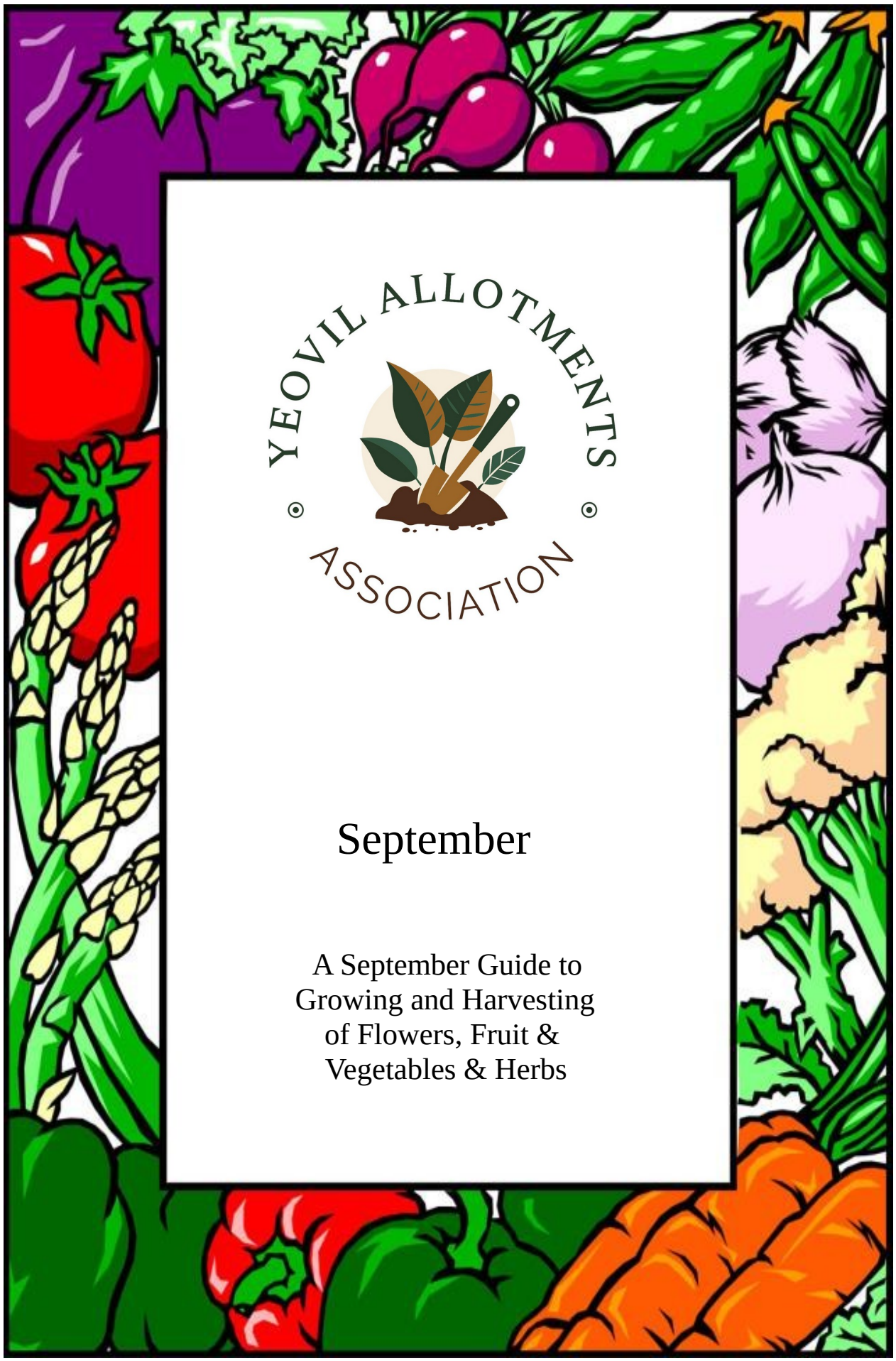

September

A September Guide to
Growing and Harvesting
of Flowers, Fruit &
Vegetables & Herbs

Dear Fellow Allotmenteers,

Welcome to September's Guide. We are now approaching the Autumn season with the leaves due to change next month. The allotment is still quite fertile and if you have planted your Winter vegetables during the Spring and Summer months, then you should see some joy around Late Autumn /early Winter. I hope you enjoy the read.

It is only a general guide and and has been composited from the Internet. You may have found many repeats in the monthly's but since you will know, seasonal crops can be grown and harvested more than once a season. So I have shown again if you have not got the information to hand.

These monthly's will be a basic understanding fixed for every month. So next year will just be a repeat of this years magazine, a sort of a definitive offer.

As usual any questions or queries can be directed to me via our email :

info@yeovil-allotments-association.co.uk

Many thanks for reading,

Gareth Richards
Treasurer
Eliz Flats, Plot 14

September Gardening Tips: Your Monthly Garden Guide

September tends to be a month of slightly more predictable weather – usually pleasantly warm enough to enjoy time in the garden. With the heat of previous months behind us but the climate still relatively warm and reliably wet, if you're wondering what to grow in September, you shouldn't be short on choices. There's plenty to keep you active in all areas of the garden, with fruit to be harvested, bulbs to plant ready for the spring, seeds to save from spent flowers, and perennials to plant out in the borders.

What to plant in September and other September gardening tips

As the seasons change and autumn starts to set in, you may find yourself considering what to plant in September. The vegetable garden is at the height of production this month, while there are plenty of bulbs and flowers to plant too. Choose your favourites from the gardening categories below for lots of September gardening tips as we transition into the autumn months.

Grow your own

Whether fruit, veg, herbs or spices are your bag, September is the big month for harvesting, so make sure you've got plenty of space in your fridge. Once you've gathered in your harvest, there are plenty of options for what to grow in September – fruit trees most notably - and you can bring some of your herbs indoors to extend their lifespan. Elsewhere there's plenty of maintenance to take care of in your fruit and veg plots once your bounty from last season has been harvested.

Vegetables

If you find yourself wondering what vegetables can be grown in September even after you've collected in what will be one of the largest harvests of the year, then you're best off focusing on leafy greens such as lettuce, spinach and kale.

What vegetables to plant in September

Sowing vegetables in September will bring spring harvests and help to cover the ‘hungry gap’ between seasons. When choosing what vegetables to plant in September, any of the following will be appropriate.

All of the below can be sown as seeds, straight into prepared soil. Use a peat-free compost specially formulated for veg to help control water availability and provide optimum conditions for strong root growth. You can protect your veg seeds from birds by covering them with a tightly secured netting.

September grow guides

How to grow cucumbers

Delicious in salads and sandwiches, the crisp, sweet crunch of a cucumber is one of the joys of summer. Growing cucumbers takes a little care and attention, but the results are well worth the effort. To learn how to grow cucumbers, follow our essential guide. Soon your summer salads will be sweet, delicious and super-satisfying.

Choosing the best cucumbers to grow

Cucumbers are divided into indoor- and outdoor-grown varieties, so growing cucumbers starts with choosing which type of cucumber you want.

Indoor-grown cucumbers are usually long, with smooth skins, and need to be grown in greenhouses to protect them from the changing weather. Outdoor-grown cucumbers are hardier and often shorter with ridged or bumpy skins. They need less care than indoor varieties, so they’re a good choice for a first time grower.

Here are a few cucumber varieties to look out for...

Indoor cucumbers

- Cucumber ‘Emilie’ AGM
- Cucumber ‘Femdan’ AGM
- Cucumber ‘Carmen’ AGM

Outdoor cucumbers

- Cucumber ‘Marketmore’ AGM
- Cucumber ‘Burpless Tasty Green’

What you’ll need to start growing cucumbers

To begin your cucumber-growing journey, you will need:

1. 9cm pots for sowing seeds
2. Dibber
3. Multipurpose compost such as **Miracle-Gro Premium All Purpose Compost**
4. Long canes or other supports
5. Spade
6. 25-30cm diameter pots for indoor-grown cucumbers
7. Compost or farmyard manure for outdoor cucumbers

When to sow your cucumber seeds

•When to sow cucumbers depends on whether you are growing indoor or outdoor varieties, and also on where you plan to grow them.

•In heated greenhouses, sow indoor cucumbers from late winter to early spring.

•If your greenhouse is unheated, wait until mid-spring before sowing indoor cucumbers.

•Start outdoor cucumbers off indoors by sowing in pots in late spring.

•Outdoor cucumbers can be also sown outside directly into the soil in early summer. They need a sheltered, sunny spot in good soil.

How to grow cucumbers from seed

1.Fill 9cm pots with multipurpose compost.

2.Using the dibber (or a pencil), make a hole 2.5cm (1in) deep in the centre of the compost.

3.Sow one seed per pot, placing it in the hole on edge rather than flat. This reduces the risk of the seeds rotting.

4.Cover with compost, and water well.

5.When sowing cucumber seeds directly outdoors, sow them 2.5cm (1in) deep, as for pots, and cover the young seedlings with cloches or horticultural fleece to give them protection in cool weather.

How and when to plant your cucumbers?

Once the seedlings are big enough to handle (usually around 3-4 weeks after germination), transplant indoor cucumbers into individual 25-30cm

diameter pots filled with multipurpose compost. Place a long cane in each pot to support the plant as it grows.

Outdoor cucumbers that have been sown indoors in spring can be planted outside in early summer. Harden the seedlings off for a week first by placing them outside in their pots during the day and bringing them back inside at night.

Before planting cucumbers outdoors, prepare the soil by digging in compost or well-rotted farmyard manure, then scatter a general-purpose fertiliser at 100g/m2 over the soil and rake it in.

Plant outdoor cucumber seedlings 90cm (3ft) apart and water well. You don’t need to provide supports for them unless you are trying to save space – they will grow happily sprawling across the ground.

How to care for your cucumbers?

The key to growing cucumbers is not to stress the plants while they are growing, as this will make the fruits taste bitter. Follow these tips for the best harvest:

- Water regularly, keeping the soil or compost moist but not waterlogged.
- To reduce the risk of fungal disease, avoid watering the leaves of the plants.
- Once flowers appear, feed the plants fortnightly with a balanced liquid feed.
- Train greenhouse cucumbers up canes or other supports to increase yield.
- Pinch out plants (remove the new leaves at the tips of growing shoots), to encourage the plants to put all their energy into producing fruit rather than foliage. Pinch out the growing tips on the main stems of greenhouse cucumbers once they reach the

greenhouse roof. Make sure that you pinch out the tips of outdoor plants earlier, once the main stem has produced seven leaves.

•Pinch out any flowerless side shoots once they reach 60cm (2ft) long (for indoor cucumbers) or have produced seven leaves (outdoor cucumbers).

•Remove male flowers from indoor cucumbers to prevent pollination (see below).

How to pollinate cucumbers

When it comes to pollination, cucumbers have a few quirks. One of these quirks is that they produce separate male and female flowers.

It's easy to tell the male flowers from the females, as the male flowers are on thin stems, while the stems of female flowers look like tiny cucumbers (which is what they will develop into).

Some cucumber plants have been bred to produce only female flowers, and these are called all-female plants. Other cucumbers produce both male and female flowers on the same plant.

Most indoor cucumber varieties are all-female and can develop fruits without needing to be pollinated. In fact, if they are pollinated, the cucumbers will taste bitter, so if any male flowers do appear on greenhouse cucumbers, remove them immediately to prevent pollination.

Outdoor cucumbers produce both male and female flowers on the same plant. They need to be pollinated in order to produce fruit, so don't remove any flowers from outdoor plants, just let the pollinating insects do their thing.

When to harvest your cucumbers

Harvest cucumbers any time between July and October once the fruits are between 15-20 cm (6-10in) long. Use a sharp knife to cut cucumbers

off the plant. Pick frequently to encourage the plant to produce more cucumbers.

It's time to give cucumber-growing a go. Once you've tasted your own cucumbers fresh from the plant, you'll never look back.

Common pest or disease problems with cucumbers

Powdery mildew

Powdery mildew is a common cucumber disease. This is a fungal disease that appears as a white powdery deposit on cucumber leaves, stunting growth and causing leaves to shrivel. Drought-stressed plants are more susceptible to this disease.

- Dig organic material into the soil before planting to improve soil water retention
- Space plants when planting to ensure good air circulation
- Remove any affected growth promptly
- Water regularly in dry periods

Cucumber mosaic virus

Cucumber mosaic virus can cause yellow leaves on cucumber plants, with a characteristic 'mosaic' patterning. Affected plants produce few or no flowers, and any cucumbers that develop are small and inedible.

- Remove and destroy affected plants promptly
- Wash hands and tools after handling affected plants
- Plant disease-resistant varieties
- No chemical controls are available

Cucumber plants wilting

If cucumber plants start to wilt suddenly despite normal watering, this may be due to sudden changes in temperature, or draughts caused by opening greenhouse vents or doors.

- Don’t water wilted plants unless the soil is dry as this could cause root rot
- Keep greenhouse temperature and humidity levels as constant as possible
- Plants may recover if quickly moved out of draughts

Glasshouse red spider mite

Glasshouse **red spider mite** is a sap-sucking mite that can affect greenhouse-grown cucumbers. Severe infestations cause plants to drop leaves and eventually die. Symptoms include a fine webbing covering leaves and stems, and mottled leaves with tiny mites and eggs on their undersides.

- Ensure good ventilation in greenhouses
- Mist plants to raise the humidity levels, or damp down greenhouse floors
- A predatory mite can be used as a biological control
- Use pesticide sprays suitable for use on edible plants

Glasshouse whitefly

Glasshouse **whitefly** suck plant sap and excrete a sticky substance called ‘honeydew’ which covers cucumber leaves and encourages the growth of sooty mould, stunting plant growth. They can also transmit viruses.

- A parasitoid wasp can be used as a biological control
- Keep gardens clear of weeds which can harbour whitefly
- Use pesticide sprays suitable for use on edible plants

Key features of cucumbers

Flowering season(s)	Summer
Foliage season(s)	Spring, Summer, Autumn
Sunlight	Full sun
Soil type	Loamy
Soil pH	Neutral to slightly alkaline
Soil moisture	Moist but well-drained
Ultimate height	30cm (12in)
Ultimate spread	30cm (12in)
Time to ultimate height	3-4 months

How to grow peas

Nothing beats home-grown peas for their tenderness and taste. That's because when they are picked, their sugars start to turn to starch and so they quickly loose their sweetness and flavour. Pick them when small, steam within an hour of picking with a sprig of mint and you won't taste any better.

Pea varieties

There are lots of different types of peas and numerous varieties. To produce crops all summer long, start by sowing an early variety, followed by a main crop.

Mangetout peas are eaten pod and all, picked before the peas have developed. Sugar snaps are also eaten whole, but once the peas have swelled. Both are generally easier to grow than podding peas, and are definitely worth growing if you've had problems with podding peas in the past.

- **Early:** Early Onward, Feltham First, Hurst Greenshaft, Little Marvel

- **Main crop:** Cavalier, Kelvedon Wonder, Onward
- **Mangetout:** Delikata, Oregon Sugar Pod
- **Sugar snap:** Sugar Ann, Sugar Snap

Cultivation of peas

Peas need a sunny position that is sheltered from strong winds, to ensure insects can pollinate the flowers.

Improve the soil with lots of garden compost to help keep the soil moist, but free draining. Peas, being legumes, prefer an alkaline to neutral soil (pH7 and greater); add **lime** to acidic soils in late winter.

Peas need plenty of soil moisture, especially at flowering and when the pods are filling, otherwise the crops are poor and the peas are small, dry and tasteless. To ensure they don't go short of water, dig a trench approximately 30cm (12in) deep in autumn and fill it with moisture-holding material, such as garden compost, shredded newspaper and un-rotted garden or kitchen waste. Fill the trench with soil a fortnight before sowing or planting out.

When to sow peas

You can start sowing in March, providing the soil is warm enough. You can pre-warm it by covering with cloches or sheets of polythene 2-3 weeks before sowing. For an earlier start, you can sow the seeds indoors in small pots filled with potting compost.

The easiest way to sow is to dig out a flat-bottomed trench 5cm (2in) deep and 20-25cm (8-10in) wide. Lightly fork over the bottom of the trench, water the soil and then sow the seeds evenly, roughly 7.5cm (3in) apart, pressing them lightly into the soil. Fill the trench with soil and lightly firm down. Sow at fortnightly intervals to give a succession of crops throughout summer. By growing different varieties and sowing at different times of year, you can pick fresh peas from June until October.

Choosing your spot and which peas to grow

Your peas are going to need a sunny, moisture-retaining and nutrient-rich position and you will need to support taller varieties so make sure there is plenty of room for that.

As with most grow your owns, there's a choice of variety from early-maturing to super sweetness, so take a little time to choose which ones will suit you best. Before you are ready to sow, make sure your dig and prepare the ground, adding plenty of compost or well-rotted manure well in advance.

If you are planting straight into the ground, do so in spring (March to June) making sure the soil is warm and the seedlings are well **protected from cold and frost**. Your seeds will rot if you plant into cold soil.

Sowing peas

You can start sowing in March, providing the soil is warm enough. You can pre-warm it by covering with cloches or sheets of polythene 2-3 weeks before sowing.

For an earlier start, you can sow the seeds indoors in small pots or modules filled with potting compost.

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Sow at fortnightly intervals to give a succession of crops throughout summer.

By growing different varieties and sowing at different times of year, you can pick fresh peas from June until October.

How to care for peas

Water well during dry periods, especially during flowering and pod set, giving the soil a good soaking once or twice a week. Mulch the soil around the plants to preserve soil moisture. You can also feed weekly with a high potassium liquid feed (such as a tomato feed) to promote bigger crops.

Apart from dwarf varieties, peas need supports for the plants to grow up. Insert twiggy branches alongside the plants when they're 7.5-10cm (3-4") high. Pea netting supported by stout canes is another option, but it's very difficult to untangle the plants at the end of the growing season. Chicken wire is a better option. Lightweight wooden trellis or willow panels are attractive alternatives, especially when growing peas as an ornamental feature.

When to harvest peas

As they start to mature, keep an eye on your peas as the earlier they are picked the sweeter they'll be. Don't rest on your laurels though, **harvest regularly** to encourage your plants to keep on producing.

Start from the bottom of the plant where the peas mature first and work your way up. Although you can freeze your peas, they really are at their tastiest eaten straightaway.

