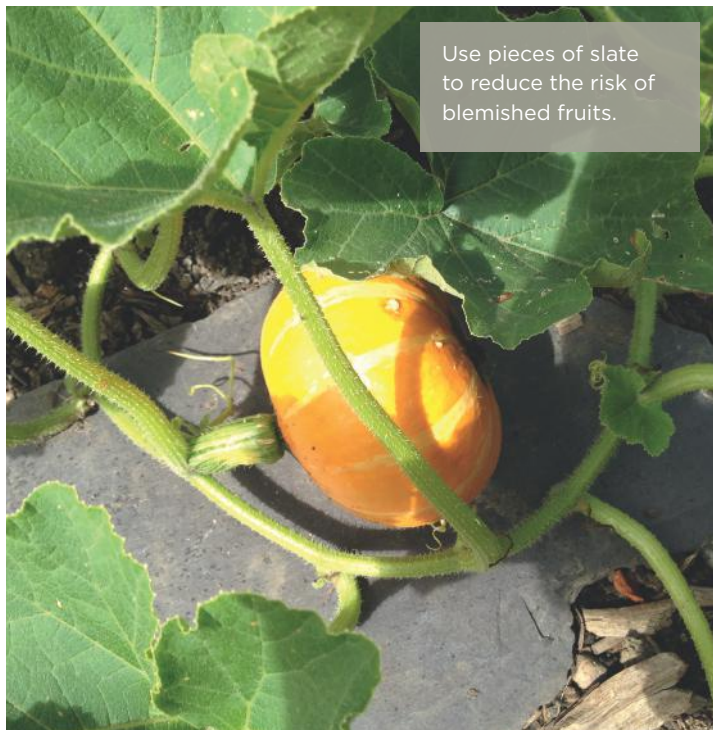
As the fruits swell, they will get heavy! Slide a piece of slate or tile underneath developing fruits to keep them clean and to prevent them from rotting. Harvest by cutting the stem in mid-autumn once the leaves have died back.

SUPPLIES

- 4-inch (10 cm) pots
- Potting mix
- Pumpkin seeds
- A seedling heat mat (optional)
- Liquid seaweed or tomato fertilizer

TIMINGS

- **Sow indoors:** Mid-spring
- **Sow outside:** Late spring
- **Transplant:** Late spring
- **Harvest:** Mid-autumn



BEN'S TOP TIP

Going large starts with what you grow.

Look for varieties with "giant," "mammoth," or similar words in their names. I love 'Dill's Atlantic Giant'.



1 Fill pots with potting mix. Sow one seed per pot about ½ inch (1 cm) deep. Germinate at about 70°F (21°C). A seedling heat mat is useful, but a warm windowsill works just as well.



2 Grow the bulky seedlings indoors, then harden them off, so they're ready to plant after your last frost date. Plant into soil lavished with organic matter.



3 Maximize airflow and light by training stems out and away from each other. Use sticks and canes to channel stems where you want them to run.



4 Allow a maximum of three pumpkins to grow per plant. For the very biggest pumpkins, let three fruits form. Then sacrifice two of them, leaving the largest to grow on. Fertilize regularly.

ENCOURAGE BIGGER PUMPKINS by heaping soil or mulch over the points where fruit-bearing “branches” join the main stem. New roots will sprout into the soil to draw up more moisture and nutrients.



Small Space, BIG IMPACT

Clever ideas for growing tasty and attractive edibles when your ambition is bigger than the space you have to grow.

Trash Can Spuds

Garden-grown spuds should be viewed with nothing but the utmost reverence, my friends! Not only do fresh potatoes boast outstanding flavor, unearthing these nutritious nuggets of garden gold is guaranteed to imbue you with smug satisfaction — and who can blame you!

Given all that, growing potatoes in a trash can/dustbin could be interpreted as, well, a little disrespectful. But there's logic behind the apparent madness. Potatoes grow fast, producing lots of floppy foliage that makes them hungry for space, but grow them in containers and their boisterous behavior is instantly tamed. Nevertheless, the more space the tubers have to develop, the more you'll get. Old (cleaned out!) trash cans are

the ideal compromise: space to grow yet still contained.

Container-grown spuds bring a potato sack full of other benefits, too. It means you can grow potatoes on the patio or balcony. There's no need to worry about soilborne problems like scab and nematodes/eelworms. And because they are portable, you can start your potatoes somewhere frost-free, then move them outside once the weather improves.

The best way to serve your potatoes? Steaming hot with a generous dollop of butter, a grind of the peppermill, and a sprinkle of garden herbs such as parsley, chives, or mint. Irresistible!

Start Off Your Spuds

Potatoes are grown from “seed potatoes” — small potatoes held over from the previous season to plant the following year. While you can save your own seed potatoes, this risks transferring disease from one crop to the next. It’s better to buy fresh seed potatoes from a reputable supplier.

Get a head start in cooler regions by sprouting (also known as “chitting”) seed potatoes before you plant them. Set seed potatoes so that the end with the most eyes, which is where the sprouts will grow from, faces up. Egg cartons are handy to hold them in place so they don’t roll about. Sprout potatoes on a bright windowsill up to a month before planting.

No trash can? No problem! Use any large container, or buy large grow bags. Whatever you use must have plenty of drain-age holes in the bottom. If it hasn’t got any, drill some.

SUPPLIES

- Trash can/dustbin or other large container
- Drill and drill bits
- Soil-based potting mix
- Seed potatoes

TIMINGS

- **Sprouting:** Late winter
- **Plant indoors:** Late winter to early spring
- **Plant/move outside:** Mid-spring
- **Harvest:** Late spring to late summer



BEN'S TOP TIP

Large seed potatoes may be cut into two or

more chunks before sprouting. Each chunk should have one or more eyes.



1 The bin should be at least 20 inches (50 cm) diameter. Drill some drainage holes into the base.



2 Put a 6-inch (15 cm) layer of the potting mix into the bottom of the bin.



3 Lay two or three seed potatoes or chunks on top so the sprouts face up. Cover with another 4 inches (10 cm) of potting mix, then water well.



4 Add more potting mix in stages, burying the foliage whenever it reaches 6 to 8 inches (15 to 20 cm) high, so that just the top inch (about 3 cm) is left exposed. Continue until the potting mix reaches the top.

OTHER WAYS TO GROW SPUDS



SACKS. Simple burlap/hessian sacks are a handsome way to grow spuds, or opt for longer-lasting grow bags that are made for the job.



BARRELS. Plastic or wooden barrels offer lots of legroom for roots to stretch out, which means happy plants and more potatoes.



TIRES. Tires, stacked in stages, are a clever solution. Line with plastic if you are worried about any chemical residues leaching into the potting mix.

When to Harvest

Potatoes are so easy to grow: just keep plants well watered, warm (but not hot), and somewhere sunny. Shade the can or bin among other plants or pots if it is very hot, so that just the foliage is in the sun. Water with an organic liquid fertilizer every few weeks to encourage strong growth. The only tricky bit is gauging when to harvest them, but even that's easy once you know how.

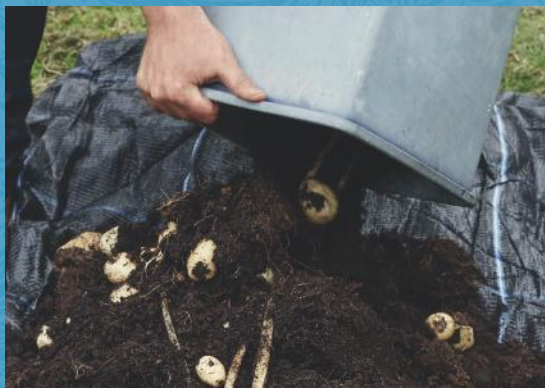
Young new potatoes may be harvested as soon as the plants' flowers begin to fade. You can take a few potatoes at a time while leaving the remaining tubers to grow on. To do this, carefully reach down into the potting soil to feel for the tubers. Try not to disturb the roots. If the potatoes feel as big as an egg, they're good to go. If not, leave them to grow on. When they're ready, simply upend the entire container and gather up the horticultural gold!

