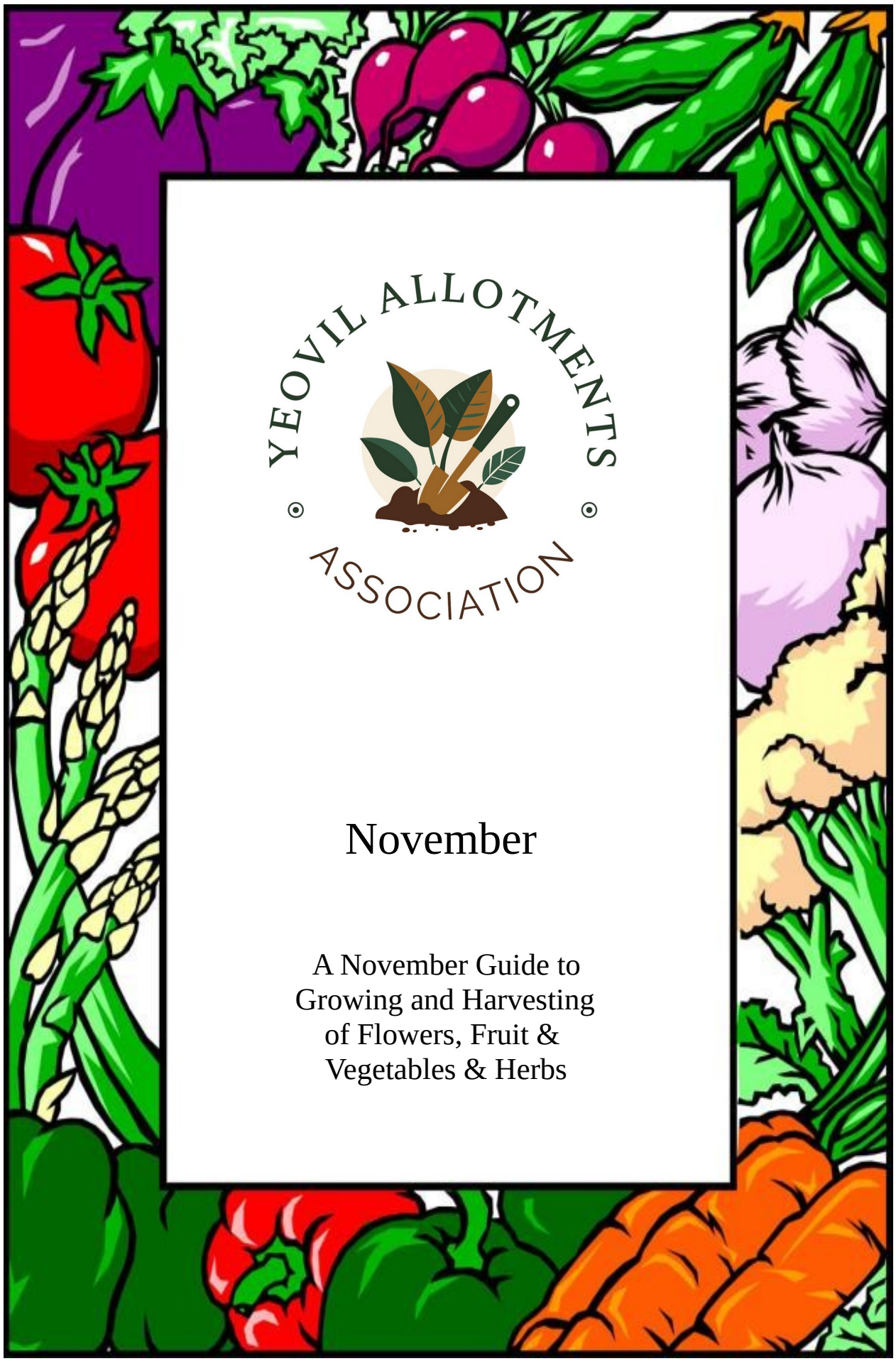

November

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

Dear Fellow Allotmenteers,

Welcome to November's Guide. We are now well into the Autumn season with Winter around the corner . For most the allotment year is winding down. If you have planted your Winter vegetables during the Spring and Summer months, then you should see some joy around this time of year. 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 month. 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

As autumn comes to an end, the last of the leaves are falling from the trees and the days are becoming wetter and noticeably colder. It's a quieter time of year in the garden, and a great opportunity to reflect on what has worked well, and what hasn't, and to start planning for the next year. If you find yourself wondering what plants grow in November, it's a good time to turn your gaze inside and freshen up your houseplants, bringing some of that garden colour into your home.