A few facts about peas

- Round, smoother pea seeds are hardier than wrinkled ones, which tend to be better for sweetness.
- They've been around a long, long time! So long in fact that peas were discovered in Egyptian tombs.
- The pea plant tendrils are edible.
- One serving of peas contains as much vitamin C as two large apples and more fibre than a slice of wholemeal bread.

Common pest and disease problems with peas

Powdery mildew

Powdery mildew is a fungal disease that appears as a white mildew on pea plants, stunting growth and causing leaves to shrivel. Drought-stressed plants are more susceptible to this disease.

- Dig organic material into the soil before planting to improve soil water retention
- Space plants when planting to ensure good air circulation
- Remove any affected growth promptly
- Water regularly in dry periods

Pea Moth

Pea moths lay their eggs on pea flowers. The larvae live in the pods, feeding on the developing peas. Caterpillars can be seen inside pods when shelled.

- Grow crops under insect-proof mesh

- Early spring and early summer sowings are less affected

Mice

Mice will dig up and eat peas sown in the ground.

- Cover the ground with a thick layer of prickly holly leaves
- Start seeds off in pots out of reach of mice and plant them out as seedlings

Pigeons

Pigeons can strip the leaves off pea plants, leaving them bare.

- Grow plants under netting

Key features of peas

Flowering season(s)	Spring, Summer
Foliage season(s)	Spring, Summer, Autumn
Sunlight	Full sun
Soil type	Chalky, Clay, Loamy, Sandy
Soil pH	Alkaline
Soil moisture	Moist but well-drained
Ultimate height	Up to 1.2m (4ft)
Ultimate spread	Up to 45cm (18in)
Time to ultimate height	6 months

How to grow onions

The basis of so many delicious dishes, onions (Allium cepa) are an essential ingredient in every cook's store cupboard. With so many tasty types of onions available, why not grow your own and try some of them out? Follow our simple guide to growing onions.

What are the best onion varieties to plant?

With so many types of onions available, it can be difficult to choose which one to grow! Here are a few of our favourites:

- Onion ‘Stuttgarter Giant’: produces firm, tasty, slightly flattened bulbs, good for storing.
- Onion ‘Red Baron’: a late maturing variety with dark red bulbs, stores well.
- Onion ‘Jetset’: an early maturing variety with yellow-brown bulbs, stores well.
- Onion ‘Sturon’: a reliable variety with good bolt resistance, producing flavourful round bulbs that store well.
- Onion ‘Troy’: suitable for autumn planting, with good bolt resistance, producing tasty yellow-skinned bulbs.

Onion growing equipment list

To grow onions at home, you will need:

- Onion sets (like bulbs, but harvested earlier)

- Spade
- Fork
- Supply of compost or well-rotted farmyard manure such as **Miracle-Gro Premium All Purpose Compost**
- **Fertiliser**
- Netting

When to plant onions

Some onion varieties can be planted in autumn for an early summer harvest, but the bulbs may rot in heavy, wet soils. The best time to plant onion sets is in early to mid-spring.

Onions need a rich, fertile neutral or alkaline soil in full sun. To prepare the soil for spring planting, dig in lots of compost or well-rotted farmyard manure in autumn and leave it to settle over winter.

How to plant onions

Although you can grow onions from seed, it's simpler to grow them from sets. Sets are young onion bulbs, grown especially for planting.

1. Before planting in spring, dig over the plot, clearing it of all weeds and stones. Tread down the soil and rake it to produce a level surface with a light, crumbly texture.
2. A couple of weeks before planting, rake in 35g/m2 of granulated fertiliser or 75g/m2 of dried chicken manure pellets. If you weren't able to dig in compost or manure in autumn, then double the amount of fertiliser used.
3. Plant onion sets 20cm (8in) apart, with the tips just showing above the soil. Allow 30cm between rows.
4. Water in after planting – this helps to settle the soil around the bulbs.

5.Cover the area with netting to stop birds pulling up the young plants.

Caring for onions

Follow these tips for a good onion harvest:

•Keep the plot well weeded. Hoeing between rows risks damaging foliage and bulb tips, so weed by hand where possible.

•Water regularly in dry periods.

•Remove any flowerspikes as soon as they appear.

•Stop watering once the leaves start yellowing – this means that the bulbs are starting to swell.

Harvesting onions

Spring-planted onions should be ready to harvest in late summer and early autumn. Autumn-planted onions will be ready to harvest from early to mid-summer. Once the foliage starts to yellow and topple over, the bulbs are ready to be harvested. Use a fork to lift them carefully, taking care not to bruise the bulbs.

Storing onions

1.Place the bulbs in a single layer on a drying rack or on a slatted shelf that allows air to circulate around the bulbs.

2.Leave them outside in the sun or in a greenhouse for a couple of weeks to dry.

3.Once the skins are dry and papery, store the bulbs in net bags or plait the foliage to form bundles.

4.Store somewhere light, cool and well-ventilated. Bulbs stored in the dark are more likely to sprout.

Common pests and diseases of onions

Onions bolting

Bolting occurs when onions stop developing their bulbs and instead produce flowers. It can be triggered by stress, such as sudden dry periods or cold snaps. Onions that have bolted can't be stored but are still edible.

- Choose varieties that have been heat-treated to reduce the risk of bolting, or look for bolt-resistant varieties.
- Cover plants with fleece to protect them against sudden cold snaps in spring.
- Water plants regularly in hot, dry periods.

Onion fly

Onion flies lay eggs in the soil around the base of onion plants and once the larvae hatch, they burrow into the bulb and eat it. Leaves yellow and wilt, and small maggots can be seen in the bulbs.

- Grow onions under insect-proof netting.
- Onions grown from sets are less at risk from onion fly.

Allium leaf miner

Adult leaf miners feed on the sap of onion leaves, and larvae feed on the bulbs themselves. Lines of small white dots appear on leaves and maggots can be seen in the bulbs.

- Grow crops under insect-proof netting.
- Avoid planting onions in soil where allium leaf miner has been a problem.

Onion white rot

Onion white rot is a soil-born fungus that causes leaves to yellow and wilt, and bulbs to rot.

•No chemical controls are available.

•Avoid planting onions in soil where this has previously been a problem.

Leek rust

Leek rust is a fungal disease which can affect all alliums. It appears as orange spots on leaves, and is more likely in wet conditions. Heavy infections can affect yield.

•Space plants well to ensure good air circulation.

•Remove and destroy any affected leaves.

•Don’t plant onions in soil where this has previously been a problem.

Key features of onions

Flowering season(s)	Spring, Summer
Foliage season(s)	Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter
Sunlight	Full shade, Partial shade, Full sun
Soil type	Clay, Loamy, Sandy
Soil pH	Neutral
Soil moisture	Moist but well-drained
Ultimate height	Up to 30cm (1ft)
Ultimate spread	Up to 10cm (4in)
Time to ultimate height	5 months

How to plant, grow and care for courgettes

Courgettes are a common summer staple in the vegetable garden and are relatively easy to grow. They taste great in salads, lightly steamed, stuffed or roasted. Courgettes and marrows are the same

thing – although courgettes plants are bred to be a much bushier and to produce lots of small, tasty fruit.

Courgette varieties

Courgettes come in many shapes and sizes, as well as the traditional long green one's, courgettes can be yellow, stripy, round and nearly black.

Different varieties to try include:

- Sunburst- (yellow)
- Eight ball (round)
- Tondo chiaro di Nizza (round and speckled)
- Green Tiger F1 (Striped)

What you'll need to start growing courgettes

For indoor sowing:

- 9cm (3.5in) pots
- **seed sowing compost**

- Propagator or warm windowsill
- Courgette seeds

For outdoor planting:

- Spade or trowel
- **Farmyard manure**
- Watering can
- **Fruit and vegetable plant food**

Cultivating courgettes

Courgettes need a sheltered position in full sun and a fertile soil that holds plenty of moisture. They are reasonably large plants, so need plenty of room, spacing them up to 90cm (3ft) apart. Some more compact varieties are also available - and these are best suited for growing in containers.

Courgettes are hungry plants so when planting outside add some well rotted farmyard manure to the planting area about two weeks before planting. Leave a low mound of the soil and manure at the top and then in two weeks you can plant your courgette into this mound.

As courgettes need plenty of water, a top tip is to sink a 15cm (6in) pot alongside them when planting out. Watering into the pot ensures the water goes down to the roots and doesn't sit around the neck of the plant, which can lead to rotting. It also keeps it off the foliage, which helps reduce problems with powdery mildew.

How to grow courgettes from seed

For the best results, sow the courgette seeds indoors from mid to late April 13mm (½in) deep individually in 7-9cm (3-3½in) pots filled with compost.

Sow the seed on its side as this helps prevent water pooling on the top. Place the pots in a propagator or other warm place at 18-21°C (65-70°F) and as soon as the seeds germinate, take any cover off. Harden off the young plants for 7-10 days before planting outside in late May/early June after the last frosts have passed.

Outside, sow 2 or 3 seeds 2.5cm (1in) deep in weed free, fertile soil, in late May or early June and cover with a cloche. Thin the young seedlings to leave just the strongest one.

How to care for courgette plants

As the young courgette plants are susceptible to frost and cold weather, cover them with fleece or a cloche if the weather turns cold early in the growing season

Feed around the base of the plant with a **granular plant food** as they start to grow. And keep the plant well watered, making sure to water around the base not the leaves, water deeply every few days rather than little and often. Once the first fruit starts to swell, feed every 10-14 days with a **high potassium feed**, to encourage tasty fruits.

Can you grow courgettes in pots?

Some courgettes grow well in containers, but they will be a bit higher maintenance. Choose the largest container you can and fill with a **good quality compost**. Don't allow the compost to dry out, **mulching** around the stem once it starts to grow will help retain moisture. Start feeding with **liquid plant food** about 3 weeks after planting and as soon as you see flowers appearing.

Good varieties for containers include "Midnight" and 'Sure Thing'.

Harvesting courgettes

Courgettes are best Harvested when they are fairly small, about 10-12.5cm (4-5in) long. Regular picking when they are small not only ensures a longer cropping period over several months, but the fruits

have much more flavour when picked early. Courgette fruits can seem to grow large overnight, so keep checking under leaves and behind the plant so you don't miss any.

Some courgette leaves can be quite prickly so wear gloves and long sleeves when harvesting. If you want a few marrows then let them grow on, but they will be watery.

Courgettes produce large crops, so one or two plants is all that's needed to feed a large family.

Common pests, diseases and problems of courgette plants

Powdery mildew

Powdery mildew on courgettes can be a common problem. This is a fungal disease that appears as a white powdery deposit on the leaves, stunting growth and causing leaves to shrivel. Drought-stressed plants are more susceptible.

- Dig organic material into the soil before planting to improve soil water retention.
- Space plants when planting to ensure good air circulation.
- Remove any affected growth promptly.
- Water regularly in dry periods and try not to get the leaves wet.

Yellow courgette leaves

Older courgette leaves often turn yellow and drop off the plant. This is not a cause for concern as they will be replaced by new growth, but also see Cucumber mosaic virus.

If younger leaves are turning yellow then this could be a sign that they need supplementary feeding with a balanced feed.

Cucumber mosaic virus

Courgette leaves turning yellow can also be due to cucumber mosaic virus. This causes deformed, stunted leaves with a characteristic ‘mosaic’ yellow patterning. Affected plants produce few or no flowers, and any fruit that develop are small and inedible.

- Remove and destroy affected plants promptly.
- Wash hands and tools after handling affected plants.
- Plant disease-resistant varieties.
- No chemical controls are available.

Grey mould/botrytis mould

Grey mould is a fungal disease that appears as powdery grey mould at the stalk of courgette, gradually covering the whole fruit, which then rots.

- Remove any dead leaves or flowers.
- Remove any affected fruit promptly.
- Space plants well when planting to allow good air circulation.
- There are no chemical controls available for grey mould.

Courgettes rotting when small or not setting

Courgette fruits can appear to start swelling but then rot or drop off the plant while still small. This occurs when the flowers are not pollinated, and is usually more of a problem early in the season, especially if it has been cold and wet. If the problem persists, you can hand-pollinate flowers using a small paintbrush.

Slugs and snails

Slugs and snails will eat the leaves of young courgette plants, and can be identified by the slime trails that they leave, as well as the damage they do.

•Check plants at night and remove slugs and snails by hand.

•Covering the soil around plants with crushed eggshells or **a grit barrier**.

•Scatter environmentally-friendly **slug pellets** if other methods are not sufficient.

Key features of courgettes

Flowering season(s)	Summer, Autumn
Foliage season(s)	Spring, Summer, Autumn
Sunlight	Full sun
Soil type	Chalky, Clay, Loamy, Sandy
Soil pH	Neutral
Soil moisture	Moist but well-drained, Poorly drained
Ultimate height	Up to 30cm (1ft)
Ultimate spread	Up to 3m (10ft)
Time to ultimate height	4 months
When to plant	May and June

How to grow salad leaves

Bags of salad leaves are quite expensive to buy and have a fairly short lifespan in the fridge. Grow your own and you can pick exactly how much you want and need. By growing a range of different types and sowing at different times of year, you can have fresh salad leaves available nearly all year round. Many salads leaves are grown as 'cut-and-come-again' crops, which you can harvest over a long time.

Salad leaf varieties

There are lots of different salad leaves available. Here are some of the best and most popular ones. Many seed suppliers sell them as salad leaf mixes, with different types, colours and flavours.

- **Chinese cabbage:** Often sold as Chinese leaves, it is fast growing and can be ready for cutting in as little as 6 weeks.
- **Corn salad or lamb's lettuce:** Hardy, making it the perfect choice for winter and early spring salads. It forms small rosettes of bright green, succulent leaves.
- **Endive:** Usually blanched to reduce its bitter content.
- **Land cress or American cress:** A tasty watercress substitute, ready to eat in 7 to 8 weeks.
- **Rocket:** An easy to grow, fast-maturing salad. Late summer sowings will continue cropping into the winter if the plants are protected by cloches.
- **Winter purslane:** An attractive winter salad also known as claytonia or miner's lettuce.
- **Oriental vegetables:** There are numerous ways of using these, from adding to salads, stews and soup, for stir-fries and as a lightly steamed vegetable. They include Chinese mustard greens, chopsuey greens, Japanese mustard spinach (komatsuna), mibuna and mizuna and texel greens.

What you'll need to start growing salad leaves

Get your salad leaves off to a good start with these growing essentials:

- Garden fork and spade
- Trowel
- Well-rotted **farmyard manure**
- General purpose fertilizer
- Salad leaf seeds

For container sowing:

- A suitable container, such as a windowbox or pot
- **Multipurpose compost**
- Balanced liquid plant food

How to grow salad leaves

Cultivation

Most salad leaves prefer an open, sunny position, although they will tolerate light shade. During hot, sunny summers, they may do better in light shade.

Before sowing, improve the soil with some organic matter to improve water holding and add a dressing of **a general granular plant food**.

Most salad leaves can also be grown in small pots, window boxes, growing bags or planters. Grow some in containers on the windowsill to have them ready at your finger tips - and at times when it may be too cold outside.

Sowing salad leaves

Sow in short rows every fortnight or so, enough for your needs, to have a continuous crop. Sow seeds thinly 13mm (0.5in) deep, cover with soil and water in well.

How to care for salad leaves

Keep the soil moist at all times, but without overwatering. If the soil dries out the plants may bolt (go to seed prematurely) and lose their strong flavours.

If necessary, thin out seedlings when they're about 2.5cm (1in) high. The thinnings can be used in the kitchen.

To encourage fast growth that is tender and full of flavour, feed plants every 3 weeks with **a balanced liquid feed**.

Harvesting salad leaves

Harvest leaves as and when needed once the plants are about 7.5-10cm (3-4in) high. You can either pick individual leaves from the outside of the plants or harvest over the whole plant using scissors.

It is best to cut in the morning, when the plants will be at their freshest.

Common salad pests and diseases

Grey mould/botrytis mould

Grey mould is a fungal disease that appears as pale discoloured patches on salad leaves, turning to a grey fuzzy growth. It is more common in wet weather.

- Remove any affected plants promptly.
- Space plants well when planting to allow good air circulation.
- There are no chemical controls available for grey mould.

Slugs and snails

Slugs and snails feed on young lettuce seedlings, and can be identified by the slime trails that they leave, as well as the damage they do.

- Check plants at night and remove slugs and snails by hand.

•Covering the soil around plants with crushed eggshells or grit may have some effect.

•Scatter environmentally-friendly **slug pellets** if other methods are insufficient.

Lettuce root aphid

Lettuce root **aphids** feed on the roots of lettuce plants, causing plants to suddenly wilt and die. It is more common in dry conditions.

•Water regularly especially during dry periods.

•Grow lettuce under insect-proof mesh.

•Pull up and destroy affected plants.

Key features of salad leaves

Foliage season(s)	Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter
Sunlight	Partial shade, Full sun
Soil type	Clay, Loamy, Sandy
Soil pH	Neutral
Soil moisture	Moist but well-drained
Ultimate height	Up to 30cm (12in)
Ultimate spread	Up to 15cm (6in)
Time to ultimate height	4-10 weeks

How to grow sweetcorn

Sweetcorn, or maize, is sweet, tender and delicious – especially when cooked as soon as it is picked. Plenty of sun and dry weather are

needed for the plants to grow well and to set cobs full of well formed kernels.

Sweetcorn varieties

Hybrid F1 varieties produce the sweetest kernels, and ‘Early Extra Sweet’ is the standard that all new varieties try to beat, although ‘Marika’, ‘Sweet Perfection’ and ‘Early Bird’ are good varieties.

The latest plant breeding has produced enhanced sweetness, with varieties such as ‘Butterscotch’ or ‘Swift’. But if you prefer a less chewy texture, then the tendersweet varieties ‘Lark’ and ‘Extra Tender and Sweet’ are the ones for you.

What you’ll need to start growing sweetcorn

Growing sweetcorn doesn’t require complicated equipment. Here’s what you need:

- Garden fork and spade
- Trowel
- Well-rotted farmyard manure

- General purpose fertiliser
- **Liquid feed**
- Sweetcorn seeds
- Cloches or clear plastic covers (1 per plant)

For indoor sowing:

- 9cm (3.5in) pots
- **Seed sowing compost**

How to grow sweetcorn

Cultivation

Choose a position that receives lots of sunshine and is sheltered from strong winds.