Harvest Potatoes

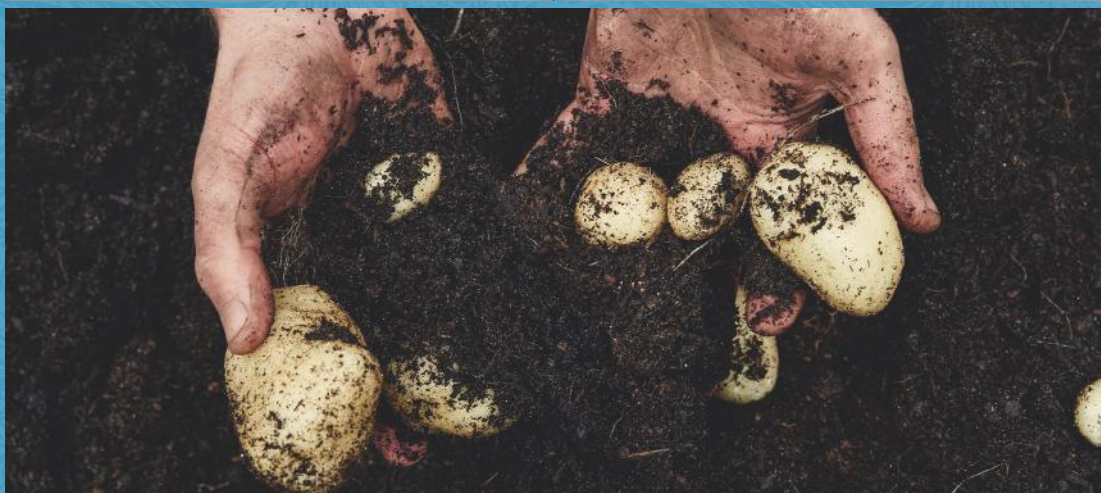
THE TIDY WAY



1 Cut back the stems so they don't get in the way and add them to the compost heap.

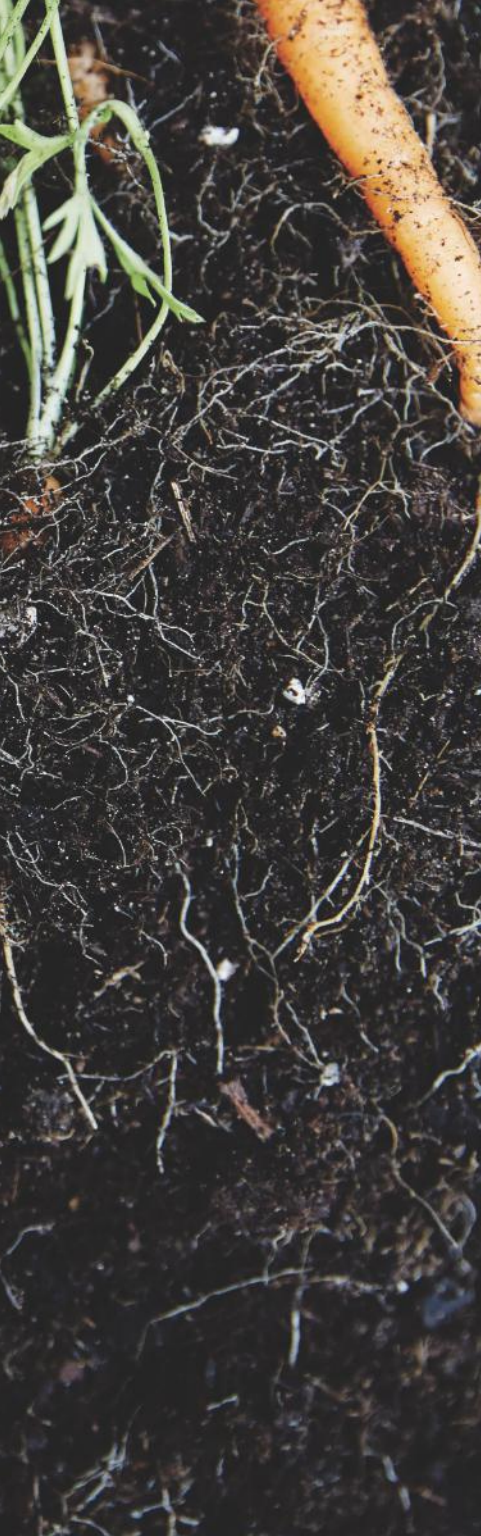


2 Lay down a tarp or sheet. Upend the trash can/dustbin and shake back and forth to empty the contents. Gather your potatoes.



3 Spread them out to dry for a couple of hours out of direct sunlight. Store the potatoes somewhere cool and dark.





Crunchy Carrots

ON THE GO

THE CARROT FAMILY LIVES A DOUBLE LIFE.

There are the chunky, muscly roots beloved of warming stews and roast dinners. Then there are their dainty cousins: delicate souls that need nothing more than a gentle steam before serving whole (perhaps with a sheen of melted butter and caraway seeds). Better still, twist off the stems, give them a quick wash, then introduce them as star guests to a homegrown salad.

Tender, finger-sized or stump-rooted varieties of carrot have a distinct gentle sweetness about them. Their feathery foliage looks divine frothing out from any container, making them a garden feature in their own right.

Any carrots can be grown in containers, though due to the restricted space some varieties may need harvesting as baby carrots. Settle for the familiar orange carrot or try a colored crop of purple, yellow, red, or white roots, each with its own character and charm.

Start carrots in early spring, then sow a new pot of crunchy carrots every two to three weeks to enjoy a regular supply of these irresistible roots. There's no need to fiddle about with seedlings. Just sow the seeds directly where they are to grow. Easy!

Grow a Carrot Basket

After a little trial and error, I have found that growing carrots in simple woven baskets works best. Not only does this look great (and hey, you can carry your carrots with you — lunch on the go!), the baskets afford extra air-flow around the roots that gives fantastic results.

You can sow into any soil-based potting mix. In fact, old potting soil mixed with equal parts coarse sand gives the sort of free-draining, low-nutrient growing medium that carrots thrive in.



SUPPLIES

- Landscape fabric or burlap/hessian
- Baskets
- Soil-based potting mix
- Coarse sand
- Carrot seeds

TIMINGS

- **Sow outside:** Early spring to midsummer
- **Harvest:** Late spring to autumn

BEN'S TOP TIP

Sow the seeds as thinly as possible so you don't

have to remove crowded seedlings later on. This also reduces the risk of carrot flies finding your crop.



1 Cut some landscape fabric to line your basket. This will keep the potting mix from washing out when you water.



2 Fill the basket with a mix of equal parts potting soil and sand. Sow seeds very thinly across the surface. Cover with ½ inch (1 cm) of soil-sand mix.



3 Water well, then move to a sunny site to grow. If it gets very warm, move the basket so it is shaded during the heat of the afternoon.