What to plant in November and other November gardening tips

November is a time of year when many of us step inside and have perhaps a little more time to enjoy our homegrown efforts. With vegetable patches providing a bountiful harvest last month, you'll likely still be enjoying those warming soups, roasted root vegetable cobblers, and apple crumbles, all made with ingredients from your own garden. There's still plenty of gardening to do in November, though. Whether you want to know what can be planted in November or you're just looking for some more general November gardening tips, choose from the categories below to keep your garden thriving through the winter.

Grow your own

You'll likely find that your October harvest will continue throughout the month of November, so keep an eye out for ripening fruit and veg. If the harvest has left your garden looking a little bare, then you'll be relieved to know that there are plenty of options for what to grow in November, including fruit trees. Elsewhere your vegetables will need plenty of maintenance to help them through the winter, and it's a good time of year to prune your fruit plants.

Vegetables

If you're looking at the tail end of your autumn harvest, mourning your bare vegetable patches and finding yourself wondering what vegetables

grow in November, you'll be pleased to know that there are a few options. That harvest should continue into November as well, so keep an eye on your patch for veg that's ready for the kitchen table.

What vegetables to plant in November

The following vegetables will gladly stand a cold spell - in fact, they will emerge from winter with strongly established root systems, raring to go in the spring:

Plant seedlings of the following

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

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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.

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 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

Almost any vegetable you can buy seed for can be grown in the garden or on the patio. Just follow the instructions for best times to sow and plant out.

Remember some plants are not hardy and could be damaged by the frosts that are common in the UK until the middle of May in the south, and as late as early June in Scotland.

Tender vegetable plants	Hardy vegetable plants
Potatoes, Tomatoes, Runner Beans, Dwarf French Beans, Aubergine, Marrow, Courgette, Sweet Pepper, Cucumber, Sweetcorn, Calabrese	Cabbage, Cauliflower, Purple Sprouting Broccoli, Kale, Sprouts, Carrots, Onion, Shallot, Leek, Lettuce, Pea, Parsnip, Radish, Spinach, Swede, Turnip

Getting The Best Results

1.Gradually improve your soil with bulky organic matter wherever you are growing vegetables other than root crops.

2.Feed the soil before you plant so that it is full of vital nutrients to help produce a tasty crop quickly.

3.Plant or sow at the correct time giving the crop enough room to grow unhindered.

4.Water whenever the soil or compost is drying out.

5.Keep weeds at bay. They will compete with your vegetables for light, moisture and plant foods. Get rid of them with the right weedkillers suggested in the ‘weed control’ section.

6.Watch out for pests that want to eat your crop before you do. Cabbage caterpillars are notorious for destroying brassicas. Whitefly can ruin your tomatoes and the roots of your carrots can be tunnelled by the maggot of the carrot fly. Take the appropriate action recommended in the ‘pest & disease control’ section of this website.

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What vegetables to harvest in November

Many of the vegetables sown in the spring will have finished cropping by now. Brassicas - such as kale and swede - really come into their own and provide us with an important source of nutrients during the colder months so you may be able to harvest a crop from any of the following:

- Beetroot
- Broccoli
- Brussels sprouts
- Cabbage
- Carrots
- Chard
- Cauliflower
- Celery
- Jerusalem artichokes

- Kale
- Leeks
- Lettuce
- Parsnips

Although they are both called artichokes, Jerusalem and globe artichokes are completely different – both in how they grow and how they're used in the kitchen. But both are perennial plants, easy to grow – and delicious to eat.