Sweetcorn will grow in most soils, providing it is well drained, but holds plenty of moisture. Before sowing or planting, improve the soil so that it is rich in nutrients and organic matter by digging in some well-rotted manure, garden compost or soil improver. Then add a good dressing of **a general plant food**.

Sowing sweetcorn

Because sweetcorn is pollinated by wind transfer of pollen, the plants must be grown together in a square/rectangular block, rather than a single row or dotted around the garden.

If you wait until late May/early June, you can sow seeds directly in the ground where you want it to grow. You will get better results if the soil is pre-warmed for 2 weeks with cloches or clear plastic covers. Leave the covers in place after sowing until the plants have grown and touch the top.

To get an early start and produce an earlier crop, sow seeds in individual pots or cells filled with a good seed sowing compost in late April or early

May and germinate in gentle warmth. Keep the plants indoors until early June, when they will be ready for planting out.

Sow seeds or plant out 45cm (18in) apart in the block.

How to care for sweetcorn

Water the soil thoroughly during prolonged periods of dry weather; this is vital when the plants are establishing and when they are flowering and the cobs are swelling.

Liquid feed every fortnight when the plants start to flower and the cobs begin to swell.

If roots appear at the base of the stem, cover them with soil to improve wind stability.

You can tap the plants when the male flowers (tassels) open to help pollination, as poor pollination will result in poorly filled cobs.

How to harvest sweetcorn

When the silks (female flowers) on top of the cobs have turned chocolate brown, test the kernels for ripeness. Pull back some of the the leaves that cover the cob and press one or two kernels with a thumbnail. If the content is creamy then it’s ripe to eat. If the content is clear, the cob is unripe, so wait. If the content is solid then you’ve left it too long.

Cook as soon as possible after picking in plain water (no salt) and you will taste perfect sweetcorn! Avoid picking more than you need, since cobs that are left in the fridge for a day or two will gradually lose their sweetness.

Common sweetcorn pests

Birds

Birds, especially pigeons, peck at the leaves of young sweetcorn seedlings, often destroying them.

•Grow plants under netting while young. Taller plants are less attractive to birds.

Slugs and snails

Slugs and snails will eat young sweetcorn seedlings, and can be identified by the slime trails that they leave, as well as the damage they do. As the seedlings grow taller they are less at risk from slugs and snails.

•Check plants at night and remove slugs and snails by hand.

•Covering the soil around plants with crushed eggshells or grit may have some effect.

•Scatter environmentally-friendly **slug pellets** if other methods are insufficient.

Mice

Mice will dig up and eat sweetcorn seeds sown in the ground.

•Cover the ground with a thick layer of prickly holly leaves.

•Start seeds off in pots out of reach of mice and plant them out as seedlings.

Key features of sweetcorn

Foliage season(s)	Spring, Summer
Sunlight	Full sun
Soil type	Chalky, Clay, Loamy, Sandy
Soil pH	Neutral
Soil moisture	Moist but well-drained
Ultimate height	Up to 1.8m (6ft)
Ultimate spread	Up to 90cm (3ft)
Time to ultimate height	4 months

How to plant, grow and care for spring onions

Spring onions (also called scallions, bunching onions and salad onions) are a delicious addition to a whole range of dishes, from summer salads to stir-fries. Harvested before the bulbs start to swell, they have a milder flavour than mature onions, and the whole plant, bulb and leaves, can be used in cooking. Quick to grow, they're ideal as a filler crop between slower growing vegetables.

Spring onions varieties

Growing spring or salad onions from seed gives you a wide range of varieties to choose from. Here are a few popular varieties to look out for:

- Spring onion 'White Lisbon' – quick to mature and ideal for successional sowing through summer. September sowings will last through winter.
- Spring onion 'Apache' – a purple-skinned variety with a mild flavour and crisp texture.
- Spring onion 'Feast' – a good performer, with excellent tolerance to heat and downy mildew. Good for successional sowing, giving harvests through summer.

What you'll need to grow spring onions

- Rake
- Garden spade
- Garden fork
- Trowel
- Spring onion seeds
- Well-rotted **farmyard manure** or soil conditioner
- **Granulated fertiliser**

- Horticultural fleece

For growing spring onions in pots:

- Container with drainage holes
- **Compost**

Sowing spring onions

Spring onions are easy to grow from seed and will grow in any fertile, well-drained soil, in full sun. For a continual harvest in summer, sow spring onions at three-week intervals from March to August. To grow spring onions over winter, sow in September and harvest in spring.

1. Prepare the soil in autumn for spring sowing by clearing any weeds and stones, and dig in soil conditioner or well-rotted farmyard manure to improve drainage.
2. A couple of weeks before sowing, rake in some granulated fertilizer. Tread the soil down and rake it smooth, so that the surface has a fine, crumbly texture.
3. Using a stick, the tip of a trowel or the corner of a rake head, draw shallow channels (known as drills) in the ground, 0.5cm (1/4in) deep and 15cm (6in) apart.
4. Sow the spring onion seeds thinly in the drills and cover over with soil. Cover the ground with fleece to stop birds pulling up the young seedlings as they appear.
5. Sow new seeds every three weeks for a continual supply through summer.

Growing spring onions in pots

To grow spring onions in pots, choose a container with good drainage holes and fill it with good potting compost. Scatter seed over the surface and cover with 1.5cm (1/2in) of compost. Water just enough to moisten the compost.

Growing spring onions in water

If you don’t have space to grow spring onions outdoors, you can re-grow shop-bought spring onions indoors in a jar of water, giving you a readily available supply of tasty leaves for cooking. Here’s how to grow spring onions in water:

1.Choose spring onions that have a few roots at the base of the plant.

2.Trim the tops of the leaves.

3.Place the spring onions in a clear glass jar and fill it with water so that the white bulb ends of the plants are underwater. Place the jar in a sunny position.

4.Cut off the green leaves of individual plants as you need them for cooking and leave the bases in the water to regrow fresh leaves.

5.Change the water every 2-3 days to keep it fresh.

How to care for spring onions

Water during dry periods, and water container-grown spring onions regularly to keep the compost moist. Don’t over-water, as this could leave the plants prone to diseases like downy mildew.

Weed regularly, preferably by hand, as spring onions have shallow roots which could be damaged by hoeing.

How and when to harvest spring onions

Spring onions are ready to harvest around eight weeks after sowing, when the plants are around 15cm (6in) tall and the bulbs are still small, less than 2.5cm (1in) across. Pull the plants up by hand as you need them, using a hand fork or trowel to help.

Storing spring onions

Spring onions are best used soon after harvesting, but they can be stored in sealed plastic bags in a fridge for up to two weeks.

Alternatively, place your harvested spring onions in a jar of water to keep them fresh until you are ready to use them. You can also use this method to grow shop-bought spring onions in water.

Common spring onion diseases

Onion white rot

Onion white rot is a soil-born fungus that causes leaves to yellow and wilt, and bulbs to rot. Control methods:

- Avoid planting onions in soil where this has previously been a problem.
- No chemical controls are available.

Onion downy mildew

Downy mildew is a fungal disease that can affect the leaves of spring onions, causing blotches on the leaf surface. In severe cases, leaves shrivel and fall off, and plant growth is stunted. It is more common in wet weather.

- Space plants when planting to ensure good air circulation.

•Remove any affected leaves.

•Water in the morning rather than the evening.

How To Plant and Grow Potatoes: The Ultimate Guide

Potatoes (*Solanum tuberosum)* are tubers that grow and form at the plant's roots. The plant also produces flowering shoots that appear above ground. These edible tubers that we know and love are an important carbohydrate and rich in potassium. They make a versatile ingredient, eaten both hot and cold and prepared in a variety of ways, from chips to crisps and much more. Luckily, it's easy to grow potatoes at home, both in containers and the ground, and just a few plants has the potential to provide large harvests.

Varieties of potato

The texture of cooked potatoes varies between waxy and floury, and some are best for boiling, others for roasting and even more for chips. For example 'Red Duke of York' isn't great boiled, as it falls apart, but for roast potatoes or mashed there it's absolutely delicious. For examples of the varieties available check out the table below:

First Earlies	Second Earlies	Maincrop	Salad
Rocket	Estima	Desiree	Lady Christl
Foremost	Wilja	Romano	Pink Fir Apple
Epicure	Kestrel	Maris Piper	Ratte

When to plant potatoes

When you buy your seed potatoes, take some time to research the variety name and what kind of potato they are, as different varieties are suitable for different cooking methods. Generally, young potatoes are

better for boiling and salads, as they contain less starch and so don't break down as quickly, while larger potatoes are best suited to mashing and baking.

In the UK, potatoes are categorised into three groups: first-earlies, second-earlies and maincrop. These groups indicate when to plant potatoes and when to harvest potatoes, although these times can differ depending on your last local frost dates.

- First-earlies are quick to crop, usually planted in late March and harvested in June to July. These small potatoes are often referred to as new potatoes. With a thin skin and sweeter taste, they are best eaten fresh and are not suitable for storing.
- Second earlies are usually planted in the first half of April and harvested July to August. These will be larger than first-earlies, but smaller than maincrop.
- Finally, maincrop potatoes are planted in the second half of April and harvested from August to October. These are invariably larger and can be stored and eaten throughout the winter.

Potato growing equipment list

Here's what you'll need to get started growing potatoes:

- Seed potatoes
- Potato **fertiliser**
- Deep container or **grow bag**
- Trowel
- Garden fork and spade
- Watering can
- Storage crates, bags, or sacks

How to plant potatoes

Rather than use old sprouting potatoes from the back of your cupboard, it is recommended to buy certified seed potatoes, as they will be disease-free. Seed potatoes are available from late winter to spring. If you purchase them prior to planting, you can give them a head start by allowing them to chit.

The process of chitting involves leaving seed potatoes in a cool, light, and frost-free place to sprout. Take care when handling sprouting potatoes, as the sprouts are fragile and can break off. If you don't have time to chit the potatoes before planting, they should still sprout underground but it may take a bit longer for the shoots to appear.

Planting potatoes in the ground

1. Potatoes grow in most soil types, but crop best in loose, fertile soil in full sun.
2. You can prepare your soil by adding well-rotted manure the autumn before planting, or potato fertilisers prior to planting.
3. Dig shallow trenches 7.5-15cm (3-6in) deep and plant the potatoes with the sprouts, or eyes, facing upwards. If you are planting first-earlies, you can plant them closer to each other.
4. Backfill and cover the seed potatoes with soil before watering. Try not to water too frequently before you see shoots, as seed potatoes can rot in waterlogged soil.

Planting potatoes in containers

If your soil is a heavy clay, or you are short of space, you might have more success growing potatoes in raised beds, or containers. While you can grow maincrop potatoes in containers, the restricted room for tubers to form may mean it is preferable to select first- or second-early varieties, as they have smaller tubers.

1.Allow about 10 litres of compost per seed potato, so for a 40-litre container, plant up to four seed potatoes.

2.When planting potatoes in containers, use a good quality compost and potato feed, and make sure the container, or sack has adequate drainage holes.

3.Fill the container a quarter full with compost and place the seed potatoes on the compost surface, again with their shoots or eyes facing up.

4.Continue to cover the seed potatoes with more compost to about an inch below the top of the container. Give it a water and wait for the shoots to appear.

How to grow potatoes

While in active growth, keep the plants well-watered, especially during dry spells, and continue to feed for higher yields. Flowers are a sign that potato tubers are forming in the soil.

You will also need to 'earth up' or mound the soil around the base of the plants as they continue to grow. This helps to keep the plant roots cool and protects tubers forming near the soil surface from exposure to the sun, where they run the risk of turning green and poisonous.

Potato shoots are tender, so if shoots appear during forecasted frosts, you can protect them with cloches or horticultural fleecing. This is another benefit to growing potatoes in containers, as you can easily move the containers undercover if there is a risk of frost.

How to grow potatoes in your garden

Potatoes will grow in almost any soil, however, they cultivate much better if the soil is enriched with heaps of organic matter. Potatoes grow best in an acid soil so **add well-rotted manure** and garden compost. It is also important that you do not lime soil at any time.

How to grow potatoes in grow bags

After chitting your potatoes, take five or so tubers and plant into your bag specifically designed for growing potatoes, around 10-12 centimetres deep, with the shoots facing upwards. Add more compost into the bag until each tuber is covered with a gap of around 5 centimetres to the top of the bag.

An application of **a high potash fertiliser** at the rate suggested on the pack will increase yields. Avoid fertilisers high in nitrogen as these will delay maturity of the crop.

Water the compost as to make sure to keep it moist, especially around flowering time. **Do not saturate the compost** as this will cause severe rot!

First early potatoes arrive around June/July time, when the leaves have fully matured and opened. Second earlies and salad can be harvested and eaten at the same time of year.

For main-crop potatoes, **look to store your potatoes in a hessian bag** in a cool, dry environment. The potatoes will be ready to harvest once there is a yellow colouring on the stems and leaves. Then remove the stems and harvest 7 days later in full.

For plenty of small ‘new’ potatoes ready to eat in July, plant a variety known as ‘early’. For a large crop of big tubers that will be ready in September and can be stored for months, go for a ‘maincrop’.

Growing seed potatoes

By buying seed potatoes, you are able to begin growing them before planting them in January/February time. Seed potatoes are actually small tubers specifically grown for the purpose. Remember, always **buy certified seed potatoes** - this way you will then know they are free from virus infections.

Seed potatoes are normally available in the first few months of the year, well before they can be planted outside.

Chitting potatoes

To get them growing when you buy them, place them in egg boxes or a seed tray, with the end with most eyes or buds facing upwards. Stand them somewhere that is cool, but frost-free, and in good light. The aim is to produce small, sturdy, green shoots. To get the biggest crops it's important to 'chit' your seed before planting. Chitting is said to improve yields, but probably is used only to gain a few weeks in the time needed for growing earlies in the ground and to provide the right conditions for storage.

There are a number of methods for growing potatoes – for example, under black polythene or in large containers. To plant using black polythene, plant the tubers through the black polythene. An advantage of this method is that there is no longer a need to earth up the new potatoes so there is no digging involved to harvest them. If you choose to use containers, line the bottom of the container (15cm/6in) with **potting compost** and then plant the tuber below.

Keep adding the compost until the container is full, as the stems begin to grow. Remember, newly emerging foliage is susceptible to damaging

frost – avoid this by earthing up with the surrounding soil or by covering the shoots with a fleece.

Planting seed potatoes

The tubers are ready to plant when the shoots are about 2.5cm (1 in) long. In late March or April dig a trench 15cm (6in) deep and plant the potatoes. Carefully push your seed potato (with the shoots facing upwards) into the loosened compost leaving a gap of 30cm (12in) between each one. Take care not to damage the shoots as you plant the seeds and ensure the potatoes are evenly spaced and not touching each other. Leave a space of 60cm (2ft) between rows. Fill the trench with soil mixed with **garden compost**, or other organic matter, for harvesting from the end of June.

Caring for potatoes

When the green shoots have grown to 20-30cm (8in-1ft) tall pull some extra soil around the stems to make a ridge. This soil is to exclude light from the potatoes that are forming on the surface. **Water in dry weather.** A **liquid feed** every fortnight of a general fertiliser can help grow yield.

How to harvest potatoes

Dig up the whole plant with a fork or spade, taking care not to spear any potatoes in the process. Some potatoes will fall away easily, while others can be gently detached from the plants' roots.

After harvest, you can leave the potatoes somewhere dry to cure, giving soil left on the potatoes a chance to dry up, which makes cleaning easier. When selecting which potatoes to eat and which to store, test the skin with a finger. Those with skin which tears easily when pressed should be used quickly, while those with a firmer skin can be stored. Store somewhere dark, cool, and well ventilated, such as a paper bag or burlap sack.

There’s nothing quite like growing, cooking, and eating your own potatoes. Just think of the culinary possibilities.

Common potato pests and diseases

Potato blight

This is a common disease that occurs in damp, warm summers. Initially, a brown watery rot will rapidly spread affecting both the stem and the leaves. In terms of tubers, they turn a reddish-brown colour when infected. They appear firm to begin with, but then develop into a soft rot below the skin. **Potato blight** is a difficult one to remedy, as unfortunately once it has struck, it is not easy to stop.

- There is currently no chemical product that can be used to fight blight, however you can apply a protectant in June if you predict the summer to be a wet one.

Potato blackleg

A common disease, blackleg is a bacterial disease which causes blackened rotting at the base of the stem. Infection can cause stunted growth and yellow-coloured stems. Tubers may turn grey/brown and rotten if they continue to form.

- Destroy all infected potatoes and rotate crops.
- It is advisable to purchase resilient potatoes varieties to avoid this problem – varieties such as ‘Charlotte’ and ‘Pixie’ are best.

Potato scab

Causing scab-like lesions on the surface of the potato, this disease is easily removed from the outer skin by peeling and does not affect the taste of the potato itself.

- There is no remedy for potato scab as such as you most likely will not recognise the issue until harvest time.

- The best advice is to **keep your potatoes well watered** as scab worsens in dry weather.

Potato rot

Potato rot is a significant problem that follows a wet growing season, especially if the tubers are lifted from wet soil. The best way to remedy potato rot, is:

- Use good quality sees tubers that are resistant certified
- Harvest at a time when the soil is not wet nor dry.
- Store your potatoes in cool and dry conditions.

Slugs

A huge nuisance where potatoes are concerned, **slugs** will eat holes in the potato leaves, and will burrow into the tubers themselves. The tell-tale sign of a slug problem is the slime trail visible on the soil near your crop, and also on the leaves themselves.

- Check plants (at night) and remove slugs by hand.
- Covering the soil around plants with crushed eggshells or grit may have some effect.
- Scatter environmentally-friendly **slug pellets** if other methods are insufficient.

Key features of potatoes

Flowering season(s)	Summer
Foliage season(s)	Spring, Summer, Autumn
Sunlight	Full sun
Soil type	Clay, Loamy, Sandy
Soil pH	Neutral
Soil moisture	Moist but well-drained
Ultimate height	Up to 90cm (3ft)
Ultimate spread	Up to 60cm (2ft)
Time to ultimate height	4 months

How to grow tomato plants at home

Nothing beats the taste of your own home-grown tomatoes, freshly-picked and warm from the summer sun. Slice into a summer salad, use as pizza toppings, or add some depth to a curry, chili or spaghetti Bolognese. Whether you're growing them in greenhouses, pots or hanging baskets, our guide tells you all you need to know about growing tomatoes.