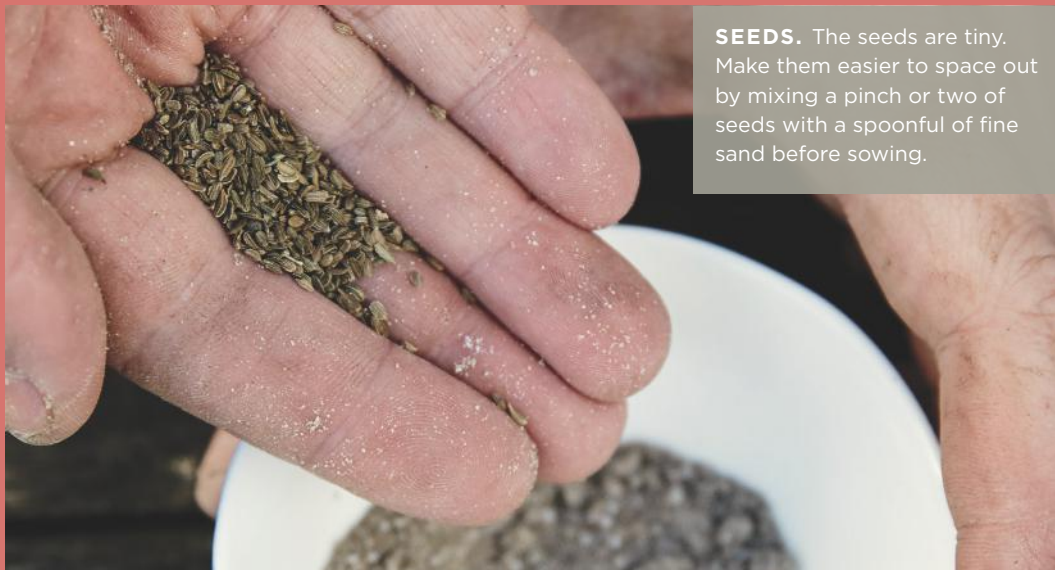


4 Harvest the carrots in stages, taking a few roots at a time so that those remaining can continue to grow. Don't forget to resow for a continued supply.

IF YOU LIVE IN A HOT CLIMATE, avoid growing carrots during the intense heat of summer. Cooler carrots have sweeter roots.

EASY DOES IT

With a little know-how, growing carrots couldn't be easier.



SEEDS. The seeds are tiny. Make them easier to space out by mixing a pinch or two of seeds with a spoonful of fine sand before sowing.



FLIES. Low-flying carrot flies are easily foiled. Simply raise container carrots at least 18 inches (45 cm) off the ground.



TOPS. The tops of the roots may become exposed with regular watering, turning them green. Cover with more potting soil to keep them in the dark.





Turn Up THE Heat

ARE YOU THE SORT OF PERSON who hankers for the heat and reaches for the hot sauce? Are you, in short, a chili head? Then you need to grow your own, my friend! Because with up to three thousand varieties to try, there's plenty to keep you hooked on the heat.

Whether you prefer a gentle tingle or a choke-inducing burn, there's a chili pepper with your name on it. They come in all shapes, sizes, and colors. Plant breeders are still at it, constantly producing new varieties, often with the aim of outspicing the last.

Peppers love sunshine and warmth. Growing in containers such as the handsome buckets used in this project makes it easy to move them to the sunniest part of the patio or to grow them in the cosseted environment of a greenhouse or cold frame.

Perfect for Pots

Aim for at least six hours of direct sunshine a day to promote strong growth, a profusion of flowers, and those all-important fruits. Hotter chili peppers need a longer growing season, while smaller-fruited peppers on bushier plants are best for container growing. Metal containers are undoubtedly chic, or opt for food-safe plastic as a no-fuss, water-retentive alternative.

Grow Chilis by the Bucket

Start seeds in late winter. Germination can be slow, but seedlings take off as soon as the weather warms up and days become longer. Repot seedlings and young plants into larger containers in stages, each time providing around 2 inches (5 cm) of additional potting mix on all sides of the existing rootball.

Avoid shocking your roots when watering; instead, use water that's been left to warm up to air temperature. Cut off the top (growing point) of plants just above a leaf joint when they get to 12 inches (30 cm) tall to encourage new branches and sturdier stems. Tie big or heavily laden plants to a central stake if they threaten to topple over.



SUPPLIES

- Chili pepper seeds
- 3- to 4-inch (8 to 10 cm) pots
- Seed-starting or all-purpose potting mix
- Clear plastic bag
- Rubber band
- Propagator or seedling heat mat (optional)
- Old buckets
- Drill and drill bits
- Liquid fertilizer, such as tomato fertilizer

TIMINGS

- **Sow indoors:** Late winter
- **Transplant:** Late spring to early summer
- **Harvest:** Summer to autumn

BEN'S TOP TIP

Regular watering to maintain consistent

moisture is a must. With experience, it's possible to judge moisture levels by how heavy pots feel — dry potting mix is very light.



1 Sow seeds 1 inch (about 3 cm) apart into pots of potting mix. Top with a thin layer of soil, then water. Cover with a clear bag secured with a rubber band and germinate on a warm windowsill or in a propagator set to 64°F (18°C).



2 Transfer seedlings to their own pots once they are at least 1 inch (about 3 cm) tall, taking care not to damage the roots. Repot into larger containers as they grow.



3 Prepare your buckets by drilling several drainage holes into each base. Plant one or two plants per bucket, depending on the expected final size of the variety.



4 Grow plants in a greenhouse or harden them off (see page 114) before moving outside. Feed plants regularly with liquid fertilizer.

PREVENT ROOTS FROM OVERHEATING in hot sunshine by placing buckets or pots into shade-casting boxes or crates.

STORING THE HEAT

Even a few plants will produce hundreds of chilis over one summer. Thankfully, drying them to enjoy over winter is a cinch. Simply thread the fruits onto fishing line and hang them up to dry in a warm, airy place for up to three weeks. Dehydrators speed up drying and give a more even finish. Store thoroughly dried chilis in airtight containers. Or infuse olive oil with whole fruits to make a warming chili oil.



How Hot Can You Go?

The heat level of a chili pepper is determined by how much capsaicin it contains. This is measured on the Scoville scale — and for real chili heads, the hotter the better!

Sweet peppers record zero Scoville heat units (SHU), while a jalapeño scores up to 5,000. Scotch bonnets crank up the heat to 400,000 SHU, but this pales in comparison to ‘Carolina Reaper’, which at 1.6 million SHU is one of the hottest in the world with a heat level that rivals pepper spray.

It doesn’t stop there. A new variety called ‘Pepper X’ maxes out at 3.18 million units. But with pure capsaicin recorded at 16 million, even this record could be short lived.



UNTIL NEXT YEAR . . .

Chili peppers can be overwintered to give an earlier harvest the next year. Before the first autumn frost, move plants to a bright windowsill away from heat sources. Keep the potting mix barely moist as growth slows down. Cut large plants back to a manageable size, making cuts just above a bud, and expect the plants to go into a bit of an “awkward phase”: they may lose most of their leaves in low light. In spring, repot plants into fresh potting mix, pick up watering as growth resumes, and slowly reacclimatize them to the outdoors.







GROW A Rainbow

IF YOU GROW JUST ONE leafy vegetable, make it Swiss chard. This easy-growing green goddess is similar to spinach in taste and nutritional value, being equally crammed full of health-boosting vitamins and minerals like iron. But chard is superior in every way.

To start with, there are its dashing good looks. Most varieties of chard boast strikingly colorful stems, some verging on garish! As the name implies, seeds sold as “rainbow chard” give a range of stem colors from electric yellow through to lipstick pink. Others have brilliant white stems offering dramatic contrast to the deep green foliage. Some even have deep reddish leaves, too.

Chard is more robust than spinach and gives up its leaves over a much longer period. Offer the most basic cold protection and there’s every chance you’ll be harvesting well into winter. Ever willing to please, chard is also less prone to bolting (running to seed) than spinach, so long as it’s kept watered in dry weather.

Grow Some Chard

Prepare the ground for sowing about two weeks beforehand. Swiss chard is a hungry plant; if you didn't get a chance to add much manure or compost earlier, now's the time to rake in some organic vegetable fertilizer. Just before sowing, rake the soil level to leave a fine, crumbly texture.