The globe artichoke is a variety of thistle, a large, architectural perennial that looks great when grown in flower beds and borders. The edible parts are the fleshy lower portions of the bracts of the unopened flower buds and their base, known as the 'heart'. Once the flower buds open, the flowers look beautiful and very attractive, but are inedible. The plants have very ornamental, large, silvery-green/glaucous-green leaves.The Jerusalem artichoke is a species of **sunflower**, grown for its edible tubers. These are a real winter treat, although an acquired taste for some. You can roast them, make them into chips and fry them, and they make a hearty soup. They are easy to grow, even in poor soils. In the summer, they produce lots of reasonably small sunflower-like flowers. As the plants grow tall (up to 3m/10ft), they can be used as a living screen.

How to grow artichokes

Cultivating artichokes

Globe artichokes

Globe artichokes prefer an open position in full sun. They need a reasonably fertile, well-drained soil. They are fairly drought resistant once established.

Jerusalem artichokes

Jerusalem artichokes will thrive in sunny or shady positions. They will grow well in even poor soil, but produce larger yields if the soil is well prepared with lots of added bulky organic matter first.

Varieties of artichokes

Globe artichokes

- **Gros Vert de Laon:** Produces the largest hearts.
- **Green Globe:** Large green heads. May need winter protection.
- **Purple de Provence Purple:** flower buds, early cropping.
- **Purple Sicilian:** Small, deep purple flower buds.

Jerusalem artichokes

- **Common:** Very knobbly tubers.
- **Fuseau:** A smooth-skinned variety, that is easy to peel.
- **Gerrard:** Colourful red skin, white flesh with a smoky flavour.

Sowing globe artichokes

For best results when growing artichokes from seed, sow in March and April in pots or trays of moist **seed sowing compost** at a temperature of 15-20°C (65-70°F).

Transplant seedlings when large enough to handle into 7.5-10cm (3-4in) pots and grow on in a warm, light position. Harden off by growing on in cooler conditions for 10-15 days before planting out after all risk of frost, 60-90cm (2-3ft) apart.

You can also direct sow globe artichoke seed outdoors from March to April when the soil has warmed up. Sow in a well-prepared seedbed, placing 2-3 seeds at stations 30cm (12in) apart. When large enough to handle, thin out the seedlings to 1 per station and then finally 60cm (2ft) apart.

Planting artichokes

Globe artichokes

Plant out young plants, preferably in spring, 60-90cm (2-3ft) apart.

Dig over the planting area, incorporating lots of organic matter – such as compost or planting compost, especially if the soil is heavy clay or light, well-drained sandy soil. Dig a good sized hole big enough to easily accommodate the rootball.

Place the rootball 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.

Then add a 5-7.5cm (2-3in) thick mulch of organic matter over the soil around the plants.

Jerusalem artichokes

Plant small tubers in March or April in well-prepared soil, 10-15cm (4-6in) deep and 30cm (1ft)) apart with rows 90cm (3ft) apart. Large tubers can be cut into sections, providing each one has 2 or 3 buds. Apply a little general granular plant food over the soil.

Tubers can also be grown in large pots filled with **a good potting compost**.

How to care for artichokes

Globe artichokes

Although reasonably drought resistant, you may need to water during prolonged periods of dry weather, especially when the flower buds are forming.

quality does degrade unless the plants are dug up and replanted in fertile soil.

Flowering season(s)	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, Poorly drained
Ultimate height	Globe artichoke: up to 1.5m (5ft); Jerusalem artichoke: up to 3m (10ft)
Ultimate spread	Globe artichoke: up to 1.2m (4ft); Jerusalem artichoke: up to 60cm (2ft)
Time to ultimate height	5-6 months

Feeding with a general granular plant food each spring will increase yields.

Keep plants weed-free and mulch with well-rotted manure or compost in spring. In cold areas, you may need to cover plants with a mulch of straw, compost or similar in late autumn to protect them from cold winter weather.

Divide plants every 3 to 4 years to keep the plants young, vigorous and cropping well.

Jerusalem artichokes

Jerusalem artichokes are easy to grow. Once planted and growing well, they rarely need any supplementary watering or feeding. Only water during periods of severe drought.

Weeding shouldn’t be necessary, as plants produce a dense, weed-suppressing canopy of foliage.