Tomato varieties

If you're new to growing tomatoes, it's worth getting familiar with some of the terminology. For a start, there are several different types of tomato: salad tomatoes (the round, red, average-sized tomato you'll see in supermarkets), small, tangy and sweet cherry tomatoes, oval plum tomatoes with few seeds (ideal for cooking), and large, juicy, flavoursome beefsteak tomatoes.

Tomato plants are divided into cordon and bush types, dependent on how they grow. Cordon tomatoes (also sometimes called 'indeterminate'

tomatoes) grow tall, producing one main stem that needs to be trained up a cane or other support. Bush tomatoes, as the name suggests, grow into short, bushy plants. They don't need training, but may need some additional support when laden with fruit. Bush tomatoes are sometimes also called 'determinate' tomatoes. Here are a few tomato varieties to look out for:

- Tomato 'Alicante': a high-yielding cordon tomato
- Tomato 'Big Boy': a full-flavoured beefsteak cordon tomato
- Tomato 'Shirley': a popular high-yielding cordon tomato
- Tomato 'Gardener's Delight': a cordon type bearing tangy cherry tomatoes
- Tomato 'Tumbling Tom': a bush type with masses of tasty cherry tomatoes

Where to grow tomatoes

Growing tomatoes in greenhouses gives you a longer growing season, and also reduces the risk of diseases such as blight, but tomatoes can also be grown outside in a sheltered, sunny spot.

They can be planted directly in the ground in rich, fertile, well-drained soil, or grown in pots filled with good multipurpose compost.

Equipment list for growing tomatoes

To grow tomatoes at home in your garden, you will need:

- 9cm pots for sowing seeds
- 25-30cm diameter pots (if growing tomatoes as container plants)
- General-purpose balanced liquid feed such as **Miracle-Gro Performance Organics All-Purpose Plant Food**
- Tomato feed such as **Tomorite Liquid Tomato Food**
- Multipurpose compost such as **Miracle-Gro Premium All Purpose Compost**
- Canes
- String
- Dibber
- Spade

How to grow tomatoes from seed

If you have a heated greenhouse, you can start sowing tomatoes in late winter. Otherwise sow indoors in early spring.

1. Fill 9cm pots with multipurpose compost.
2. Sow a seed on top of the compost in each pot, then cover it lightly with a thin layer of compost.
3. Water the pots, cover with clingfilm and place in a greenhouse or on a sunny windowsill.
4. Once the seeds have germinated, remove the clingfilm. Water the pots regularly to keep the compost moist.

5.When the seedlings are about 15cm tall, plant them in their final locations.

How to plant tomatoes outdoors

1.Check the weather report before deciding when to plant tomatoes outdoors and wait until all danger of late frosts is past, usually around late May or early June.

2.Before planting, prepare the ground by digging in lots of compost or well-rotted farmyard manure.

3.Harden seedlings off for a week before planting outside, by putting the seedlings outside in their pots during the day and bringing them back inside at night.

How to grow tomatoes in planters

1. Check the weather report before deciding when to plant tomatoes outdoors and wait until all danger of late frosts is past, usually around late May or early June.

2. Harden seedlings off for a week before moving to outdoor planters, by putting the seedlings outside in their pots during the day and bringing them back inside at night.

3. Transfer tomato plants to a **large gro-bag** and water them in.

Caring for tomato plants

The secret to caring for tomato plants is regular watering and feeding, especially once fruits start to develop. Aim for a consistent moisture level in the soil – if the plants dry out and then get soaked to compensate, the fruits will take up too much water and split. In wet weather, lay a thick layer of compost around outdoor tomatoes to help keep soil moisture levels constant.

Feed plants fortnightly, starting with a balanced liquid feed. Once fruits start to appear, switch to a tomato feed.

For cordon tomatoes, tie the main stems back to support canes as they grow, and remove the small side shoots that appear in the angles between side stems and the main stem. Once five trusses (side stems bearing leaves, flowers and fruit) have developed, pinch off the growing tip of the main stem. This will focus the plant's energy on producing more fruit.

For bush types, there's no need to remove side shoots or pinch out growing tips. However, you may need to support heavily-laden branches with canes.

When to harvest tomatoes

Greenhouse-grown tomatoes should be ripe by mid-summer. Tomatoes grown outdoors will ripen later in mid- to late summer, depending where you are in the UK.

Ripe tomatoes are the same colour all over. They can be left on the plant for up to two weeks once ripe, so pick them as you need them.

As temperatures drop in autumn, tomatoes will eventually stop ripening on the plants. However, you can still ripen them indoors. In October, cut off all remaining tomatoes and place them indoors in a paper bag together with a banana or an apple. These fruits give off a gas called ethylene which encourages the tomatoes to ripen. The process takes about two weeks. Check the bag periodically and remove tomatoes as they ripen.

Common tomato plant problems, pests and diseases

Tomato blight

Blight is the biggest problem for tomato growers. This is an air-borne fungal disease most likely to occur in warm, humid conditions. Brown

patches on leaves are the first indication of blight, and should be removed and disposed of immediately.

Unfortunately, there's no treatment for tomato blight but there are precautions you can take to reduce the risk:

- Choose disease resistant cultivars. Several varieties have been bred to have increased resistance to blight, although none are guaranteed disease-resistant.
- When watering plants, water the soil, not the leaves

Greenhouse-grown plants are less at risk of blight, but can be attacked by red spider mite and aphids. To discourage red spider mite, mist plants regularly, and wipe aphids off with a damp cloth.

Whitefly

Whitefly live on the underside of the tomato leaves and weaken the plant by sucking the sap of plants.

- An **insecticide spray** will control whitefly

Tomato leaf mould

Tomato leaf mould is a common fungal disease of tomato plants growing in greenhouses. Brown leaves and fruit as well as bleached spots on the flower petals are typical symptoms of this disease. It is rarely seen on outdoor plants.

- Remove and destroy all affected plant parts.
- For plants growing under cover, increase ventilation and, if possible, the space between plants.
- Try to avoid wetting the leaves when watering plants, especially when watering in the evening,
- Copper-based fungicides can be used to control diseases on tomatoes.

Blossom end rot

Blossom end rot is caused by lack of calcium in the fruit. A circular patch varying in size and colour (from brown to black) at the bottom of tomato fruits is the classic symptom of blossom end rot.

- Keep soil and compost consistently moist
- Apply a liquid **tomato fertiliser**

Key features of tomatoes

Flowering season(s)	Spring, Summer
Foliage season(s)	Spring, Summer, Autumn
Sunlight	Full sun
Soil type	Chalky, Clay, Loamy, Sandy
Soil pH	Neutral
Soil moisture	Moist but well-drained
Ultimate height	Up to 1.8m (6ft)
Ultimate spread	Up to 60cm (2ft)
Time to ultimate height	5 months

FAQs

Can I grow tomatoes at home?

Yes, you can grow tomatoes at home in the UK, either in containers, greenhouses, or outdoors. Choose varieties suited to UK climates, like cherry or outdoor beefsteak tomatoes.

Do tomatoes grow indoors?

Yes, tomatoes can grow indoors in the UK. Use grow lights, warm

conditions, and a sunny spot to encourage healthy growth. Consider dwarf or cherry tomato varieties ideal for indoor cultivation.

How To Grow and Plant Garlic With Our Simple Steps

Garlic is the base of so many delicious dishes, and growing garlic (Allium sativum) at home is now very popular. It's an easy vegetable to grow – just plant a garlic clove into the soil, wait a few months and you'll be rewarded with a bulb of up to a dozen or more cloves ready to use in the kitchen.

Hardneck and softneck garlic

Garlic bulbs are divided into hardneck and softneck varieties. Hardneck garlics produce a flowerspike, essentially a long stem growing up from the bulb and bearing a flowerhead. Softneck garlics don't produce flowerspikes, so the 'neck' of these bulbs stays soft and flexible.

Hardneck bulbs are hardier than softnecks, so are a good choice for areas with cold winters. The bulbs often have stronger, more complex flavours than softneck garlics. On the downside, the bulbs don't store as well as softnecks do.

Softneck garlics are best grown in mild areas. The bulbs tend to have a mild flavour and can be stored for several months. Garlic bulbs sold in supermarkets are usually softneck varieties.

Hardneck garlic varieties to grow

- Garlic 'Early Purple Wight' – a robust variety, ready to harvest in early summer
- Garlic 'Sprint' – fast-growing, with large pink cloves

Softneck garlic varieties to grow

- Garlic ‘Arno’ – medium-flavoured pink cloves
- Garlic ‘Marco’ – white-skinned, with a strong flavour
- Garlic ‘Germidour’ – large white bulbs, mild flavour

How to grow garlic

Begin by splitting the bulb carefully into individual clove segments, and then gently push each clove into the soil, so the tip is just below the soil surface, with the clove facing end-up and the flatter basal plate facing down. Allow a gap of 15cm (6in) between each clove and 20-30cm (8-12in) between each row of cloves.

Garlic growing equipment list

To grow garlic in your garden you will need:

1. Spade
2. Fork
3. Garlic bulbs

4. Supply of well-rotted farmyard manure or other soil improver such as **Levington Organic Blend Farmyard Manure**
5. General-purpose **fertiliser**
6. Horticultural fleece or cloches

How to plant garlic

Garlic does best in a fertile, well-drained soil in full sun. The bulbs need a period of cold weather in order to grow, so the best time to plant garlic is in autumn, although there are some varieties that have been bred for spring planting.

1. Before planting garlic, prepare the soil by digging in plenty of compost or well-rotted farmyard manure. If your soil is very heavy clay, add grit, or plant bulbs in containers instead.
2. Remove any weeds and stones.
3. Apply a general-purpose fertiliser in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions, and rake in.
4. Break the garlic bulbs into individual cloves.
5. Plant the cloves 15cm (6in) apart and 2.5cm (1in) deep, with tips just below the surface and pointing upwards. Space rows 30cm apart.
6. Water after planting, to help settle the soil around the cloves.
7. Cover the area with horticultural fleece or cloches to stop birds pulling up the seedlings as they appear. Once the plants grow larger, they are less attractive to birds and the protection can be removed.

Growing garlic in containers

Garlic will grow happily in containers outdoors, and this is a good option in gardens where the soil is very heavy and wet.

1.Choose a container at least 30cm in diameter and 20cm deep, with good drainage holes.

2.Fill with a good quality multipurpose compost and add a slow-release fertiliser.

3.Plant the cloves 10-15cm (4-6in) apart and 2.5cm (1in) deep, with tips just below the surface and pointing upwards. Don’t plant bulbs right up against the edge of the container – leave space for them to swell as they grow.

4.Water regularly to keep the compost moist.

Caring for garlic

Once planted, garlic doesn’t need much looking after. Just follow these simple steps for a good crop:

•Keep beds weed-free. Remove weeds by hand to avoid damaging the bulbs with a hoe.

•Water during long dry periods.

•Stop watering once the leaves start turning yellow and the bulbs start to swell.

•On hardneck bulbs, pick any flowerscapes before they flower, to keep the plant’s energy focused on developing the bulb. The flowerscapes are edible and very tasty!

Harvesting garlic

While garlic is growing, you can harvest a leaf now and then to add to salads, but don't take too many at a time from any one plant.

Flowerscapes should be picked before the flowers develop. The scapes have a mild garlic flavour and can be cooked or chopped up and added raw to salads.

The garlic bulbs themselves should be ready to harvest from early summer. To know when to harvest garlic, look at the plants' leaves – when they turn yellow, the garlic is ready to be harvested.

To harvest garlic, use a garden fork to gently lift the bulbs.

How to store garlic

- Before storing garlic, lay the bulbs outside in the sun on a rack, or inside in a well-ventilated shed, to allow them to dry out. This will take two to three weeks.
- Once the skins are dry and papery, the bulbs are ready to be stored. Remove any damaged or bruised bulbs.
- Store garlic bulbs in a string bag in a cool, dry, dark place.

Common garlic diseases

Although garlic is easy to grow, there are a few diseases that can cause problems.

White rot

White rot is a fungal disease that rots garlic bulbs and causes leaves to turn yellow and die. Unfortunately, there's no treatment available for this. Burn all affected plants and don't plant garlic or **other allium bulbs** in that soil for at least eight years.

Leek rust

Leek rust, another fungal disease, causes orange blotches on leaves. Mild cases will not necessarily affect the crop but remove any affected leaves as soon as you see them and burn or dispose of them (but not on a compost heap). Leek rust is more common in long periods of wet weather, and on overcrowded plants. Avoid planting garlic or other alliums in affected soil for at least three years.

Key features of garlic

Flowering season(s)	Spring, Summer
Foliage season(s)	Spring, Summer, Autumn
Sunlight	Full shade, Partial shade, Full sun
Soil type	Chalky, Clay, Loamy, Sandy
Soil pH	Neutral
Soil moisture	Moist but well-drained
Ultimate height	Up to 45cm (18in)
Ultimate spread	Up to 10cm (4in)
Time to ultimate height	6 months

How to grow and care for salad rocket

Salad rocket, like its name, is a fast-growing salad leaf, perfect for adding a peppery spiciness to your salads. It will give a crop for most of the year, and if allowed to, will seed freely providing new plants for the next season too. This is a tough plant that needs little care, and a great way to easily grow some healthy food. Here we run through how to grow rocket and offer some handy rocket growing tips.

Types of salad rocket to grow

Salad rocket (Eruca vesicaria) is also known as ‘Arugula’ in many other parts of the world but is slightly different from Wild rocket. It is, however, grown and harvested in the same way.

The main difference is that salad rocket is an annual, with creamy-white flowers and softer leaves, and wild rocket is a perennial, has yellow flowers and a much spicier flavour.

Salad rocket is rich in potassium, vitamins A, B C and K. The leaves are the most commonly eaten part of the plant but you can also eat rocket flowers. Younger leaves and flowers are best eaten fresh, whereas older parts of the plant are better blanched or popped in a stir fry.

Varieties of salad rocket:

- ‘Sky Rocket’ - a very fast grower, providing a crop quickly
- ‘Letizia’ - slow to flower and set seed, giving a longer growing season than many others
- ‘Esmee’ - very attractive lobed leaves, looks lovely in pots
- ‘Wasabi’ - a wild rocket variety with a particularly peppery flavour

What you'll need to grow salad rocket

It's super easy to grow rocket from seed. It is fairly tough and can cope with poor soil, although you will get a more tender leaf if you can provide fertile soil and try to keep the soil moist in dry weather.

Sow rocket seeds from April through to September, and expect to harvest it from March (from autumn sowings), all the way through to December.

To grow rocket directly in the soil you will need:

- A trowel or hoe
- Watering can with fine rose
- Rocket seed

1. Create a shallow drill in the soil, no more than 1cm deep, using the trowel or hoe.
2. Water the drill, and then place 2 seeds 6cm (2") apart, along the length of it. If sowing more than one row, allow 15cm (6") between the rows.
3. Cover the seeds with soil, and water again using the fine rose on your watering can.
4. Water every day until seedlings germinate.

Salad rocket can also be grown in containers from seed using a peat-free multi-purpose compost and sowing closer together. Don't allow the containers to dry out as this will encourage the plants to bolt (set seed).

When to plant salad rocket

Sow from spring through to late summer and then cover with fleece or a cloche when it gets cold to continue harvesting rocket in the autumn. Rocket can be grown indoors, although can go to seed very quickly with too much heat or sunlight.

Allow some plants to flower and develop seedpods, which you can then leave to sow themselves, or collect and dry out to sow again next season.

Where to plant and place your salad rocket

Rocket is a low growing plant which rarely reaches 1m (3') in height. It can become quite spindly towards the top when it gets to this height, and is best grown towards the front of a patch, where it is easy to harvest.

Although rocket likes warmth if it gets too much sunshine and too hot it will go to seed very quickly. It’s often better to sow rocket after the summer solstice to lessen the chance of bolting.

Rocket is related to other Brassicas, such as cauliflowers, cabbage and broccoli. For that reason, it’s best to sow salad rocket in a place where these plants haven’t grown recently. This stops unwanted pests and diseases from building up in the soil.

Caring and nurturing your salad rocket

To keep the plant producing fresh, young green growth, feed weekly with **Miracle-Gro® Performance Organics Fruit & Veg Concentrated Liquid Plant Food**. Water well during dry spells as it has a tendency to bolt when the weather is hot and dry.

Rocket does not need to be pruned, but keep cutting the young leaves so that they repeatedly come again. This will be just four to six weeks after sowing, when it can start to be harvested. Pick the outer leaves first and you should find new leaves appearing. Pick them fresh, as they do not store well, and more mature leaves can taste bitter and be much tougher.

Frequently asked questions about salad rocket

Is rocket safe to eat?

Yes, rocket is delicious eaten raw in salads, on top of pizzas and added to pasta dishes. It does have a peppery flavour that some people may need to get used to.

Is rocket easy to grow from seed?

Rocket is super easy to grow from seed. It copes with any soil but does prefer a bit of sun. The best part is that if it's grown from seed when the outside temperature is warm then you can pick just four to six weeks from sowing.

Can rocket be grown as a perennial?

Wild rocket is a perennial plant. Salad rocket is an annual but can be treated as a perennial by simply leaving it to self-seed from year to year.

Common pests and diseases of salad rocket

Rocket is largely unaffected by pests and diseases, but you can run into a few problems...

Why are my rocket leaves covered in tiny holes?

Flea beetles love munching on rocket leaves, making it look unattractive. Cover with fine netting or horticultural mesh from the moment they are sown. Encourage natural predators such as ladybirds and ground beetles, or spray with **BugClear™ Fruit & Veg**. However, tolerate it where possible - although it doesn't look nice, the leaves are still edible.

Key features of salad rocket

Botanical Name	*Eruca vesicaria*
Plant Type	Annual
Family	Brassicaceae
Light Exposure	Full sun - partial shade
Soil pH	Any
Flowering Time	Summer
Flower Colour	Creamy-white

How to grow chard

Chard, or Swiss Chard, is a delicious and beautiful plant which will bring harvests to the kitchen and colour to the garden all year round. Beta vulgaris subsp. vulgaris is a deep green leafy vegetable with brightly coloured stems, quick to grow from seed and needing little aftercare. It's an easy plant for new gardeners to begin growing, and will quickly become an essential part of any keen home grower's vegetable patch.