SUPPLIES

- Chard seeds

TIMINGS

- **Sow indoors:** Early to mid-spring
- **Sow outside:** Mid-spring to late summer
- **Harvest:** Spring (from a late-summer sowing) to winter

BEN'S TOP TIP

If chard bolts, sending up long stems to produce

seeds, cut the plant down to the ground and a second crop of leaves will often develop.



1 Choose a sunny to part-shaded position. Mark out furrows 1 inch (about 3 cm) deep and 16 inches (40 cm) apart.



2 Space the chunky seeds about 2 inches (5 cm) apart, then cover the seeds with soil, pat down, and water.



3 Thin the seedlings in stages until there is one healthy plant every 12 inches (30 cm) along the row.



4 Remove weeds as they appear, and water with abandon in hot weather to encourage steady growth.

SPRING-SOWN CHARD can keep going for up to 12 months in ideal conditions. Prepare plants for the long haul by adding plenty of well-rotted compost or manure to the soil the winter before sowing.



Second Chance

Start Swiss chard indoors in pots or plug trays for transplanting later on. Having young plants ready to go into the ground is a valuable tactic when planning to follow on from earlier vegetables. Succession cropping like this minimizes wasted space, while keeping your harvests coming.

Sow in early summer to plant outside once early crops such as potatoes, peas, and carrots are finished. Set plants at least 1 foot (30 cm) apart into ground refreshed with a top-up of garden compost, then water thoroughly to settle in.

Cutting AND Cooking

Chard gives two crops for the effort of one: soft green leaves and their crunchy stems and midribs.



1 Begin harvesting leaves once they have grown to a usable size. Harvest from the outside in.




2 Cut or twist off a few leaves at a time, leaving the smaller leaves in the middle to grow on.



3 Prepare by tearing off the delicate leaves from the sturdy stems. Steam the greens like spinach. Sauté the stems like asparagus.





TOTALLY TERRIFIC Tomatoes!

GARDEN-GROWN TOMATOES are a revelation. Melding together intensely rich aromas and concentrated flavors, these tasty toms stand head and shoulders above the usual grocery store suspects. Banish the banal, ignore the insipid, and wave goodbye to the wishy-washy washouts you've put up with until now. It's high time you treated your taste buds to totally terrific tomatoes, grown by you.

Like many of our favorite crops, tomatoes present the gardener with a wonderful problem: deciding what to grow! There are hundreds of varieties and cultivars vying for attention, boosted by our fascination with this versatile winner.

Heirloom or heritage varieties — that is, any older variety maintained by gardeners and farmers for decades — exemplify our love affair with the tomato. From sweet cherry tomatoes to fist-sized whoppers for pulping, there's a tomato to please every palate.

Choose from a mind-boggling array of fruit colors from red, orange, or yellow to green, black, and even striped. Opt for a flesh-filled plum or paste tomato for cooking or a tart-yet-juicy variety to crown summer salads.

Check that whatever catches your eye is suitable for your garden and climate. There are options for both hot regions and cooler, temperate climates, with many varieties and cultivars offering at least some resistance to common diseases such as blight.

Plant a Crate of Tomatoes

Bush, or determinate, tomatoes form shorter, bushier plants than vining types, making them well suited to container growing. While they won't need as much support, tying the central stem to a sturdy stake or cane stops plants from lurching to one side as fruits grow heavy. Tumbling tomatoes, more often grown in hanging baskets, are an excellent accompaniment.

Our crate also includes basil. Tomatoes and basil are a winning combination in the kitchen as well as in the garden. Basil helps repel whitefly and other pests and is said to improve the taste of tomatoes. A couple of marigolds finish off the display, adding a splash of color and further pest prevention.



SUPPLIES

- Wooden crate, approximately 20 x 16 x 12 inches (50 x 40 x 30 cm)
- Landscape fabric or burlap/hessian
- All-purpose potting mix
- 2 bush or tumbling tomato plants
- 2 or 3 basil plants
- 2 marigold plants
- Strong bamboo cane or stake
- Liquid tomato fertilizer

TIMINGS

- **Plant outside:** Late spring
- **Harvest:** Midsummer to autumn

BEN'S TOP TIP

Split fruits are a common issue. It happens

when water rushes into the plant following a period of dryness. Maintain consistent soil moisture to avoid this.



1 Place the crate in a sunny but sheltered part of the garden. Line it with landscape fabric, then fill with potting mix.



2 Plant your tomatoes toward the back and the basil and marigolds at the front of the crate.



3 Push in a cane next to the tomato plants. Tie the stem of each tomato to the cane. Plants may need tying in stages as they grow.



4 Keep the potting mix moist. Start applying the fertilizer as soon as the tomatoes begin to flower to encourage fruiting.

HOW A TOMATO TASTES is due to a combination of at least 24 flavor compounds. The most intense flavors develop in plants grown in full sun.

GROWING FOR FLAVOR

You can buy tomatoes as garden-ready plants, but to really blow open the doors of choice and flavor, you'll need to grow from seed. And once the plants get growing, you'll need to water carefully, so as not to dilute the flavor compounds of the fruit.

SOW. Sow in pots eight weeks before it's time to plant into their final positions. Germinate at about 70°F (21°C). Using a seedling heat mat or propagator is a convenient way to initiate growth, or create the warm, humid environment the seeds need by covering pots with clear plastic. Keep seedlings somewhere bright indoors.

TRANSPLANT. Once the seedlings have their first adult leaves, it is time to carefully separate them to plant into their own pots. Handle seedlings by their leaves, never by the delicate stems, and plant them right up to their lowest leaves.

Planting deep like this encourages sturdier plants. You may need to repot them into larger containers again before they are ready to go into their final positions.

WATER CAREFULLY. Give plants the water they need to thrive, but be mindful that too much water risks diluting those all-important flavor compounds. Once the fruits begin to ripen, taper off how much water you give, so that plants have just enough. Feed plants regularly with a liquid tomato fertilizer, to increase both fruit production and flavors.

TIME YOUR HARVEST. Water in the morning but harvest later in the afternoon, once moisture levels have dropped and fruits have warmed up in the sun, boosting aroma and taste. Keep picked tomatoes on the kitchen counter, not in the refrigerator, which impairs their taste.





A photograph of a clear glass bottle containing a plant cutting with green leaves and visible roots. The bottle is placed on a rustic wooden surface. The background is a soft-focus green garden scene.

Free Herbs FOR LIFE

IMAGINE YOU HAD A LIMITLESS SUPPLY

of herbs. Just stop and think about that for a moment. Okay, so we're not talking riches beyond all compare, but always having herbs on hand will crank up your kitchen creativity. And well-fed family and friends makes for a happy home life.

Herbs bring so much to the table — literally. Whether it's a basil-infused tomato soup, rustic rosemary-and-garlic roasted potatoes, or a rousing lemon balm tea, herbs are the A-listers on the cook's guest list.

But packets of herbs don't come cheap, especially if you're a fan of variety. A garnish of dill here, a fistful of parsley there, and a sprig of mint at teatime . . . it all adds up.

Which is where your newfound confidence in the garden comes in. Are you up for a little propagation? Of course you are! Making new plants from cuttings is child's play, especially when most herbs can easily be rooted with nothing more than a jar of water.

Growing from cuttings is quicker than growing from seed, and by starting new plants off in water it is possible to have a year-round supply of fresh herbs, indoors, on the windowsill. It's also a great way to get kids into gardening. So let's kick open the gates to an herbal heaven!

Root Herb Cuttings in Water

What could be simpler than taking cuttings from your favorite herbs, then dropping them into water to take root? It almost feels like cheating, it's so easy!