In exposed areas, when the stems reach 30cm (12in) high, pile up earth around them to a depth of 15cm (6in) to make the plants more stable.

When the foliage starts to turn yellow in autumn, cut down the stems to 7.5cm (3in) above ground level.

Harvesting artichokes

Globe artichokes

Cut off the flower buds, ideally when they reach the size of a golf ball, with a pair of secateurs, before they open and start to flower. After harvesting the main head, secondary usually smaller heads appear on sideshoots, which can be harvested later.

Jerusalem artichokes

Harvest as needed from October/November to February, carefully lifting the tubers with a garden fork. They will survive all but the harshest winters, so can be left in the ground, although slugs and waterlogging can be a problem.

The roots store well, providing a valuable food source throughout winter.

Some people leave the tubers in the ground, just harvesting as needed, and allowing the remainder to grow on to crop the following year. Their quality does degrade unless the plants are dug up and replanted in fertile soil.

Fruit

If you've been asking yourself, 'can I plant fruit trees in November?' then the answer is yes. A wide range of bare-root fruit plants are available to buy in the autumn and winter. These are often stronger specimens than container-grown plants and come in a wider range of varieties. Elsewhere in the garden, there's plenty of harvesting and maintenance to be done.

What fruit to plant in November

November is the perfect time to plant fruit trees and canes as the soil is still warm, and plants are entering a dormant period. Those that can be planted now include:

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

How to grow ornamental quince

The ornamental quince is a small, pretty shrub with lots to offer to any garden. Chaenomeles spp. produce abundant flowers from February through to May, which are enjoyed by bees. The blossoms are followed by attractive, slow developing fruit which are a great source of food for birds throughout the summer. The shrub also doesn't need much maintenance and is super easy to look after. Here is our essential guide on how to grow ornamental quince.

Types of quince to grow

Chaenomeles spp. are sometimes confused with the related quince (Cydonia oblonga), but the ornamental quince is grown primarily for its flowers rather than fruit. It is often called 'flowering quince'. The fruit of Chaenomeles spp. can be eaten, but they are smaller than the fruit produced by Cydonia.

Ornamental Quince is also a much smaller shrub than the edible tree which can sometimes reach 4.5m (15').

The main species of Chaenomeles to grow are:

- Chaenomeles speciosa. Also known as Chinese quince. This species has red, white or pink flowers, and can grow to 2m (7') high. Notable cultivars include 'Moerloosei', which has a particularly long flowering period, and 'Geisha Girl', which has salmon-pink flowers.
- Chaenomeles japonica. Also known as Japanese quince, or Maule's quince. The smallest of Quince species, this variety only grows to 1m high (3'), but can grow to double this in width. Expect red, white or pink flowers with small fruits up to 7cm across (3"). Attractive cultivars include 'Pink Lady' and 'Texas Scarlet'.

•Chaenomeles cathayensis. A much larger variety of Ornamental quince, growing up to 6m (18') tall. Flowers are white or pink with fruits up to 15cm (6") across.

What you'll need to grow ornamental quince

Ornamental quince can be grown from seeds, but takes a long time and germination is variable. An easier way to propagate your own quince is by tip layering from an existing plant, in the spring, after new leaves have begun to appear.

Ornamental quince plants have a naturally arching habit, so find a long branch, gently bend it towards the ground and simply bury the tip of the stem in nearby soil. You may need to weigh it down so that the stem doesn't spring up before it has taken root.

Water the buried tip, and keep it connected to the main plant until you are sure that the buried stem has produced new roots. Check this after two to three weeks by gently removing some of the soil away from the tip, to see if new roots have started to shoot from the buried stem. If new roots are visible, sever the stem from the main plant, and prepare to relocate the plant later in the year.

Ornamental quince are best planted out in the winter, when the quince becomes dormant. You will need:

•A spade

•A garden fork

•Gloves

•Well rotted compost

•Fertiliser

1.Using the spade to dig a hole in the ground that is twice the width of the rootball of the Ornamental quince. The hole should be slightly deeper than the rootball.

2.Disturb the soil in the bottom of the hole, using the fork.