Types of chard to grow

There are many varieties of chard, all of them having the characteristic large fleshy leaves and thick crispy stalks. The plant is also known as 'silver beet' and 'leaf beet'.

Chard can have red, burgundy, yellow, bright pink, white or orange stems. They look stunning all year around, but particularly against a frosty or snow-white ground. The names of different chard varieties often give a clue to the stem colour:

- ‘Bright Lights’ - a mixture of varieties with differently coloured stems
- ‘Bright Yellow’ - golden coloured stems and slow to set seed
- ‘Fantasy’ - red stemmed and resistant to downy mildew
- ‘Fireworks’ - a mixture of varieties with different coloured stems
- ‘Rainbow’ - multicoloured stems
- ‘Green Wave’ - green stems and leaves, looking rather like perpetual spinach
- ‘Peppermint’ - pink and white striped stems
- ‘Ruby Red’ - bright red stems
- ‘White Silver’ - white stems

The leaves can be picked young and eaten in salads or, as they mature, cooked like spinach, whilst the stems can be chopped and cooked in stir-fries or pasta sauces. All varieties of chard are high in vitamins A, C and K, iron and fibre, making them a great addition to any dish.

What you'll need to grow chard

It's simple to grow chard from seeds. You can sow chard seeds direct in the ground from March through to September. You will need:

- A trowel or hoe
- Watering can with fine rose
- Water
- Chard seeds

1. Create a shallow drill in the soil, no more than 1.5cm (1/2") deep, using the trowel or hoe.
2. Water the drill, and then place a seed every 10cm (4") apart along the length of it.
3. Cover the seeds with soil, and water again using the fine rose on your watering can.
4. Water every day until the seedlings germinate. Thin to 40m (16") apart as plants grow larger.

The seeds can also be sown in modules, with young plants then transplanted to their final location.

You can also grow chard in pots or containers. Simply, follow our guidance above, filling the container with a peat-free multi-purpose compost. Be extra vigilant in watering them, as pots tend to dry out more quickly.

Young chard leaves can be harvested after just two months, and fully grown leaves after three months. Cut them from the outside of the plant, close to the soil. New leaves will shoot from the centre of the plant as the season progresses.

Where to plant and place your chard

Chard is a hardy and robust plant and will grow well in most soil types. Ideally, plant them in an open sunny position although they will tolerate partial shade.

Chard looks great planted informally amongst other plants in the border or vegetable patch. It is also stunning when planted in a more formal pattern, with careful thought given to how the plants are arranged to show off their colourful stems. Chard will grow to 50cm (20") in height, and as the stems are the eye-catching feature, position them so that they can be seen towards the front of a bed.

Caring and nurturing your chard

Water regularly during hot spells, so that the plants do not flower and set seed. At some point, regardless of your efforts, chard will do this - you can leave the seedheads to spread and germinate at random for next year, or collect them for drying and sowing in another location.

Harvest throughout the year, although growth will slow in very hot and very cold weather, so quantities will fluctuate. When harvesting, always leave some greenery on the plant so that it can continue to absorb sunlight and convert this into energy for new growth.

Mulch around mature plants in the summer and autumn with farmyard manure help retain moisture around the plants. Water regularly in dry spells. Feed fortnightly with **Miracle-Gro® Performance Organics Fruit & Veg Concentrated Liquid Plant Food** to encourage continuous leafy green growth.

Frequently asked questions about chard

Can I eat all of the Chard plant?

You can eat the leaves when young, raw, in salads, or cook the stems and leaves as they mature. Larger stems and leaves are very versatile, and go particularly well in pasta dishes, pizza, omelettes and curries.

Can I grow chard in containers?

Yes! Chard looks great in containers as a central, feature plant, with low-growing bedding plants around the edges. Sow in modules first then transplant when they have a few true leaves. Choose a large container filled with a good peat-free compost, such as **Miracle-Gro® Peat Free Premium All Purpose Compost**. Water regularly as containers can easily dry out.

Can chard grow in shade?

Chard will grow in shade, but much more slowly than plants receiving sunlight.

Does chard come back each year?

Chard is not a perennial plant, but their lifespan does cover two growing seasons. Plants will freely seed themselves, meaning that you can plant them once and have many years of self-grown plants appearing in your garden.

Common pests and diseases with Chard

Why do the leaves of my chard plant have white-grey patches on them?

Downy mildew thrives among crowded plants, so thin as needed to ensure good air circulation.

Why does my chard plant have furry grey patches on it?

Grey Mould can affect any part of chard, spreading to and damaging other plants too. Ensure good air circulation by thinning plants as needed.

Why are the leaves of my chard plant shredded around the edges?

Birds can tear the edges of chard leaves in search of moisture. Cover plants with netting if this has become a problem.

Why do the leaves of my chard have white or brown blisters and blotches?

Beet leaf miner maggots can tunnel into the leaves, making them look unattractive. Add fine mesh to deter beet leaf miner flies from laying their eggs on leaves, and squash maggots on sight.

Key features of chard

Botanical Name	*Beta vulgaris*
Plant Type	Biennial
Family	Amaranthaceae
Light Exposure	Sun to partial shade
Soil pH	Neutral to slightly acidic

How to grow sugar snap peas

Sugar snap peas are a deliciously sweet, fun and quick-cropping vegetable to grow. They will produce a prolific amount of peas from even the tiniest space, and are a great way to involve kids in the garden. Kids love to eat these delicious peas straight from the pod, so don't count on too many making it to the kitchen! Just provide water, food, compost, and sunlight, and you'll have a harvest of tasty healthy snacks in no time.

Varieties of sugar snap peas you can grow

Sugar snap peas are different to other peas as the entire swollen pea pod of a sugar snap pea can be eaten raw. Garden peas have a thicker pod which isn't so palatable, so the peas need to be removed from the

pod first. The entire flat pod of a mange tout can be eaten, but they can be a little tough, so should be steamed or marinated for a while first.

We really like the following sugar snap peas:

- **Delikett**. A prolific producer of very sweet sugar snap peas, ‘Delikett’ has been awarded the prestigious RHS Award of Garden Merit (AGM). These plants grow to just 60cm (2') tall and are compact, making them perfect for a container or small patch of soil.
- **Sugar Ann**. One of the fastest maturing cultivars, ‘Sugar Ann’ will begin to produce peas in under two months from sowing. It grows to 75cm (2 ½') tall, with heavy showers of small and sweet pods.
- **Sugar Lace**. A good type to grow where powdery mildew is a problem, showing resistance to this nuisance disease. This cultivar puts most of its energy into producing peas rather than leaves, producing super juicy pods.

Sugar snap peas are a good source of Vitamin C. Their sweetness and ease of eating makes them a healthy addition to any lunchbox!

Essential equipment for growing sugar snap peas

To grow sugar snap peas you will need:

- Small pots at least 9cm (3") deep.
- **Miracle-Gro® Peat Free Premium Fruit & Vegetable Compost**, or all purpose compost such as **Miracle-Gro® Premium All Purpose Compost**.
- Dibber.
- Sugar snap pea seeds.
- Garden rake (if growing in the ground).
- Container (if growing in pots).
- Watering can.
- Plant food, such as **Miracle-Gro® Performance Organics Fruit & Veg Granular Plant Food**.
- 1m (3') tall supports (sturdy sticks, trellis, or canes with netting).
- **Levington® Composted Bark**.

How to grow sugar snap peas

You can sow sugar snap peas from March - April indoors or April - June outside as long as all risk of frost has passed. The cultivars we have recommended above grow to under 1m (3') tall, but some can reach 2m (6'), so make sure you check the packet first and use taller supports if needed.

How to sow sugar snap peas indoors

1. Fill the small pots with compost, leaving 2-3 cm (1") between the top of the compost and the rim of the pot.
2. Push 3-4 seeds into the compost in each pot, so that they aren't touching each other. You might need to limit this to 2 seeds in small pots.

3.Keep well watered, and prepare to move them outside when they are 12-15cm (4-5”) tall, from April onwards.

How to sow sugar snap peas outdoors

1.Prepare the soil with a garden rake, removing weeds and evening out any large clumps of soil. If growing in pots, fill the container with compost, so that it is just 1cm (1/2”) below the rim of the container.

2.Use the dibber to make a hole 2-3cm (1-1.5") deep for each pea.

3.Fill each hole with water, place a pea seed in, and fill the hole with compost.

Supporting your crop

1.Once peas have germinated, or after you have planted out the peas you started indoors, it’s time to add supports. These can be arranged in a row, or a wigwam arrangement shape.

2.Insert twigs and sticks (being careful to avoid the delicate roots), a trellis, or canes with netting wrapped around, into the ground. Sugar snap peas climb using tendrils and need a roughly textured surface to scramble up.

3.The supports you use should be strong enough to support the plants as they grow - make sure they don’t wiggle in the ground!

Caring for sugar snap peas

Make sure that your sugar snap peas receive lots of sun. Ideally this should be six hours or more each day, so check that they do not become overshadowed by other plants.

Shelter plants from strong winds, and keep well watered. Sugar snap peas need moist, well drained soil, so water them daily. Add a mulch of **Levington® Composted Bark** in early summer, to conserve moisture, which will help the plant to keep producing more pods.

Check that supports are firmly in the ground, securing them as needed. Occasionally a plant will veer away from the supports, so gently help it back towards them if needed.

Sugar snap pea plants will produce pods up until the first frosts. They are annual plants that you will need to sow each year. One of the many great things about them is that you can dry and save some of the seeds for using again next time.

Harvesting sugar snap peas

The earliest sown sugar snap pea pods will be ready by June. Wait until they have filled out and have a tubular shape, but before you can start to see the individual peas in the pod. Depending on the variety, they are likely to be 4cm (1.5") long, but pick them before they get to 8cm (3”) big as the pods then start to become fibrous.

1. Once pea pods start to swell, they can be harvested. Hold the stem of the plant just above the pea pod, and gently snap the pod away.
2. Feed the plants throughout the cropping season with **Miracle-Gro® Performance Performance Organics Fruit & Veg Concentrated Liquid Plant Food**.
3. Sow more peas around the base of the supports every 2-3 weeks up until the end of June, to ensure a succession of peas to harvest.

Storing and cooking with sugar snap peas

You should eat sugar snap peas soon after picking them, for maximum sweetness. If you store them before use, place them in the salad drawer of the fridge.

Add fresh sugar snap peas to salads, whole or sliced, and washed but uncooked. They pair well with salad leaves, pak choi, radish, baby carrots and spring onions.

Mature pods that were picked a little late are better cooked before eating. They are great used in stir-fries alongside noodles and broccoli, or served as a side dish with new potatoes and a slice of quiche.

Sugar snap peas can be frozen for cooking at a later date. Blanche them by adding whole pods to a pan of boiling water for two minutes, before draining and plunging into ice cold water. You can then store in the freezer and add to pasta dishes and risottos.

Common Pests And Diseases

Sugar snap peas are susceptible to a number of pests and diseases. They are all better prevented rather than treated after an attack has started.

What is the white growth on the surface of my sugar snap pea leaves?

Powdery mildew can affect sugar snap peas in hot, dry weather. Keep plants well watered, avoiding touching the leaves with water. Some cultivars, such as ‘Sugar Lace’ and ‘Super Snappy’ have better resistance to powdery mildew, so try these if you have had problems in the past.

What has eaten my sugar snap pea seedlings?

Mice can eat the seeds of freshly planted sugar snap peas, leaving stalks scattered over the surface of the soil. **Slugs and snails** will eat any green part of the plant that they can reach, with only shiny, slimy trails to show. Start plants inside and move outside once they are big enough to fend off attacks from any of these culprits.

What is eating my sugar snap pea plants?

Pigeons will nibble the leafy foliage, stunting their growth before they can develop pods. Use secure netting to prevent pigeons reaching plants, removing it once plants start to flower. Hang shiny items nearby to confuse them and deter them from landing.

Carrots are relatively easy to grow and can be sown regularly throughout the season for an abundance of carrot crops. They now come in a variety of colours, from white to purple (and, of course, orange).

How to grow carrots

Cultivation

For the best results, carrots need a sunny position and fine, crumbly soil that has not been freshly manured, without too many stones.

Carrot varieties

For early crops, choose ‘Early Nantes’, ‘Amsterdam Forcing’ or ‘Mignon’.

For the main sowing season, sow ‘Autumn King’, ‘Red Intermediate’ or ‘Chantenay Red Cored’.

For stoney soil, try the shorter or stump-rooted varieties, such as ‘Rondo’ or ‘Parmex’.

And to tempt kids, you could try ‘Sugarsnax’, ‘Parmex’ or ‘Bolero’.

Sowing carrots

The seeds need to be sown where they are going to mature. Follow our **how to grow carrots** guide for full details.

How to care for carrots

If you have sown too thickly they will need thinning out. Don’t compost the larger thinnings as they make a delicious addition to salads. It is better to sow thinly, rather than having to thin out seedlings, as handling and bruising the plants can attract carrot fly.

Harvesting

Carefully lift carrots as soon as they are large enough to use. Don’t leave them to get very large or you’ll sacrifice flavour.

Read our **how to grow carrots** guide for further advice and information.

Pests

Carrots may be susceptible to the following problems: Forking, Cracking, Carrot Fly.

Foliage season(s)	Spring, Summer, Autumn
Sunlight	Full sun
Soil type	Clay, Loamy, Sandy
Soil pH	Neutral
Soil moisture	Moist but well-drained
Ultimate height	Up to 15cm (6in)
Ultimate spread	5cm (2in)
Time to ultimate height	3 months

Growing vegetables in September

When you're not busy harvesting your lovingly grown crop, there's still plenty to do in the vegetable patch to keep it productive throughout September and into the colder months. If the hot and dry weather of the summer continues, make sure to keep your vegetable plants well-watered, and consider adding a natural feed to promote healthy growth. This is particularly important for new seedlings, which can quickly wither without a little help.

You can earth up and firm down the soil around your Brussels sprouts to prevent them from getting damaged during windy weather. It's also worth earthing up your leek stems with soil to increase the length of the white stems.

To help encourage air flow and to ripen the remaining fruit, pinch out the tops of your tomato plants. You can remove any new flowers, or any growth which is either below the lowest fruits or is shading any of the fruits. You can also pinch out the growing tips of cucumbers and feed them with a naturally derived tomato feed such as Tomorite®.

If you sowed peas in summer, add supports to them – you might even be able to use twigs from all of the pruning you'll be doing this month. Allow

a couple of the pods from your French and runner beans to dry out on each plant and place them in a paper bag until the spring when they can be sown again.

Once you've done the above, there's just a little pruning and thinning left to do. Remove horizontal leaves from your celeriac to expose the crowns and help the roots bulk up, and thin your turnips to roughly 8cm (3 inches) apart.

What vegetables to harvest in September

September is the pinnacle of the vegetable growing season, with heavy quantities of veg ripening for the harvest – just in time for those winter roast dinners!

Remember to keep harvesting your chilli peppers throughout the month to extend the productive season. These can be frozen, eaten fresh or dried out for use over the winter. Radishes are also quick growing, and the roots will go woody and become unpalatable if left for too long, so make sure to pull these frequently.

Recommendation: You can use the leafy tops of turnips in the kitchen as greens – in stews and omelettes, for example.

Peas

Onions

Cavolo Nero

Rocket

Fruit

If you're wondering what fruits to plant in September, then it's the perfect time of year to get some bare-root trees and bushes in the ground. Elsewhere in the garden there are plenty of fruits to be harvested – from apples and pears to strawberries and raspberries.

What fruit to plant in September

September is the perfect time to plant new fruit trees and bushes, with the widest selection of varieties available as bare-root plants. Fruit plants are perennials, and will be in your garden for years, possibly even decades, so consider what's best for you and your garden long term:

- The size of a mature fruit tree is determined by the rootstock it has been grown on. A reputable grower will advertise which one has been used for a particular plant. It is important to know this as a full-grown tree on 'MM111' rootstock can grow up to six metres (20 feet)
  high. **Apple**, **apricot**, **nectarine**, **peach**, **pears**, **plum** and **quince** tr ees are all grafted onto specific rootstocks.

- The amount of fruit produced can be increased by planting a variety which has a nearby fruit tree from the same pollination group. Pollination groups are a widely-used way of categorising fruit plants which flower at the same time. This maximises opportunities for insects to cross-pollinate the flowers, which will then form fruit. **Apples**, **cherries**, **pears** and **plums** are grouped in this way.

Many fruit trees can also be planted in containers. They will need lots of water during hot spells when they dry out quickly, but they are great as feature plants in ornate planters, or if you want maximum productivity from a small space. If you are watering your plants during a hot spell,

consider mixing in some organic liquid plant food for tastier, more abundant produce.

Elsewhere in the garden, strawberries can still be planted in early September but it's best not to leave this any later than the first week. You can use runners from existing plants or buy new ones - either are easy to grow in the ground or in pots.

September grow guides

The Ultimate Guide To Grow, Plant and Care for Strawberries

Who doesn't love strawberries? If you're a strawberry fan, the many varieties of 'Fragaria × ananassa' are easy to grow at home, allowing you to enjoy the perks of harvesting ripe fruits in your own garden. What all strawberry growers will soon realise – you'll be having the juicy fruit with everything, as just one plant can be a prolific cropper.

Understanding the different types of strawberry

Strawberries are either summer-bearing or everbearing. Summer-bearing strawberries tend to grow bigger fruits and produce one larger harvest over a two-week period in the summer. The exact timing depends on the cultivar. These larger harvests are ideal if you plan to make jam with your strawberries, as you will require a glut of fruit in order to do this.

Everbearing plants, also called perpetual strawberries, produce fruit all season, but in smaller numbers and more sporadically. This type of strawberry is ideal to snack on fairly regularly, or for small harvests to enjoy at breakfast for example.

It's also worth mentioning the alpine, or wild strawberry, Fragaria vesca. Technically an everbearing strawberry, it also does well in gardens. The fruits are small and a bit dry but with an intense flavour. They spread

easily and make excellent groundcover, which is another perk as the dainty leaves are ornamental.