Cuttings from herbs with soft stems work best of all. Basil, mint, and lemon balm are particularly keen to root. You can also take cuttings from woody herbs like rosemary, sage, and thyme by selecting the freshest supple growth, before it has had a chance to harden. Always select cutting material from nonflowering shoots. Note that very thin-stemmed herbs such as parsley and cilantro/coriander will not root in water.

SUPPLIES

- Sharp scissors or knife
- Herbs
- Glass jars
- Pots
- Potting mix

TIMINGS

- Spring to summer from garden herbs
- Year-round from grocery store herbs



BEN'S TOP TIP

Don't spread disease. If your scissors are dirty,

give them a wash in soapy water, then wipe the blades with rubbing alcohol.



1 Use scissors to make cuttings of soft stems 4 to 6 inches (10 to 15 cm) long. Cut just below a leaf joint, then pick off leaves from the lowest two-thirds of the stem. Removing the leaves stops them from going moldy in the water.



2 Pop the cuttings into water-filled jars. Make sure the leaves are above the water level.



3 Place the cuttings on a warm and bright windowsill or even outdoors. Change the water every two or three days. Roots should grow within two to four weeks.



4 Once there's a good root system, move the cuttings into their own pots. Grow on, then transplant into the garden or bigger containers.

OPAQUE GLASS filters out some of the light, helping to slow the growth of algae in your rooting jars. Regular changing of the water should prevent a green, soupy slick.

DRIED HERBS FOR THE PANTRY

While fresh is best, quality dried herbs are a convenient way to enjoy leafy summer herbs all year round.



PICK. Choose healthy foliage free of blemishes and dust. Ideally, you want to avoid washing them.



DRY. Hang loose bunches upside down to dry or use a dehydrator on low heat to preserve flavor and goodness.

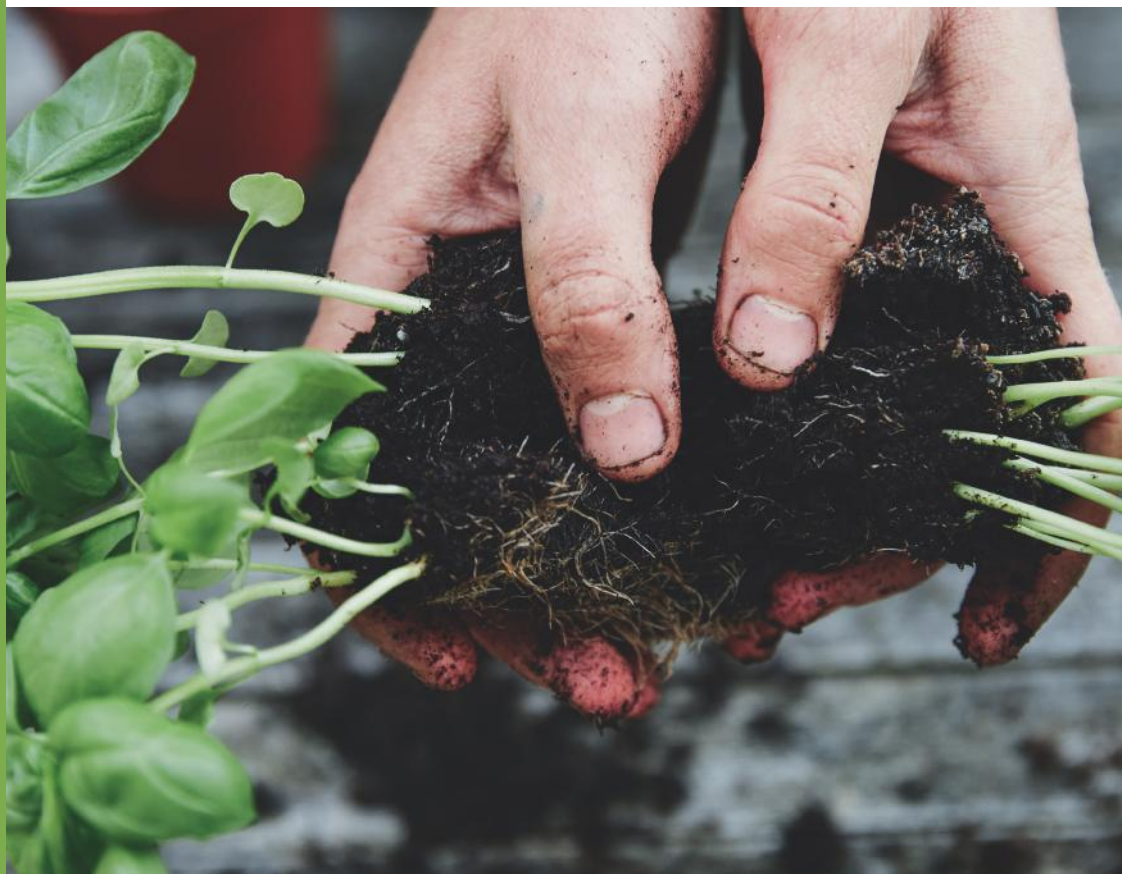


STORE. Herbs are dry when crispy and crumbling to the touch. Store in airtight jars in a cool, dark place. Dried herbs keep for up to a year.

DIVIDE AND CONQUER

Take a closer look at those pots of herbs sold in grocery stores: you will notice that they aren't one plant but lots of crowded seedlings. Grown like this, they won't last more than a couple of weeks. But carefully tease the herbs apart to replant and they will have the space they need to thrive for far longer.

Separate individual seedlings or clusters of seedlings, being as careful as you can to avoid damaging the roots. Transplant into pots of fresh potting mix. Or simply tear apart the store's pot into two or three clumps for repotting — instantly doubling or tripling your purchase!





Head TURNERS

Sometimes you just want to show off — and why not? These gorgeous garden projects will turn heads for all the right reasons.

Straw Thing!

Hang on a minute — are those vegetables growing in straw bales? Yep, your eyes are not deceiving you, they really are! If there is just one project in this book that is certain to turn heads, this one is it.

Normally used for animal bedding, straw bales made from cereal crops like wheat also make for handy, season-long raised beds. Laying them out takes an instant, while preparing them for planting is no great shakes.

Bales offer a lot of space for eager roots to explore. And because of their capacious volume, bales are less prone to drying out on hot, sunny days than containers are. As

the bales decompose, the nutrients locked up within the straw become available for the vegetables. It's yin and yang: your plants steadily grow as the bales steadily decline, with very few weeds to deal with in the meantime.

Set up straw bales on bare ground, lawn, or a hard surface. Create a stand-alone feature or line up tidy rows of bales complete with drip irrigation for a truly hands-off setup. Either way, you can do away with a lot of the digging, hoeing, and bending associated with traditional vegetable beds. Laid-back growing never looked so good!

Prepare Bales for Planting

Straw bales need to be conditioned before planting so they are ready to support your plants; we want them to start decomposing. This occurs naturally when the bales are soaked, but it's a slow process. To speed things along — the process on the facing page takes about two weeks — we need to add fertilizer with a high nitrogen content, such as ammonium sulfate, or blood meal as an organic alternative. Urine also happens to be very high in nitrogen; it's a free and readily available fertilizer!



SUPPLIES

- Straw bales
- High-nitrogen (21-0-0) fertilizer
- Balanced organic fertilizer
- Hand fork or trowel (optional)
- Potting mix
- Vegetable plants

TIMINGS

- **Plant:** Late spring
- **Harvest:** Summer to autumn

BEN'S TOP TIP

Use the spray setting on your garden hose to blast the fertilizer down into the bale. It takes up to 2 gallons (8 L) of water to soak each bale.



1 On Day 1, sprinkle $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (65 grams) of high-nitrogen fertilizer over the top of each bale. Thoroughly water in the fertilizer until you can no longer see it at the surface. Water should be seeping out from the bottom of the bales.



2 On Day 2, simply soak the bales. Repeat days 1 and 2 for the next four days, during which time the bales will heat up as decomposition gets under way.



3 After a week or so, tiny flecks of compost will appear. Any straw grains left in the bale may germinate. Pick the shoots out or leave them.

THE TEMPERATURE INSIDE THE BALES shoots up during conditioning, peaking as high as 150°F (66°C).

4 On Days 7 to 9, apply $\frac{1}{4}$ cup (30 grams) of high-nitrogen fertilizer and water as before. On Day 10, apply a balanced organic fertilizer containing equal parts nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium. Continue to soak the bales, then plant them as soon as the insides have cooled down.



5 Excavate planting holes with the hand fork, if using, or by pulling out the straw. Drop a handful of potting mix into each hole, then place and firm in a plant.

Best Plants for Straw Bales

Fruiting vegetables like tomatoes, peppers, and cucumbers grow well in straw bales. Sow them elsewhere, then transplant them as young plants, adding an extra handful of potting mix to the planting hole to ease the transition. Use a hand fork or trowel to make the holes.

To grow leafy vegetables and salads, lay 2 inches (5 cm) of potting mix on top of the conditioned bale, then sow into that.

Extend the growing season outdoors by popping a cold frame over the top of the bale to trap the sun's warmth. You can make your own by screwing a sheet of polycarbonate onto a simple wooden frame.



ALL HAIL THE BALE

Straw bales are an easy and inexpensive way to get an edible garden started. Source them from local farms or search online. Make sure they are definitely straw bales — not hay bales, which will be full of weed seeds. Organic gardeners should source organic bales to avoid any chemical residues.

Position bales so that the nylon twine used to hold them together is at the sides of the bales. The cut ends of the straw should face up to make watering into them easier. Pop them onto tarp or sheets of cardboard to stop weeds growing through. Using lots of bales? Lay them end to end in a north-south direction so that sunshine reaches all of the plants.

BOOST YOUR BALES

Maximize the harvest from your bales with just a few simple steps.



SUPPORT. Install supports such as a trellis for climbing plants like cucumbers.

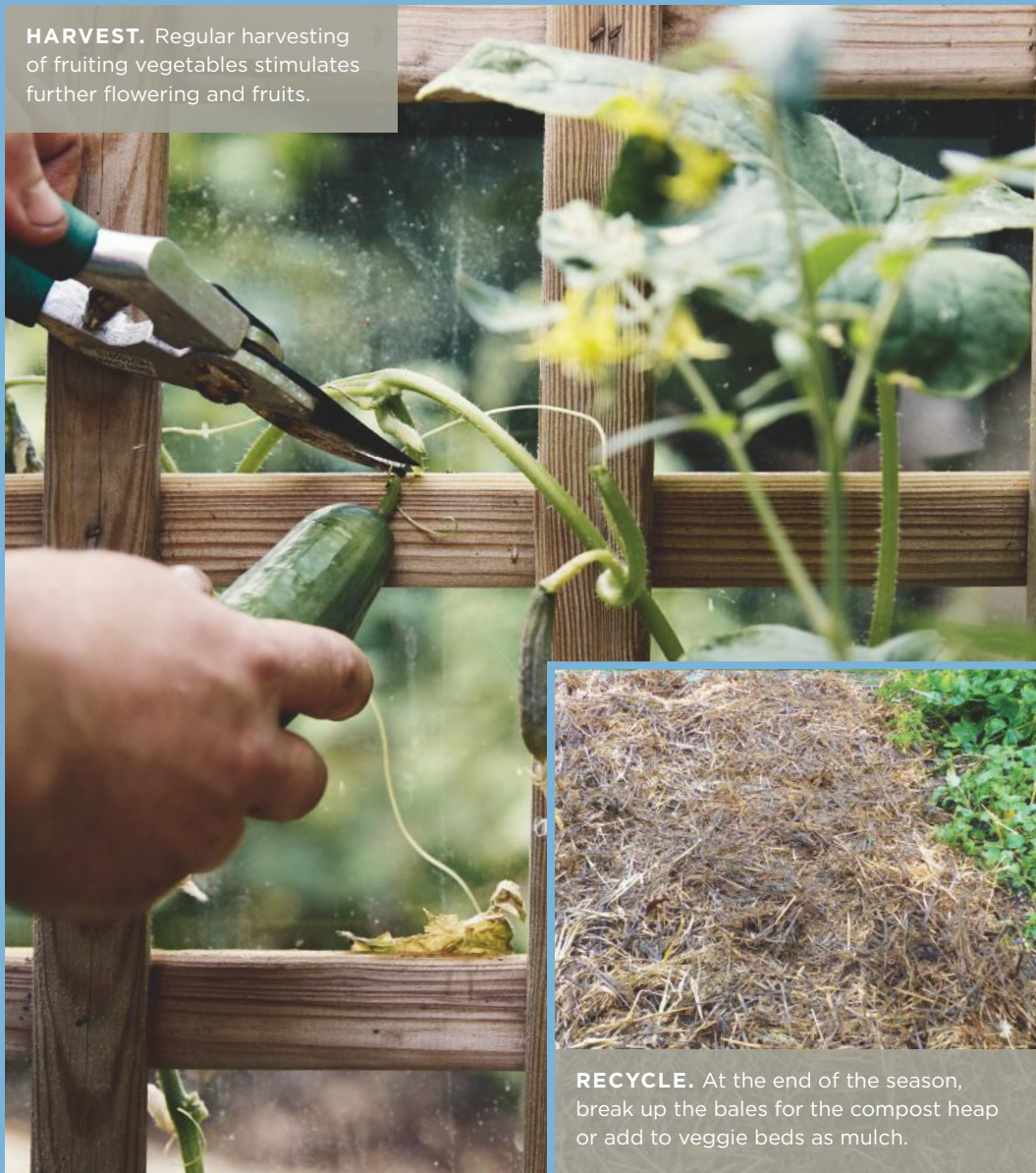


FEED. Water plants with an organic liquid fertilizer to promote good growth.



PILE. Bunch up excavated straw around tomato stems to encourage more roots.

HARVEST. Regular harvesting of fruiting vegetables stimulates further flowering and fruits.



RECYCLE. At the end of the season, break up the bales for the compost heap or add to veggie beds as mulch.





THE Sky's THE Limit!

WAKE UP A BORING WALL with a cacophony of color, courtesy of wall-hugging pots and planters. Living walls are where space-strapped gardeners are at; there may be limited ground to work with, but vertically, only the sky's the limit!

Living walls have rocketed in popularity over recent years — in part as a consequence of generally smaller garden sizes, but also as a reaction to our insatiable appetite for more growing opportunities. Choose from ready-to-plant solutions or make your own display by securing pots and tubs to walls and fences, while making use of upside-down planters and hanging baskets.

Sunny walls carry the advantage of absorbing heat during the day. This is then released at night to create a cozy microclimate ideal for gaining a head start on tender crops such as tomatoes and peppers. White walls reflect light back onto your plants, improving the quality of light for sun-craving crops.

Check that your wall or fence is strong enough for its living cloak. Plants and wet potting mix is a very weighty combination! If you're unsure, build your vertical garden from the ground up, so its weight rests predominantly on the ground rather than the wall.

Or grow climbing vegetables like beans or wall-hugging fruits such as fan-trained peaches that simply cover the wall rather than lean heavily on it.

HOMESPUN HANGING GARDENS

Think outside the box and repurpose old items into handy hanging homes for your wall-dwelling plants.



STEP IT UP. With a little handiwork a wooden frame propped against a wall is easily adapted to hold pots or trays of edibles.



TIN CAN ALLEY. Old tin cans make quirky containers for herbs and trailing flowers.