Strawberry varieties

Strawberries come in a range of different shapes, sizes, flavours and cropping times. The main summer-fruiting varieties are divided into early, mid, and late-season types. There are also perpetual or everbearing varieties that can fruit more-or-less continuously from July to September.

Some of the best varieties include:

- Early summer fruiting Emily, Honeoye
- Midseason Cambridge Favourite, Hapil, Pegasus
- Late season Rhapsody, Symphony
- Perpetual fruiting Aromel, Bolero

Your local garden centre will probably have a selection of different varieties, so you can pick n' mix your plants for a long cropping period. Make sure you pick strawberry plants with plenty of healthy green leaves, that are fairly compact and not too leggy.

When to plant strawberries

Strawberries are available as bare-root runners, that are best planted in the spring or as young plug and potted plants.

You can plant strawberries at any time of the year, as long as the soil is workable and not waterlogged or frozen. However, mid-spring or early autumn are the ideal times to plant strawberries for an effective and bountiful harvest.

How to plant strawberries

So, you love the taste of strawberries. You're ready to have them with everything, but your big question is: how to grow them? The great news is that strawberries are simple and straightforward to grow. You do need to make sure you follow some basic guidelines, however. Here's how to do it.

Examine your strawberry plants

The first step is to examine your strawberry plants prior to planting. Check them for signs of **pests and disease** and remove any damaged leaves with clean tools. If your new plants are on the small side, you may choose to remove any early flowers or immature fruits. This will encourage the plant to put its energy into producing fresh growth, giving it a better chance of producing higher yields in the summer.

Choosing where to grow strawberries

When left to their own devices, strawberries may become very invasive, which is why many gardeners prefer to grow them in containers. Traditional strawberry planters are specialised containers that allow multiple plants to be grown in a small amount of space. Strawberries grow well in most containers and hanging baskets, as long as drainage holes are present. Try a multipurpose compost as a growing medium and space the strawberries about 20cm (8in) apart.

When planting strawberries, try a sunny location as they fruit well in full sun. They will tolerate part-shade, although fruit yields may be smaller. Strawberries like fertile but well-drained soil. If you are planting them directly in the ground or a raised bed, it's worth incorporating some manure or general fertiliser into the soil before planting. Space the plants 30-45cm (12-18in) apart, in rows 60-90cm (24-36in) apart

Planting strawberries

Using a trowel, dig a planting hole twice as large as the plant's root ball. Make sure the plant's crown, where the leaves meet the roots, is level or ever so slightly proud of the compost surface. Planting strawberries too deep can lead to rot, and planting

too high will dry the roots out. Backfill around the plant's roots and firm down the soil with your hands.

The final stage is optional but certainly helpful. Add a thin layer of straw to the surface of the soil and around the strawberry plants. If straw isn't available, you can use horticultural grit. This acts as a barrier between the developing fruit and the soil. Fruits resting against the soil surface are vulnerable to rot if the soil is wet, as well as nibbles from hungry insects.

When to harvest strawberries

You are likely to know when to harvest your strawberries as the fruits will have darkened in colour and look juicy. Try to harvest as soon as they are ripe, as this is when they taste their best. Remember to be as gentle as possible when harvesting as this prevents bruising the fruit. If you can, remove the stalk and stem from the plant too.

How to care for strawberry plants

Caring for strawberry plants requires some light maintenance to keep them healthy and productive. The first tip is to water regularly, especially if the plants are growing in a container or raised bed. When watering, aim the flow near the base of the plant, rather than overhead, as the leaves of strawberries can be susceptible to mould when wet.

Regular feeding is also important when growing strawberries, as they are hungry plants. Most gardeners like to use a high-potassium liquid feed every two weeks, such as **Miracle-Gro Performance Organics Fruit & Veg feed**. This kind of feed encourages flowering; and more flowers means more fruit. Tomato feed will also do the job well.

It's worth remembering that strawberry plants eventually lose their vigour and usually need replacing every three to four years. In the second or third year, you may decide to propagate baby plants from the runners your strawberries produce. These are the long creeping shoots that snake along the soil and produce daughter plantlets nearby. However, in the first year, it's beneficial to remove runners as and when you see them. Cut them off where they meet the mother plant. This encourages your strawberry plants to put more energy into flowering and fruiting.

Common strawberry plant pests and diseases

Grey mould/bortrytis mould

Grey mould is a fungal disease that appears as powdery grey mould at the strawberry stalk, gradually covering the whole fruit, which then rots. Strawberries affected by grey mould should not be eaten.

- Remove any dead leaves or flowers.

- Remove any affected fruit promptly.
- Space strawberry plants well when planting to allow good air circulation.
- There are no chemical controls available for grey mould.

Powdery mildew

Powdery mildew is a fungal disease that appears as a white powdery deposit on strawberry leaves, stunting growth and causing leaves to shrivel. Drought-stressed plants are more susceptible to this disease.

- Dig organic material into the soil before planting to improve soil water retention.
- Space strawberry plants when planting to ensure good air circulation.
- Remove any affected growth promptly.
- Water regularly in dry periods.

Frost damage

Late frosts can damage strawberry flowers, blackening the centres. Damaged flowers will not develop into fruits.

- Avoid planting strawberry plants in frost pockets.
- Protect plants from late frosts by covering them with horticultural fleece at night during cold snaps.

Verticillium wilt

Verticillium wilt is a soil-borne fungus. It causes the leaves of strawberry plants to turn brown and wilt, and eventually the whole plant will die.

- Avoid planting strawberries in ground that has been used in the past three years for tomatoes, peppers or potatoes or other strawberries.
- There is no chemical control for verticillium wilt.

Slugs and snails

Slugs and snails will eat ripe strawberries, and can be identified by the slime trails that they leave, as well as the damage they do.

- Check plants at night and remove slugs and snails by hand.
- Covering the soil around plants with crushed eggshells or grit may have some effect.
- Scatter environmentally-friendly **slug pellets** if other methods are not sufficient.

How to grow peach trees

What better way to round off a summer meal than with a luscious peach? Even better, a peach you've grown yourself? But can you

grow peaches in the UK? With a sheltered sunny location and careful nurturing, you can grow peaches in the UK. Prunus persica originates from China and in the age of the grand country house was extensively grown in specially designed glasshouses. Follow this guide to learn how to grow peaches in your garden at home.

Types of peach trees to grow

Here is a selection of widely available peach trees to grow in your garden, including some smaller trees suitable for growing in containers. Most of the peach plant varieties listed have pretty pink blossom in spring. We've highlighted where the flowers are a slightly different shade.

- 'Peregrine': has red tinted skin and white flesh. It is said to be one of the most reliable varieties for a generous crop of fruit ready to harvest in August.
- 'Avalon Pride': is said to be strongly resistant to the most common problem when growing peaches, leaf curl disease. It ripens from early August with yellow flesh that parts from the stone relatively easily.
- 'Duke of York': an early variety ready to harvest from early summer, the fruits have red skins and sweet white flesh.
- 'Saturne': grow this 'doughnut' peach for something a little different. Children love the flat fruits with extremely sweet white flesh.

These compact and slow growing varieties have been bred to grow in containers:

- ‘Bonanza’: crops in late summer with large red and yellow skinned fruits with yellow flesh.
- Sibley’s Patio Peach ‘Melred’: the sweet yellow flesh parts easily from the stone. Magenta red flowers.
- ‘Garden Lady’: a later fruiting variety with yellow and red skins and yellow flesh.

What you’ll need to grow peach trees

Peaches do best grown in well-drained, fertile soil. If you have heavy clay, you may find they grow best in a large container, such as the variety ‘Bonanza’ - but you can improve drainage by adding mulch every year. You can enrich all soils by adding **well-rotted manure**.

To grow peaches in a container you will need:

- a container with a diameter of at least 30cm.
- pea gravel at the base of the pot for drainage and stability.
- **soil-based compost**.

Where a peach tree is planted against a wall or fence, provide support with horizontal strands of strainer wire at 15cm intervals, attached to the vertical support with metal vine-eyes. Train the branches of the peach onto bamboo canes arranged on the wires in a fan shape. Training peach trees this way encourages more fruit for minimum space and allows more sun and heat to get to the fruits.

To take care of a peach tree, ideally you need to provide protection at several stages of growth with:

- Polythene sheeting shelter: in winter this protects the tree from peach leaf curl.

•Horticultural fleece: in early spring this protects the delicate blossom from frost. Remove it during the day for any early pollinating insects to reach the flowers.

•Strong netting: from April through to harvesting because birds love to eat the peaches off the tree.

Peaches often flower before many pollinating insects emerge. A small paint brush can be used to pollinate the peach flowers by hand. Just dab each flower with the brush at around midday every day during the flowering season.

Where to plant and place your peach trees

Peaches grow best fan-trained (see above) against a sunny, sheltered south or south-west facing wall or fence. Peach trees are often sold bare-rooted and should be planted between November and March about 15-

20cm from the wall, at a slight angle towards the wall. If planting more than one peach, space them at least 3.5m to 4m apart.

In a sheltered location, peaches can also be grown as a free-standing shrub.

Caring and nurturing your peach trees

Follow these care tips for growing successful crops of peaches:

•Peaches prefer warm conditions in a sunny spot and protection from frost: see above.

•In late winter feed peach trees with a **continuous release feed** followed by a mulch of **well-rotted manure**. For peaches grown in containers, apply a liquid feed high in potassium such as **tomato food** every two weeks during the growing season.

•Keep the ground moist throughout the growing season and water peach trees generously during hot sunny weather as the soil near a

wall can quickly dry out. Make sure peach trees in containers don't dry out.

•Thin out any badly placed or misshapen fruits from the growing clusters to allow the remaining fruits space to develop. This should be done when the fruits are about 1cm wide. Aim to leave about 15cm between each peach.

•The fruits are ready to harvest when their skins have coloured up and the flesh around the stalk yields slightly. Cup your hand around the peach and remove it from the tree by giving a slight twist. Peaches do not store well and are best eaten when freshly picked.

•Prune peach trees immediately after harvesting. Because peaches flower on one year-old growth, remove as much old growth as possible. Cut back stems which have fruited to a new shoot, and tie in the new growth to the support to replace the old growth.

•Re-pot container grown peach trees approximately every three years.

•After the first year, never prune peach trees in the winter, as this can lead to disease.

•Peaches tend to be self-fertile, so you should harvest enough fruit even with one plant.

Common pests and diseases with peach trees

What is peach leaf curl?

Peach leaf curl happens in spring when new leaves blister and turn bright red or purple followed by a white layer of spore. The leaves then drop. The disease is caused by a fungus carried by wind and rain which overwinters in the bark and bud scales.

To control it, remove infected leaves before the spore layer forms. Encourage the growth of replacement leaves by feeding and watering

the tree. Fan trained trees can be protected from mid-winter to late spring with a temporary open-sided shelter made from polythene sheeting.

Can aphids attack my peach trees?

Aphids can attack peach trees, with the leaves becoming wrinkled and turning a yellowish-green in late spring/early summer. It's caused by a couple of species of aphid (both green and black). You can control it by spraying from mid-spring with a **plant oil pesticide**.

Frequently asked questions about peach trees

Do you need two peach trees to produce fruit?

No, Peach trees are self-fertile. But you may need to hand pollinate your fruit tree (see above) as the tree can come into blossom before the emergence of pollinating insects.

How big do peach trees get?

The average height of a mature peach tree is between 2.5m and 4 metres.

What is the lifespan of a peach tree?

Peach trees live for an average of 12 years.

Where do peach trees grow best?

Peach trees grow best in full sun, fan-trained against a south or south-west facing wall or fence.

Key features of peach trees

Botanical Name	Prunus persica
Plant Type	Deciduous fruit tree
Family	Rosaceae
Light Exposure	Full sun
Soil pH	All soil types: acid, neutral, alkaline
Flowering Time	March
Flower Colour	Pink
Native Area	China

How to grow cherry trees

Cherry trees are usually grouped into being either an ornamental type grown for their flowers, or a type grown for producing cherries for eating. The ornamental type is well-celebrated in Japan, where the annual cherry blossom festivals attract thousands of visitors from across the world. Cherry trees are truly beautiful, with different species of *Prunus spp*. offering gorgeous flowers, bark, leaves, and fruit. You can bring a bit of this to your garden with our easy to grow guide.

Types of cherry trees to grow

Ornamental cherry trees are usually labelled as such. These varieties do produce fruit, but they are not always edible – blossoms are the reason to grow them rather than for their flavour. These stunning cherry blossom trees are also known as sakura, and there are several hundred cultivars of tree to consider. We recommend:

- Prunus ‘Accolade’ gives interest throughout the year, with large pink flowers in the spring, and bright orange-red leaves in the autumn.

•Prunus apetala. A small tree growing to 5.5m (17') with white to light pink flowers, and very dark fruit.

•Prunus ‘Kanzan’. A pink flowering variety which has a large spread of up to 8 metres (25') wide.

•Prunus nipponica, or Japanese alpine cherry. This Japanese cherry blossom tree is very tolerant of cold conditions, this variety usually has light pink flowers with attractive yellow-orange leaves in the autumn.

•Prunus pendula ‘Pendula Rubra’. A weeping cherry tree cultivar, with an arching habit offering dark pink flowers.

•Prunus 'Royal Burgundy’. Grown for its stunning foliage, the leaves of this variety emerge as a copper colour, turning to bright red and eventually purple.

•Prunus sargentii. A pink flowering cherry tree with bronze to orange leaves.

•Prunus serrula. Also known as the birchbark cherry, paperbark cherry, and Tibetan cherry tree. Grown for its shiny copper coloured bark, a medium sized tree reaching 6-9m (18-27' high).

•Prunus ‘Shogetsu’. Large flowers which turn from pink to white.

•Prunus × subhirtella 'Autumnalis Rosea’. Unusual insofar that this cultivar will flower in a mild winter, as well as in the spring.

•Prunus ‘The Bride’. A small tree with bright white flowers.

Other cherry trees, not carrying the label ‘ornamental’ are usually grown for their fruit. The delicious fruit can be sweet or acidic. Sweet cherries are great for eating fresh, whilst acidic cherries are better for cooking. We like:

- Prunus ‘Sweetheart’. A sweet cherry which will continue cropping into early autumn.
- Prunus ‘Morello’. A dark-red fruited acidic variety, great for making into jams and tarts.
- Prunus ‘Merchant’. A heavy cropping sweet cultivar with dark fruits, this one needs a pollination partner.
- Prunus ‘Lapins’. Another heavy cropping sweet variety, this one does not need another cherry tree nearby as it is self-fertile.

Both types of cherry tree are truly beautiful, so whichever you choose, just be sure to give it a good start by following our top tips for growing cherry trees, below.

What you’ll need to grow cherry trees

A wide range of cultivars of cherry tree are available to buy online. You’ll also find cherry trees for sale at most garden centres. Choose one with an appropriate rootstock for the space you have available - rootstocks limit the size of the mature plant.

‘Gisele 5’ rootstock (dwarf cherry tree) is perfect for small gardens and pots, growing to just 1.5 metres (5') tall, making the cherry tree a dwarf size. The rootstock ‘Colt’ is better for a larger garden, limiting the height of a sweet cherry tree to 8 metres (24'), and acidic cherry trees to 4 metres (12').

Some cultivars need a pollination partner to produce fruit, so check this when purchasing. If necessary, buy a second plant to be grown nearby. To plant the cherry tree:

1. Dig a hole slightly bigger than the rootball, or if growing in a pot, add plenty of **compost** to a large container which is at least 50 cm (18") across.
2. Add plenty of water to the hole or pot, and allow to drain away.
3. Place the plant in the hole to the same depth it was planted when grown in the nursery - look for a change in the appearance of the bark, slightly above the roots.
4. Add a stake to the ground, and use string tied in an ‘8’ shape to secure the tree to it.
5. Backfill soil in the ground, or add more compost to the pot, gently firming in to ensure good contact between the roots and the soil.
6. For cherry trees planted in the ground, add a mulch of **Levington® Composted Bark**.

Plant outside from mid-autumn through to the end of the winter, when the plant is dormant and the ground isn’t frozen.

Where to plant and place your cherry trees

Cherry trees grow well in pots, as well as fanned against a wall or in the ground as a free-standing tree. They can be relatively small, so are suitable for most gardens no matter the size. Choose an appropriate rootstock so that the tree will only grow to the size you want it to.

They don’t cast much shade, so are perfect for underplanting with flowers that like dappled shade. Cherry trees like sun and to be protected from wind.

Cherry trees need a period of cold weather, so don’t be tempted to grow them indoors in a heated environment.

Caring and nurturing your cherry trees

Cherry trees flower in mid-late spring, and fruiting varieties are ready to harvest throughout the summer. Protect from birds who will enjoy the fruits, by securing netting over the plant. Make sure there are no gaps as birds will get in and may get trapped.

They like lots of sunlight, and prefer well-drained soil which can retain some moisture. Mulch annually in late winter and early spring with **Levington® Peat Free Organic Blend Farmyard Manure**.

Prune young trees from March to April, and mature trees in the summer only if needed. This should focus on maintaining the shape desired, and to ensure good airflow around the plant. Prioritise removing dead and diseased growth.

Protect from frost when flowers are forming, using horticultural fleece. Remove this each day once the weather warms to allow pollinators to reach the flowers, replacing at night before frosts return.

Water container-grown and young plants to ensure consistent moisture. Mature specimens should not need watering except in the very driest of summers.

Common pests and diseases with cherry trees

Why are the cherry tree leaves on the tips of the branches curling up?

Black cherry aphid suck sap from the leaves, causing them to curl up and become distorted. It doesn't look very nice but is largely harmless - encourage birds outside of the fruiting season, as they will enjoy eating the aphids.

Why do my cherries have small holes in them?

Cherry fruit fly can lay eggs in young fruit, and when these hatch the worm-like larvae eat the flesh and then exit the fruit, leaving a small hole. You can prevent this by encouraging birds into the garden (protect with netting when fruits are forming). Squish small populations by hand, and spray with **BugClear™ Ultra Gun!** If the problem persists.

Why does the bark of my tree have a split which is weeping?

Canker is a serious disease which can kill a cherry tree and can spread to other trees. Remove infected sections of the plant using secateurs or a pruning saw, cleaning the tool carefully before using again. Destroy the affected material.