BAG IT UP. Give tired sacks a new lease on life. Plant directly into them or just drop in plastic pots of produce.

Make a Living Wall

This quick-to-set-up project turns a standard trellis panel into a thing of immense beauty! Use any combination of containers, which can be reconfigured as often as the mood takes you. Plant the containers with a combination of vegetables, herbs, and flowers suitable for the space available. We're using salad greens, radishes, kale, basil, and pea shoots, teamed with a splash of color from marigolds and dainty violas.



SUPPLIES

- Trellis panel
- Wood stain or paint (optional)
- Drill and masonry drill bit
- Wall anchors
- L-shaped screw-in hooks
- 10- to 12-inch (25 to 30 cm) pots
- Potting mix
- Selection of plants and seeds
- Strong jute twine or wire

TIMINGS

- **Sow/plant outside:** Early spring to early summer
- **Harvest:** From late spring

BEN'S TOP TIP

Wrap the twine around both the pot and trellis at least twice to spread the strain and minimize the risk of the twine snapping.



1 Leave your trellis panel as it is or zhooosh it up with a coat of stain or paint suitable for outdoor use.



2 Drill holes in the wall with the masonry drill bit. Line them with wall anchors, then screw in sturdy L-shaped hooks, ensuring they're level.



3 Fill the pots with potting mix, then sow or plant. Our selection includes herbs, flowers, salad greens, and leafy greens — a feast for eyes and bellies!



4 Hang up the trellis panel. Now secure the pots to the trellis using the twine. Cut off any excess. Keep plants watered and harvest often.

RAISING POTS OFF THE GROUND makes them prone to drying out quicker. Water regularly or consider setting up a simple drip-irrigation system.





Tripod Beans

CLIMBING BEANS ARE THE PLANTS that keep on giving and giving and giving! So long as you pick the pods, the plants will respond by simply growing more, all summer long and on into autumn.

Climbing, or pole, beans seem to scramble skyward with effortless grace. As soon as they find their feet, they're off — and the stopwatch starts on the count-down to harvest. They take up very little ground space, and when grown on a tripod, they make an attractive feature in their own right. Try growing them in the flower border, too. Bamboo canes are the traditional choice for setting up a bean tripod. You can even grow your own bamboo canes! Choose a clump-forming bamboo, as some types can be particularly invasive.

Any climbing variety of bean works well for this project. My favorites are hearty runner beans, which couldn't be better named. You could also plant scrambling varieties of pea.

The secret to a no-fuss journey to harvest is good, rich soil. Lavish your soil with a wheelbarrow load of well-rotted manure or garden-made compost and plants will respond accordingly. Show 'em some love, folks!

Climbing High

Pole beans are sensitive souls that won't tolerate frost. Don't let that stop you from getting a head start. Sow them indoors, one seed per pot of seed-starting or all-purpose potting mix. Keep seedlings in a bright location, then plant outside once the frost risk has passed. Acclimatize seedlings to cooler conditions for two weeks before planting by leaving them outside for increasingly longer periods. If you want to sow them directly where they are to grow, wait until the soil has warmed to at least 54°F (12°C).



SUPPLIES

- 6 to 10 bamboo canes or other straight stems, at least 8 feet (2.4 m) tall
- Garden twine
- Climbing bean seeds

TIMINGS

- **Sow indoors:** Mid-spring to early summer
- **Sow outside/transplant:** Late spring to early summer
- **Harvest:** Midsummer to autumn

BEN'S TOP TIP

No room in the garden? Pole beans can be grown in large containers. Water often to replace moisture loss, apply organic liquid fertilizer, and mulch with garden compost or manure.



1 Push the canes into the ground to make your tripod. Use a trash can lid as a guide to create a neat circle. Canes should be spaced about 1 foot (30 cm) apart.



2 Tie the tops of the canes together using twine. Weave the twine in and out as well as around the canes to give a tight finish.



3 Help plants get a grip — run twine horizontally across the canes with the first line about 1 foot (30 cm) above the ground.



4 Plant or sow one bean per cane, then water to settle in. If you are using seeds, sow a few extra in pots so you can fill in spots where seeds don't germinate.

DIG IN A WHEELBARROW LOAD OF COMPOST or manure per tripod. This creates the moist, nutrient-rich soil that beans thrive on. Add further mulch of organic matter around plants during the course of the summer for even more pods.



Cool Kids

Got a small person in your life? Growing beans is a satisfying project for children. The big seeds are easy to sow, plants grow fast, and children love having the responsibility of picking the pods. Kids involved in the growing and harvesting process usually wind up eating more vegetables — a fortuitous side effect if ever there was one!

Turn a tripod into a living hideout by spacing canes to leave a clear entrance. Make the circumference of the tripod a little wider, so there's enough room inside. The beans will grow to create a shady den where kids can hang out and play.

GROW A VEGGIE ARCHWAY

Both climbing and sprawling vegetables will reach for the sky if given a little encouragement. An archway is the perfect solution to tempt them heavenward and offers multiple benefits. You can, of course, walk or sit under it (who wouldn't want to be surrounded by delicious produce!). Ripe pods and fruits will dangle down, making harvesting easier, while a tunnel of vegetable-laden goodness is surely the ultimate attention grabber!

Archways can be permanent or temporary. Ours uses simple galvanized metal uprights and stock fencing or cattle panels to create an instant archway that's easily dismantled at the end of the season. Add a generous layer of well-rotted organic matter such as compost to the bottom of the planting trench. This will hold on to moisture and provide a steady supply of nutrients for what are very hungry plants.



BEAN AND GONE

Follow these simple tips to keep the beans a-coming.



MULCH. Lay organic material such as garden compost on the surface once plants have settled in. As well as feeding these hungry plants, the mulch will keep the soil cool.



WATER. Flowers drop and pods fail in very dry conditions, so water regularly in hot weather. That blanket of mulch should help, too.



PINCH. When they reach the top of the tripod, pinch out (cut off) the growing tip to encourage new side shoots — and more beans.



PICK. Pick beans young and tender. Check the tripod at least every two days — look inside and out. Gluts can be frozen or pickled to enjoy during winter.







Flower Power Salads

GARDENS AREN'T JUST THERE TO PROVIDE FOOD;

they also offer somewhere to relax, socialize, and admire. The best gardens are places of sanctuary for both wildlife and gardener — there's little point growing so many plants if you can't take time out to enjoy them!

Flowers bring untold joy. They are beautiful to look at, and most attract beneficial bugs that help control pests or pollinate our vegetables and fruits. Some can even be eaten. What, really? Yes, really!

From the soft and subtly sweet to those packing a downright peppery punch, there's a surprising variety of flavors to titillate your taste buds, including those of many herbs such as chives and mint. Transform the humble salad into a thing of beauty with these colorful jewels. Scatter petals onto a bed of leaves to create your own piece of edible artwork. Revel in their smooth textures, floral nose, and tasty tones.

IMPORTANT!

Only eat flowers you know to be safely edible and that you can identify beyond any doubt. For this reason, it's usually best to grow your own flowers from seeds or young plants. It also means you can be sure that the flowers you pick are free from any traces of pesticides or weed killers.

Grow Nasturtiums

Nasturtiums are the go-to edible flower. These easy-to-grow annuals often self-seed, popping up year after year to yield their peppery blooms and leaves. You can eat every part of the nasturtium. The seedpods are spiciest and may be pickled in vinegar to make “poor man’s capers” — delicious scattered onto a pizza or salad.

Nasturtiums are tasty, but they do contain oxalic acid, so eat them in moderation. Pregnant women are advised not to eat them, and people with kidney disease should seek advice from a healthcare professional before consuming.