Frequently asked questions about cherry trees

Do cherry trees have thorns?

No, cherry trees are thornless.

Can you grow a cherry tree from a cherry pip?

Cherry trees can be grown from seed, but the size of the mature tree is then not controlled by a rootstock, so they can become rather too large for most gardens.

Are cherry trees poisonous to horses?

Yes, the leaves of a cherry tree contain cyanide, and are toxic to horses if eaten.

Key features of cherry trees

Botanical Name	*Prunus spp.*
Plant Type	Woody perennial
Family	Rosaceae
Light Exposure	Full to partial sun
Soil pH	Neutral to slightly acidic
Flowering Time	April-May
Flower Colour	White, light and dark pink

Apples, pears, plums, cherries and even lemons. If you don't have a large garden, growing your own fruit and fruit trees might seem like an impossible dream and something only for the orchard owner. In fact, if you have even the **smallest of outdoor spaces**, you may well be able to enjoy your own harvest of fresh fruit by planting dwarf or patio fruit trees. They don't take much more care than their larger orchard cousins.

What's Your Favourite Fruit?

Fruit always tastes better when it's homegrown, so before you get started, spend a little time at your local garden centre or nursery deciding **which fruit you'd like to grow** and how many fruit trees you've got a room for. Because you want a great harvest of juicy flavoursome fruit, it is better if you are able to ensure your patio fruit trees will be south facing, so be realistic about what you can fit in.

Your Fruit Tree Container

Unless you happen to have a patio which includes flower beds, you are of course going to need a nice solid, but a free-draining container for each tree. A pot or container that is about 45 - 50 cm diameter should be large enough and fill it with good soil-based compost and plant up your chosen fruit trees. It may help if you fill the bottom with crocks if you are worried about drainage.

Getting Juicy

As your trees are **restricted to containers** they are going to need a little love and attention in order to bear the best fruit. Add a good feed or fertiliser which is high in potassium in spring and summer and check the particular tree you have chosen for any recommendations as to what feeds might suit it best.

Protect your tree and any early blossom against frost and very harsh winters and check whether or if you need other plants to help pollination.

You'll also need to water your patio fruit trees daily, so keep a careful eye on the containers particularly during the growing season and hot weather.

As with all plants, come the winter, take a little time to check them over. Are there any dead or diseased branches that need cutting out or do they need a little thinning and shaping. But don't cull or cut back too violently and try to ensure you keep a nice shape.

Making The Most Of Your Trees

While some fruit trees can grow in containers indefinitely, others need a bit more attention. If you notice that your harvest or yield is getting smaller in size or quality, then it may be time to re-pot. This might be anywhere between 2 to 7 years after original planting and it's an easy enough job.

During the trees, dormant season (i.e. when it has no leaves, flowers, fruit or buds) just remove the tree from the pot and tease out and thin the roots a little. Then refill the container with **fresh compost** and replant.

With luck and ongoing care as described above, your fruit tree should enjoy a new lease of life and start producing some bumper crops once more.

Get Ambitious

There is such a diverse choice of dwarf or patio fruit trees to choose from these days that if you fancy it, you can get creative and train your trees. Perhaps you just want them to arch around a doorway, lattice out over a back wall or work their way around a trellis or pergola.

Again, spend some time online or at your garden centre discovering what's available and would work best in your space and you might be

pleasantly surprised about just how much you can achieve in your back yard, along your fence or up to some unsightly posts.

Fruit Tree Pollination

Many fruit trees require a compatible donor for them to be able to successfully fruit. Fear not though as this will often happen naturally, especially if you are growing in an urban location. If you are not and you are concerned about finding a pollinating partner for your fruit tree then you can grow a self-pollinating tree.

A great example of a self-pollinating tree is a dual-tree. This is two varieties of fruit growing in the same plant that is a perfect idea for a small garden.

Enjoy The Fruits Of Your Labour

Even without the sweet pleasures of homegrown fruit, patio fruit trees are worth the effort you put in. Their blossom is normally a joy as it heralds the arrival of spring and patio trees are normally really attractive to look at with their bright colours and fruit.

Of course, there are the health benefits of having fresh fruit on tap and the money-saving side of things too, all of which add up to make fruit trees a really great choice for your patio growing.

Have you been enjoying homegrown fruit and the indulgence of heavily laden patio trees? Have you got **the perfect patio**? Let us know on our social media sites, or leave a comment below!

Growing fruit in September

With everything else happening in the garden in September, you'll be pleased to know that fruit trees and bushes need little maintenance this month. There are just a few key things to keep on top of.

If the weather is hot and dry, keep watering new fruit bushes and trees regularly – especially those in containers.

Look out for heavily laden branches of apple and pear trees that may need some extra support. You can provide this by supporting the branch from below with a stout stake, or by attaching a strong rope from the branch to a nearby wall.

If you have grapes, you can help these ripen by removing any leaves that are shading the fruit.

Finally, remain vigilant for pests and diseases which may be rife around this time of year.

What fruit to harvest in September

September can provide bumper crops of homegrown fruit – if you also have a vegetable garden then you'll likely find yourself supplying friends and family with bushels of fruit and veg this month. Remember to pick fruits regularly to catch them at their best. The following can all be harvested throughout September:

If you want to keep berries for use over the winter, wash and add them to containers suitable for freezing.

Recommendation: Give the container a shake after an hour to keep the berries from sticking to each other. This makes it easy to take a handful whenever needed.

Strawberries

Raspberries

Peach

Fig Tree

Herbs and spices

If you have the option of moving some of your herbs and spices indoors in September, then you can substantially extend their growing season. Outside, there are still a few herbs that you can plant but, with the seasons changing, your efforts may be better focussed on harvesting.

What herbs and spices to plant in September outside

As the weather gets colder and windier, there are fewer herbs and spices that can be planted outside, but we can bring a number of them indoors to extend their growing season. Before turning your eye indoors though, there are a few perennial herbs that can be planted into borders or containers:

Plant seedlings of the following

How to grow and care for coriander

Coriander has recently become a very popular herb to grow at home. Grown mainly for its green leaves which are sometimes known as Cilantro and also its spicy seeds, this herb is a must in salads and as a fragrant green addition to Indian, Thai and Chinese curries. The seeds are a vital ingredient of curry powder.

Coriander varieties

Coriander is usually available as the species (Coriandrum sativum), although the variety Calypso has good bolting resistance and can be cut back and allowed to regrow several times. The variety Confetti has fern-like foliage.

What you'll need to start growing coriander

Growing coriander requires very little equipment. Here's what you'll need:

- Coriander seeds
- A suitable pot with drainage holes
- Multipurpose **compost**
- Balanced **liquid feed**

Cultivating coriander

Outdoors, coriander prefers a cool position and light shade and very well-drained soil.

Coriander is most commonly grown in a pot - either in a little shade on the patio or on a windowsill that doesn't receive direct, burning sunlight in summer and which doesn't get too hot.

Sowing coriander

Sow coriander seeds directly in well-prepared moist soil outside at monthly intervals from March to August for a continuous supply of leaves.

You can also grow it in 15-30cm (6-12in) pots, sowing a few seeds in each and germinating indoors with gentle warmth. Sow every 6-8 weeks to have a constant supply of fresh leaves throughout the year.

Young plants are usually available from garden centres in summer. Plant these out or pot them up into slightly larger pots.

How to care for coriander

When sowing outdoors, thin seedlings or young plants to 5-7.5cm (2-3in) apart. If you specifically want to grow it for its seeds, grow at 20-25cm (8-10in) apart.

Keep the soil or compost moist as it tends to run to seed if allowed to dry out, but take care not to overwater as too much water can lead to rotting - especially in autumn and winter.

Give plants a light liquid feed of **a general feed** every couple of weeks during late spring and summer. This will help ensure plants go on producing a constant supply of leaves. Don’t use high potassium feeds as these will encourage premature flowering.

If plants become stressed they will run to seed quickly and leaves start to lose their flavour once flowering begins. This is fine if you want to harvest seeds; otherwise discard the plants.

Harvesting coriander

Start harvesting the leaves when they are bright green and young and the plants are 10-15cm (4-6in) tall.

You can treat coriander plants as a cut-and-come-again crop. Otherwise, allow them to run to seed and allow the seeds to develop on the plant and harvest them before they are shed.

Common problems, pests and diseases in coriander

Slugs and snails

Slugs and snails will feed on young coriander seedlings. They can be identified by the slime trails that they leave, as well as the damage they do.

- Check plants at night and remove slugs and snails by hand.
- Strulch is a good deterrent to snails.
- Covering the soil around plants with crushed eggshells or grit may have some effect.
- Scatter environmentally-friendly **slug pellets** if other methods are insufficient.

Aphids

Aphids are sap-sucking insects which can quickly infest young plants, stunting growth.

- Wipe off small colonies of aphids on coriander with a damp cloth.
- Encourage natural predators like ladybirds and hoverflies.
- **Pesticide sprays** are available for aphids.

Bolting

Bolting occurs when coriander plants produce flowers and set seed early. As they are annuals, the plants will die once they have set seed. Bolting can be triggered by stress, such as sudden dry periods.

- Plant bolt-resistant cultivars.
- Water regularly.
- Sow new seeds every few weeks to ensure a constant supply of leaves.

Key features of coriander

Flowering season(s)	Summer
Foliage season(s)	Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter
Sunlight	Partial shade, Full sun
Soil type	Chalky, Clay, Loamy, Sandy
Soil pH	Neutral
Soil moisture	Moist but well-drained
Ultimate height	Up to 50cm (20in)
Ultimate spread	Up to 30cm (1ft)
Time to ultimate height	6 months

How to grow sorrel

Perennial herb sorrel is easy-to-grow and well suited to the UK climate. Sorrel, or *Rumex* spp., is a great substitute for spinach, with a similar texture but a sharper citrus flavour. Delicious in soups and salads, this bountiful plant will reward you with crops from late spring all the way through to the autumn.

Varieties of sorrel you can grow

Now you know what sorrel is, there are several varieties of sorrel to choose from which are all easy to grow:

- Common sorrel (Rumex acetosa). The most widely available, this large, clumping variety produces prolific amounts of leaves. Sometimes marketed as spinach dock and garden sorrel.
- French sorrel (Rumex scutatus). A small variety which reaches just 30cm (1') tall, but can spread to up to 1m (3') across. A less astringent flavour than others and a pronounced lemon taste.
- Red veined sorrel (Rumex sanguineus). Probably the most attractive variety of Sorrel, this one is as delicious as the others, but

is also quite beautiful. The contrast of the green leaves and deep red leaf veins catches the eye in both the garden and in a large bowl of lettuce.

•Sheep's or wild sorrel (Rumex acetosella). Often found growing in the wild, it's also possible to cultivate it in the garden. Be wary of allowing it to self-seed however, as it will pop up all over the place and can become a bit of a nuisance. It has a very strong, sour flavour.

Essential equipment for growing sorrel

Growing sorrel is easy - you just need the following:

•A 9cm (3") diameter pot.

•Seed compost, such as **Levington® Peat Free Seed Compost with added John Innes**.

•Watering can with fine rose.

•Seeds.

•Compost (if growing in containers), such as **Miracle-Gro® Peat Free Premium Moisture Control Compost for Pots & Baskets**.

•Dibber.

Where to plant your sorrel

Sorrel typically reaches 60cm (24") high, with very strong roots that will compete with other plants. The flowers are not especially attractive, so this plant is one that can be planted behind or amongst other vigorous crops. It is usually grown as a perennial, so plant it where it can stay for a few years. It will tolerate sun or partial shade.

When to plant your sorrel

Sow sorrel seeds in pots from February through to April, before transplanting or directly outside from April to July. It’s great for planting in a gap in the veggie garden after early potatoes, broad beans or garlic have been lifted. As well as sowing from seed, sorrel plants can be purchased from horticultural retailers ready to plant out.

How to sow sorrel

1. Fill the pot with compost, leaving 1cm (½") between the surface and the rim.
2. Water the compost well, making sure any water drains away.
3. Place 3-4 seeds on top of the compost, not allowing them to touch.
4. Loosely cover seeds with 1cm (½") of compost, leaving a small gap between the surface and the lip of the pot.
5. Move to a cool, light position.
6. Keep seedlings watered. as they grow and don't allow them to dry out.

Once seeds sown indoors have grown to about 10cm and you have hardened them off and the weather is right, get ready to plant them out. The following Sorrel planting steps also apply to purchased Sorrel plants and for **divided plants**:

1. Clear a patch of soil in the vegetable garden or border, or fill a container with a **suitable compost**.

2. Use the dibber/trowel to create a hole in the soil or compost, large enough to plant the young Sorrel plant into. If planting more than one, allow 30cm (1') between plants.

3. Place the plant in the hole, with the bottom leaves of the seedling just above the top of the hole.

4. Add more compost to the hole and around the stem of the plant . Firm the plant in so that there is good contact between the roots of the plant and the compost.

5. Once planted, water and leave to grow on, keeping well watered especially in dry weather. Luscious green leaves will be ready to pick just a couple of months later.

Caring for sorrel

Keep sorrel well watered during hot summer months, and remove flowers as they appear. This will help to stop the plant from running to seed which makes the plant taste too bitter to eat. Keep picking the leaves too as this will encourage the plant to produce more young growth.

Frosts will kill off foliage later in the year, but the plant will remain alive beneath the surface, ready to re-shoot in the spring. Divide plants every 2-3 years in the spring or autumn to maintain good air circulation around plants.

Harvesting sorrel

Harvest leaves from the earliest sowings from May onwards. Later sowings will be ready in the summer. Young sorrel leaves are softer and tangier, whereas older, larger leaves are better for cooking and less flavourful. Use them fresh in salads alongside other lettuce-type leaves.

Choose leaves which have an even shade of green, and that aren't showing any signs of yellowing or crispy brown areas.

Many varieties of sorrel contain oxalic acid, which can be poisonous if eaten regularly and in quantity, so don't eat them every day.

Storing sorrel

Sorrel is best eaten fresh, but if you want to preserve some for future use, then prepare it soon after harvesting. If possible, make it into your final dish before freezing it. For example, make a soup or stew before batching it up and freezing for use over the winter.

If it's not possible to use sorrel leaves straight away, wash them and gently sandwich them between sheets of damp kitchen paper in a sealed container in the fridge.

Common Sorrel pests and diseases

Sorrel is fairly resilient to most pests and diseases, and will only really be affected by these very familiar creatures...

Slugs and snails

We have a **great guide** for combating these troublesome pests.
Apply **SlugClear™ Slug & Snail Barrier** to newly planted sorrel as the young leaves are especially vulnerable.

Aphids

Aphids attack most plants, and sorrel is no exception. Tolerate small populations wherever possible, and encourage predators into the garden to help manage them. **Use BugClear™ Ultra 2** if the problems continue.

Parsley is a very commonly grown herb, used mainly as a garnish and to make delicious parsley sauce. But it is also an excellent ingredient for flavouring savoury dishes, making flavoured butter and stuffings and is very rich in vitamin C.

The more usual curly-leaved parsley looks good when used as a garnish, but flat-leaved parsley (pictured above) has a better, stronger taste and is a better choice for cooking.

How to grow parsley

Cultivating parsley

For the main summer crop, you can grow parsley in either a partially shaded position or full sun. An overwintering crop will need a protected site in full sun.

Parsley needs a fertile, moist, but well-drained soil.

Parsley varieties

Parsley is available as the common curly-leaved parsley, but don’t forget flat-leaved, French parsley.

Common parsley: Bravour, Champion Moss Curled, Envy

French parsley: Festival 68, Italian

There is also Hamburg parsley, which is grown as a root vegetable.

Sowing parsley

Parsley seeds are very slow to germinate, taking up to one month, especially in very wet, cold soils. So make sure the soil is warm and even pre-warmed by covering with cloches for very early sowings.

Sow seed thinly outdoors from March to July in well-prepared soil in drills 30cm (12in) apart and thin out the young plants to 10-15cm (4-6in) apart.

Seeds can also be sown indoors from August to March in cell or plug trays filled with **seed sowing compost** at a temperature of 18-21°C (65-70°F). Lightly cover the seed with more compost and keep moist. Grow on the seedlings in cooler conditions of around 10°C (50°F) and plant outside when the last frosts are over, after hardening off – gradually acclimatising them to outdoor conditions – for 10-14 days.

Planting parsley

You can also buy young parsley plants from garden centres, which can be planted outside anytime from spring to late summer.

Dig over the planting area, incorporating some organic matter – such as compost or leaf mould – if the soil is heavy clay. Dig a good sized hole big enough to easily accommodate the root ball.

Place the root ball in the planting hole and adjust the planting depth so that the crown of leaves is at soil level.

Mix in more organic matter with the excavated soil and fill in the planting hole. Apply **a general granular plant food** over the soil around the plants and water in well.

Or grow plants indoors on a brightly lit windowsill to have fresh leaves readily to hand.

Harvesting parsley

Don’t start harvesting the plants until there are at least 8 to 10 leaves. Then pick regularly to encourage a continual supply of leaves. Cut single leaves or bunches of leaves, starting low down on the stems.

How to care for parsley

Keep the soil moist by watering parsley regularly during prolonged dry periods; dry soils can cause the plants to ‘bolt’ (going to seed prematurely).

Parsley is a hungry plant, so use **a general granular plant feed** in the soil before sowing or planting out and feed with **a liquid plant food** throughout summer.

Should plants start to flower and go to seed, remove the flower heads immediately. This usually signifies the plant is getting past its best and you should grow some more to replace it.

Parsley is a hardy biennial and can carry on into autumn to provide small pickings over winter. Cover plants with a cloche to give protection from cold and so provide pickings for longer. Parsley is in the same family as carrots and is subject to carrot root fly attack, so cover early sowings with a cloche or horticultural fleece to protect plants against the female laying eggs in the soil.

Although fresh leaves have the best flavour, any excess can be frozen or dried in a microwave.

Dig up Hamburg parsley roots when they're large enough to use. They should be ready to harvest 3 to 4 months after sowing. The roots can be left in the ground in winter and dug up when needed. The leaves can also be used as any other type of parsley.