SUPPLIES

- 3- to 4-inch (8 to 10 cm) pots
- All-purpose potting mix
- Nasturtium seeds
- Netting or trellis (optional)

TIMINGS

- **Sow indoors:** Mid-spring
- **Sow outside:** Mid- to late spring
- **Transplant:** Late spring to early summer
- **Harvest:** Midsummer to early fall

BEN'S TOP TIP

Flowers wilt quickly, especially in the heat.

Pick them as close to eating them as possible, or store picked flowers in the refrigerator until you're ready to use them.



1 Fill the pots with soil. Sow the chunky seeds about ½ inch (1 cm) deep in the pots. (Alternatively, plant directly into prepared soil.) Keep soil moist to encourage germination.



2 Transplant pot-raised nasturtiums after the last frost. Plant at least 10 inches (25 cm) apart into fertile soil. Water to settle the soil around the roots.



3 Depending on the variety, plants will either form a mound or sprawl. Train sprawling nasturtiums up the trellis to add vertical interest to the garden.



4 Harvest flowers as they appear. All parts of the nasturtium are peppery, though the blooms are less intense. The flowers make a stunning salad garnish.

PLANT NASTURTIUMS NEXT TO FAVA/BROAD BEANS or vegetables in the cabbage family. They will lure pests such as black bean aphids and cabbage butterflies away from your vegetables.

BLOOM TOWN!

Try these flowers and add color to your life, and to your kitchen.



CALENDULA. Sprinkle the petals onto salads, add zing to syrups, or use as a substitute for saffron.



BORAGE. Perfect as part of a homegrown salad but even better in a thirst-quenching summer cooler.



SUNFLOWER. Pluck the petals, then leave the heads to grow on and produce their yummy seeds.

Best of Friends

Many edible flowers benefit other vegetables, herbs, and fruits by attracting pollinating insects and bugs that eat common pests. Plant these companions nearby and reap the rewards.

Borage and sunflowers are great for drawing in the bees, while a few marigolds planted by your tomatoes will help to deter whitefly. Or plant strong-smelling garlic and chive flowers to confuse pests. True flower power in action!



Floral Ice Cubes

Flowers such as borage are the perfect complement to summer drinks — everything from cordials to cocktails.



- 1 Carefully pick off whole blooms. Wash gently, then arrange on a kitchen towel to air-dry.



- 2 Place one bloom into each cell of an ice cube tray. Fill with water; freeze.



3 Drop the ice cubes into your summer drinks. Once melted, you can eat the flowers. Enjoy!





SUCCULENT Strawberries

SWEET, JUICY, AROMATIC strawberries are the stuff of summer dreams. Coaxed to ripen in the soft sunshine then relished within moments of picking, this is what growing your own food is all about.

The strawberries sold in grocery stores are bred to travel and for shelf life. Transported hundreds or even thousands of miles from where they were grown, these are hard and insipid imitations of the real thing — great for handling and storage, but sorely lacking in taste.

Grow strawberries yourself and you can prioritize varieties with a flavor and aroma that'll have you closing your eyes in bliss as you sink your teeth into their succulent flesh.

Strawberries grow well in rich, fertile soil but perform reliably in pots, tubs, and hanging baskets, too. I love them spilling out from a window box or hanging basket, their luscious fruits dangling temptingly as they ripen to red. Try homegrown and discover what strawberries should really taste like.

Plant a Strawberry Cascade

Strawberry cascades undoubtedly have head-turning appeal, especially in flower or fruit. Terra-cotta pots look the business but owing to their porous properties will need watering more often than plastic pots. This cascade is made up of three pots ranging in size from small to large. Position your cascade in the sun and water with a liquid fertilizer high in potassium (one sold for tomatoes plants would be fine) throughout the growing season.



SUPPLIES

- 3 terra-cotta pots: 6, 10, and 14 inches (15, 25, and 35 cm) in diameter
- Potting mix
- Short bamboo cane
- 10 strawberry plants
- Liquid tomato fertilizer

TIMINGS

- **Plant outside:** Spring to autumn
- **Harvest:** Summer to autumn

BEN'S TOP TIP

Plant at the right depth: too shallow and

the exposed crown — where the stems of the plant emerge — will be prone to drying out; too deep and the crown could rot. All the roots should be completely covered, leaving just the crown showing.



1 Fill the largest pot with potting mix, then push the bamboo cane down through the middle so it is perfectly straight.



2 Thread the medium pot onto the cane through its central drainage hole, then fill with potting mix. Repeat for the small pot.



3 Get planting! Plant four or five strawberry plants into the large bottom pot. Firm in and water well to settle.



4 Plant three or four strawberries into the middle pot, then two strawberries at the top, in the smallest pot. Water and feed with a liquid fertilizer.

BUY STRAWBERRIES AS POTTED PLANTS from spring onward or as cheaper bare-rooted runners to plant in autumn or early spring.

WHAT TO GROW

Strawberries fall into several categories. Choose a range of varieties and you could be picking them from spring to autumn.

EARLY TO LATE. Most varieties are classed as early-, mid-, or late-season berries. Grow one of each and extend the season.

EVER-BEARERS. Also known as perpetual strawberries, ever-bearers crop sporadically throughout summer to autumn.

ALPINE. Alpine or wild strawberries form tiny fruits big on aroma and taste. They naturally spread by self-seeding.



Make More Plants

Strawberries fruit for four to five years before they need replacing. Buy more plants, or propagate your own from runners. Runners are long, thin shoots with tiny plants at the end that grow new roots when they come into contact with soil.



1 Cut off runners for the first two years after planting to conserve the plant's energy.



2 From year three, peg or weigh the runners down into pots of potting mix.

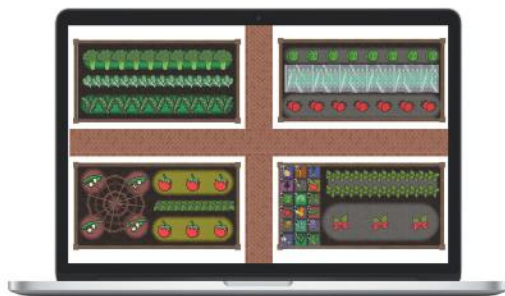


3 Plants will have rooted once you notice new growth. Cut it from the mother plant, then grow on to transplant to the garden.

About GrowVeg.com

Since 2007 GrowVeg.com has been on a mission to make gardening easy and enjoyable. We've been growing our own fresh, organic food for years and we believe it's the best way to get back in touch with nature, stay healthy, and enjoy the very best in delicious, just-picked goodness.

A couple of generations ago, it was rare to grow up without knowing how to grow food. Yet, for some reason, that precious knowledge of soil, plants, and harvests simply stopped being passed on. Today few people have the skills they need to grow food successfully, and many gardening resources feel like dense textbooks loaded with confusing tables and charts to consult. At GrowVeg.com we aim to cut through all the complexity and give simple, practical advice, tailored to each person's location.



Want to know how many plants you can fit into an area? The best time to plant in your neighborhood? Which plants grow well together or how much protection a greenhouse will give? These are the questions that led to the online GrowVeg Garden Planner, which makes it simple to create the best layout for any vegetable garden. Over half a million people have used GrowVeg.com to organize their garden beds, keep on track, and make the most of the space they have.

Beyond planning, GrowVeg.com offers a wealth of information on every aspect of growing food. With well over 1,000 searchable articles, growing guides, videos, and troubleshooting pages, there's something for every gardener — from complete beginners to old hands who've spent half a century digging the ground. From tiny city balcony gardens through to rural homesteads, the possibilities are endless!

Our mission is to open up the wonders of homegrown organic gardening to everyone and we'd like to thank you for being part of that by picking up this book. Please become part of our social media communities, or follow our exploits on [YouTube.com/GrowVeg](https://www.youtube.com/GrowVeg) because we'd love to have you join us in this most wonderful adventure of connecting with the earth that sustains us!