Parsley growing conditions

Flowering season(s)	Summer
Foliage season(s)	Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter
Sunlight	Partial shade, Full sun
Soil type	Clay, Loamy
Soil pH	Neutral
Soil moisture	Moist but well-drained
Ultimate height	Up to 20cm (8in)
Ultimate spread	Up to 15cm (6in)
Time to ultimate height	3-4 months

What herbs and spices to plant in September indoors

The following can be brought indoors and grown somewhere warm and bright such as a conservatory, windowsill or (ideally) a greenhouse, which will provide a suitable environment to keep the herbs in leaf a little longer.

Plant seedlings of the following

How to grow basil

No kitchen should be without a basil plant. Cultivated in herb gardens for centuries, it's one of the easiest herbs to grow from seed and it makes a delicious addition to so many dishes. Grow sweet basil (Ocimum basilicum) for tasty Italian cooking, or Thai and

lemon basil (Ocimum tenuiflorum, Ocimum x citriodorum) for exciting Asian dishes.

Types of basil to grow

As well as the popular sweet basil, there's a whole range of other basil varieties available. Here are a few of the most popular:

- Basil 'Sweet Green' – traditional sweet basil, ideal for Italian dishes.
- Basil 'Genovese' – stronger flavour and aroma than sweet basil.
- Basil 'Christmas' – a cross between Genovese and Thai basil. The leaves have a fruity, mulled-wine scent. Also good as an ornamental plant, with purple flowers.
- Basil 'Crimson King' – a very ornamental purple-leaved basil. The leaves have a clove flavour.
- Basil 'Siam Queen' – a Thai basil with liquorice-flavoured leaves, purple-red stems and violet flowers
- Basil 'Mrs Burn's Lemon' – delicious lemon-flavoured leaves.
- Basil 'Lettuce Leaf' – crinkled leaves with a mild flavour, good in salads

Essential equipment to grow basil

You will need the following equipment to grow basil at home:

1. Basil seeds
2. Pots
3. **Multipurpose compost**
4. Propagator or clear plastic bags

Where to grow basil

When growing basil, choose a sunny, sheltered spot with well-drained soil. Planting basil in raised beds improves drainage and gives some protection against slugs and snails. You'll also find that basil is ideal for pots, even growing happily indoors on a sunny windowsill.

How to sow basil

You can sow basil indoors from late February onwards.

1. Fill pots with multipurpose compost and firm down.
2. Sprinkle seed thinly over the top of the compost. Basil seeds germinate easily, so don't sow many more than you need.
3. Cover the seeds with a light layer of compost.
4. To avoid disturbing the seeds, stand the pots in a tray filled with water so that the compost can soak up water from below.
5. Place the pots in a propagator at a temperature of 15-25°C (59-77°F). Alternatively, place a clear plastic bag over each pot and place the pots somewhere warm with bright indirect light until the seeds germinate.
6. Water regularly but lightly.
7. Once the seeds have germinated, take them out of the propagator, or remove the plastic bags and let the seedlings grow on until they have developed at least two true leaves (these are the second pair of leaves to appear).
8. Hold each seedling by a leaf (never hold the stems, as these are easily damaged) and ease it out of the compost, using a pencil or something similar to help. Repot each seedling into its own individual pot.

9.Wait until all danger of frost is past before moving basil outside. Harden plants off for two weeks first by placing the pots outside during the day and moving them back inside at night.

Caring for basil

Basil hates sitting with its roots in cold, wet soil. Water in the morning so that the soil can dry out during the day. Avoid splashing the leaves when watering, to reduce the risk of powdery mildew, a fungal disease.

If you are growing basil primarily for use in the kitchen, pinch off any flowers that appear, as the leaves will develop a bitter taste once the plant has flowered.

Aphids can be a problem, especially on indoor plants. Wipe them off by hand before infestations get too big. Leaving the plants outside for a few days to allow natural predators like ladybirds to eat the aphids can reduce the problem.

Slugs and snails love basil and can devour entire plants, There are various ways to protect plants, including copper tape around pots, crushed egg shells, beer traps and sawdust, but physically checking the plants with a torch last thing at night is often the most effective solution.

Harvesting basil

You can harvest basil throughout summer, and regular harvesting will encourage the plant to produce more leaves.

If you just need a few leaves, pick individual leaves that join the stem just below a new pair of leaves. This means that for every leaf you pick, the plant produces two more. When harvesting basil in quantities, always leave two or three sideshoots below the point where you cut, to encourage the plant to grow bushy.

In mid- to late summer, cut the whole plant back by a third to encourage a final flush of leaves.

Basil won’t survive outside once the temperature drops below 5°C (41°F). For a supply of basil leaves into late autumn, move container-grown plants to a sunny indoor spot.

Storing basil leaves

It can be difficult to keep basil plants growing indoors in low winter light levels, but you can freeze or dry basil leaves to give you a supply of basil through winter.

- To freeze basil leaves, remove all leaf stalks and wash the leaves. Blanch the leaves in boiling water for a couple of seconds, then drain and rinse in iced water. Pat the leaves dry and place in an airtight container in a freezer.
- To dry basil leaves in an oven, turn it on to its lowest heat, then place the basil leaves on a baking tray and leave them in the oven for two to four hours until they crumble when bent.
- To air-dry basil, cut leafy shoots with long stems, tie them in bunches and hang the bunches somewhere cool and well ventilated, in bright but indirect light. Air-drying basil takes about a month.

Common pest or disease problems of basil plants

Black spots on basil leaves

Black spots on basil leaves can be caused by bacteria from the soil being splashed onto the leaves of the plant.

- Avoid splashing the leaves when watering.

Powdery mildew

Powdery mildew is a fungal disease that appears as a white powdery deposit or white spots on basil leaves, stunting growth and causing leaves to shrivel. Drought-stressed plants are more susceptible to this disease.

- Dig organic material into the soil before planting to improve soil water retention.
- Space plants when planting to ensure good air circulation.
- Remove any affected leaves promptly.
- Water regularly in dry periods.

Fusarium wilt

Fusarium wilt is a soil-borne fungal disease that causes basil leaves to turn yellow and wilt. The plant becomes unable to take up water and dies.

- There are no chemical controls available.
- Avoid planting basil in soil where basil plants have been previously affected by fusarium wilt.

Slugs and snails

Slugs and snails love basil and will strip plants bare. They can be identified by the slime trails that they leave, as well as the damage they do.

- Check plants at night and remove slugs and snails by hand.
- Covering the soil around plants with crushed eggshells or grit may have some effect.
- Scatter environmentally friendly **slug pellets** if other methods are not sufficient.

Glasshouse whitefly

Glasshouse **whitefly** suck plant sap and excrete a sticky substance called ‘honeydew’ which covers leaves and encourages the growth of sooty mould, stunting plant growth. They can also transmit viruses.

- A parasitoid wasp can be used as a biological control.

•Keep gardens clear of weeds which can harbour whitefly.

•Use **pesticide sprays** suitable for use on edible plants.

Glasshouse red spider mite

Glasshouse red spider mite is a sap-sucking mite. Severe infestations cause plants to drop leaves and eventually die. Symptoms include a fine webbing covering leaves and stems, and mottled leaves with tiny mites and eggs on their undersides.

•Ensure good ventilation in greenhouses.

•Mist plants to raise the humidity levels, or damp down greenhouse floors.

•A predatory mite can be used as a biological control.

•Use **pesticide sprays** suitable for use on edible plants.

Key features of basil

Foliage season(s)	Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter
Sunlight	Full sun
Soil type	Chalky, Clay, Loamy, Sandy
Soil pH	Neutral
Soil moisture	Moist but well-drained
Ultimate height	Up to 50cm (20in)
Ultimate spread	Up to 30cm (1ft)
Time to ultimate height	6 months

How to grow and care for coriander

Coriander has recently become a very popular herb to grow at home. Grown mainly for its green leaves which are sometimes known as Cilantro and also its spicy seeds, this herb is a must in salads and as

a fragrant green addition to Indian, Thai and Chinese curries. The seeds are a vital ingredient of curry powder.

Coriander varieties

Coriander is usually available as the species (Coriandrum sativum), although the variety Calypso has good bolting resistance and can be cut back and allowed to regrow several times. The variety Confetti has fern-like foliage

What you'll need to start growing coriander

Growing coriander requires very little equipment. Here's what you'll need:

- Coriander seeds
- A suitable pot with drainage holes
- Multipurpose **compost**
- Balanced **liquid feed**

Cultivating coriander

Outdoors, coriander prefers a cool position and light shade and very well-drained soil.

Coriander is most commonly grown in a pot - either in a little shade on the patio or on a windowsill that doesn't receive direct, burning sunlight in summer and which doesn't get too hot.

Sowing coriander

Sow coriander seeds directly in well-prepared moist soil outside at monthly intervals from March to August for a continuous supply of leaves.

You can also grow it in 15-30cm (6-12in) pots, sowing a few seeds in each and germinating indoors with gentle warmth. Sow every 6-8 weeks to have a constant supply of fresh leaves throughout the year.

Young plants are usually available from garden centres in summer. Plant these out or pot them up into slightly larger pots.

How to care for coriander

When sowing outdoors, thin seedlings or young plants to 5-7.5cm (2-3in) apart. If you specifically want to grow it for its seeds, grow at 20-25cm (8-10in) apart.

Keep the soil or compost moist as it tends to run to seed if allowed to dry out, but take care not to overwater as too much water can lead to rotting - especially in autumn and winter.

Give plants a light liquid feed of **a general feed** every couple of weeks during late spring and summer. This will help ensure plants go on producing a constant supply of leaves. Don't use high potassium feeds as these will encourage premature flowering.

If plants become stressed they will run to seed quickly and leaves start to lose their flavour once flowering begins. This is fine if you want to harvest seeds; otherwise discard the plants.

Harvesting coriander

Start harvesting the leaves when they are bright green and young and the plants are 10-15cm (4-6in) tall.

You can treat coriander plants as a cut-and-come-again crop. Otherwise, allow them to run to seed and allow the seeds to develop on the plant and harvest them before they are shed.

Common problems, pests and diseases in coriander

Slugs and snails

Slugs and snails will feed on young coriander seedlings. They can be identified by the slime trails that they leave, as well as the damage they do.

- Check plants at night and remove slugs and snails by hand.
- Strulch is a good deterrent to snails.
- Covering the soil around plants with crushed eggshells or grit may have some effect.
- Scatter environmentally-friendly **slug pellets** if other methods are insufficient.

Aphids

Aphids are sap-sucking insects which can quickly infest young plants, stunting growth.

- Wipe off small colonies of aphids on coriander with a damp cloth.
- Encourage natural predators like ladybirds and hoverflies.
- **Pesticide sprays** are available for aphids.

Bolting

Bolting occurs when coriander plants produce flowers and set seed early. As they are annuals, the plants will die once they have set seed. Bolting can be triggered by stress, such as sudden dry periods.

- Plant bolt-resistant cultivars.
- Water regularly.
- Sow new seeds every few weeks to ensure a constant supply of leaves.

Key features of coriander

Flowering season(s)	Summer
Foliage season(s)	Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter
Sunlight	Partial shade, Full sun
Soil type	Chalky, Clay, Loamy, Sandy
Soil pH	Neutral
Soil moisture	Moist but well-drained
Ultimate height	Up to 50cm (20in)
Ultimate spread	Up to 30cm (1ft)
Time to ultimate height	6 months

How to grow peppermint

Peppermint, or *Mentha* × *piperita*, is super easy to grow. It's an incredibly useful plant in the kitchen, with the aromatic leaves giving a refreshing flavour to food and drinks. The flowers attract beneficial wildlife to the garden, and peppermint plants are rumoured to deter mice, rats and mosquitos! Follow our peppermint growing guide to find out how to grow peppermint in your garden.

Types of peppermint plant to grow

Peppermint is a cross between two other species of mint - spearmint and watermint. It’s grown worldwide but originates from Europe and the Middle East.

It’s also a perennial plant, growing to about 90cm (36") tall. Peppermint has distinctive smooth, square shaped stems, with dark green pointed leaves and dark leaf veins. The delicate lilac-purple coloured flowers will appear throughout the summer months, and will teem with bees, butterflies, overflies and lacewings in the sun.

There are some stunning cultivars of peppermint to try:

- Mentha × piperita ‘Black peppermint’ plant. Very dark leaves with a purple tinge and a strong flavour.
- Mentha × piperita ‘Candymint’. Slightly reddish stems.
- Mentha × piperita 'Chocolate Mint’. The leaves and stems when rubbed between the fingers smell like a popular chocolate mint sweet.
- Mentha × piperita ‘Citrata’. Lots of different varieties, including basil, grapefruit, lemon and orange.
- Mentha × piperita ‘Crispa’. Wrinkley leaves.
- Mentha × piperita 'Lavender Mint’. Lavender scented leaves.
- Mentha × piperita 'Lime Mint’. Lime aroma and flavour.
- Mentha × piperita ‘Variegata’. Usual green leaves with a lighter pattern.

Peppermint will benefit from being cut frequently, so choose a cultivar which you think you will use a lot in the kitchen. Of course, you can just add prunings to the compost heap, but it’s great to make use of the pungent foliage if you can! Don’t be shy when harvesting - cut stems to within 3cm (1") of the ground, ideally just above a pair of leaves.

Add peppermint leaves to drinks, salads, peas and new potatoes. They can also be used to make flavoured ice cubes, by simply removing a few leaves from the stem, and immersing them in water in an ice cube tray – allow to freeze and then pop a cube or two into a glass of freshly poured lemonade. Peppermint leaves also make a wonderful tea, great for digestion.

What you'll need to grow peppermint plants

Peppermint has a much stronger flavour than spearmint. So, what's the difference between spearmint and peppermint plants? Spearmint, also known as common mint and garden mint, is related to peppermint. However, peppermint is distinguished by its typically purple-brown stems, and leaves which are much thinner than those of spearmint.

And can you grow peppermint outdoors? Yes, of course. Peppermint can be quickly and easily propagated from a piece of another plant. Simply remove the plant from the container, or dig up a clump from the border, and use a sharp spade to divide the clump into smaller sections.

Part-fill a freestanding container with **Levington® Multi Purpose Compost**. Alternatively, cut away the bottom of a container, and place it into the soil, deep enough to keep the rim of the container above soil level, and part-fill with **compost**. This will stop the roots from spreading, which they will do very quickly if allowed, crowding out other plants. Replant the clumps in the container, backfill with soil, and water well until established.

Peppermint plants are best planted out in the spring, ready to put on new growth which can be harvested throughout the summer and autumn. They can also be grown on a windowsill in a small pot, all year round.

Where to plant and place your peppermint plants

Because peppermint grows from rampant roots, give careful thought to how you will restrict its growth. The fleshy roots can grow very thickly and re-grow from short pieces, so don't allow it to get out of control. It's not difficult to dig out if it does spread, but better to prevent the problem, as by the time it has taken over, other plants may have suffered.

As with other herbs grown for culinary use, keep them within easy reach of the kitchen door. Make sure that the soil is moisture retentive, enriching with **Levington® Multi Purpose Compost** if needed.

Peppermint is hardy and can withstand repeated frosts, so don't worry about providing winter protection. It also isn't fussy when it comes to sunlight, so is a good plant for a tricky location where there's a lot of shade or poorly drained soil.

Caring and nurturing your peppermint plants

Peppermint is fine in full shade, or with full sun, or anywhere in-between. It's a very versatile plant and should be planted out into soil which has been enriched with a **general multipurpose compost**. This will help the plant to retain moisture. Make sure you water peppermint plants well in hot weather, as they do prefer damp conditions.

Cut back the entire plant to ground level in the autumn, and then mulch the surface to provide protection and food to the plant. Choose a mulch that will provide the peppermint with nitrogen, such as **Levington® Composted Bark**, which will encourage strong green growth.

Prune during the growing season if needed to maintain shape and dig out any roots which have spread.

Common pests and diseases with peppermint plants

Peppermint is a resilient plant, and it will withstand attacks from a lot of pests and diseases. There are just a few worrying problems to look out for.

Why is my peppermint plant wilting?

Verticillium wilt can cause a peppermint plant to suddenly collapse, especially in hot weather. This is a fungal disease characterised by dark markings on (and in) the stem, as well as yellowing lower leaves. Remove and destroy any affected material, and ensure the peppermint plant receives adequate watering and a feed in the autumn.

What are the pretty metallic green insects on my peppermint plant?

Unfortunately, these beautiful bugs are the destructive Mint leaf beetle. This pest will create holes in the leaves as they chew on the foliage. The leaves then don’t look attractive. However, peppermint is so vigorous that it will usually survive a nibble. If you’re worried, remove by hand and destroy.

What are the orangey-yellow patches on my peppermint?

Rust can cause patches of orangey-yellow to appear on the plant. Dig up and destroy affected plants, and don’t propagate a new plant from another which has signs of rust.

Frequently asked questions about peppermint plants

Are peppermint plants perennials?

Yes, peppermint plants will come back year after year.

Can you eat peppermint leaves?

Absolutely, yes! They are reputed to aid digestion and are great paired with potatoes and peas. They add a different flavour dimension to salads and drinks and can be made into a refreshing tea by just adding a few leaves to a cup of boiling water.

Key features of peppermint plants

Botanical Name	Mentha × piperita
Plant Type	Herbaceous perennial
Native Location	Middle East and Europe
Family	*Lamiaceae*
Light Exposure	Full sun to shade
Soil pH	Acid, Neutral, Alkaline.
Flower Time	June to September
Flower Colour	Lilac

What to plant this month

At this time of year, it’s a good idea to feed coriander and dill with a naturally derived all-purpose plant food to help the plant produce more leafy growth.

Divide and replant chives to reinvigorate them and cut back mint to about 5cm (2 inches) above ground level once it has finished flowering.

Don’t forget to save the seeds from basil, coriander, dill, caraway and fennel. Collect them on a dry day and leave them on a warm windowsill for a week before placing them in an envelope. Label the envelope with the name of the plant and the date that the seeds were harvested.

What herbs and spices to harvest in September

Herbs can be picked fresh or harvested and kept for use over the winter. Just a pinch can transform the flavour of a dish. Pick, wash, chop and freeze the following:

- Coriander
- Parsley
- Mint
- Oregano
- Basil

Some herbs are evergreen and will sit in the garden ready to be picked all year round:

- Rosemary
- Sage
- Thyme
- Bay

Plant seedlings of the following

Basil

Coriander

Peppermint

Bay

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