3.Wearing gloves, dig in plenty of **Levington® Multi Purpose Compost** to ensure good drainage. **Add Miracle-Gro® Premium All Purpose Continuous Release Plant Food** to provide a long-lasting nutrient boost to the newly planted Ornamental quince.

4.Place the plant in the middle of the hole, backfill with soil and gently firm in so that there is good contact between the roots and the soil.

5.Water well and leave to establish.

Easier and quicker still is to purchase an Ornamental quince from a garden centre or online retailer. An ideal time to do this is the autumn, when the soil is still warm but not too dry.

Where to plant and place your ornamental quince

Locate the Ornamental quince in full sun, or dappled shade. They will grow especially well in full sun, which will encourage flowering. They are fully hardy to frosty conditions, but should be protected from strong winds.

Ornamental quince are best placed in a border, where they can be left to spread across the ground. They can be grown in a container, but moisture levels will need to be closely monitored, and plants will always be much happier in bare soil. Ornamental quince will grow in acid through to alkaline soil.

The arching and dense habit of Chaenomeles spp. mean that it is not easy to train against a wall. However, Chaenomeles are deciduous woody perennials and produce small thorns, making it a great security deterrent to plant around the perimeter of a garden. The spikes also mean it is best placed away from paths.

Caring and nurturing your ornamental quince

Ornamental quince flowers on old wood, so prune after flowering in May-June. Only prune to maintain a manageable size and shape, and to remove dead or diseased growth. Make sure to remove enough growth from the centre of the plant to allow good air circulation. As they are very thorny, wear thick gloves which cover the forearms too.

Whilst Ornamental quince tolerate drought well, water them in very dry periods, and add a mulch annually to help retain moisture.

Common pests and diseases with ornamental quince

Why is the bark on my Ornamental quince becoming swollen and producing a sappy substance?

Canker is a serious disease which can severely weaken and eventually kill an Ornamental quince. Act quickly to prune affected parts of the plant back to 15cm (6") beyond any visible damage.

What are the shiny brown lumps on the leaves of my ornamental quince?

Scale insects can attack Ornamental quince, clinging on to the underside of leaves as they suck sap from the plant. Mature plants will be able to withstand a small number of scale insects, and the population will be controlled by natural predators, such as ladybirds and birds.

Encourage these into your garden. Larger infestations of scale insects can be treated with **BugClear™ Fruit & Veg Ultra**.

Why is new growth on my ornamental quince stunted and gnarly?

Aphids love to feed on young foliage and flower buds. They need managing if these grey-green pests appear in large number. Encourage ladybirds, birds, and other predators which will consume the aphids. Spray with a strong blast of water from the hose, and squish between fingers. Badly affected flower heads can also be removed and immersed in soapy water to kill off the aphids.

Frequently asked questions about ornamental quince

Are Ornamental quince fruits edible?

Ornamental quince fruits can't be eaten raw but do make excellent jellies and jam. However they are smaller than the fruits of Cydonia, and a little fiddly to prepare!

How easy are ornamental quinces to grow?

Quinces are incredibly easy to grow as they are tolerant of most soil and pH types.

Can ornamental quince be grown in pots?

Yes, but they will need more care and attention to maintain moisture levels than those grown in the ground.

Is ornamental quince evergreen?

No, they are deciduous and will lose leaves in the autumn.

Key features of ornamental quince

Botanical Name	*Chaenomeles* spp.
Plant Type	Woody shrub
Family	Rosaceae
Light Exposure	Full sun to dappled shade
Soil pH	Neutral to slightly acidic
Flowering Time	February - May
Flower Colour	White, pink, or red

Apples are the most popular and one of the easiest tree fruit to grow. Although they are usually grown as half standards or bush trees, they can be trained into numerous shapes, which take up very little space - such as espaliers and cordons - so you don’t need an orchard to grow several varieties.

The easiest and quickest way to grow apples is to buy a young, ready-trained tree.

There are also other varieties of Malus, called **crab apples**, grown for their highly attractive flowers, foliage and small edible when cooked crab apples.

How to grow apples

Cultivating apples

Apples prefer a warm, sunny site, which isn’t too exposed - strong winds can reduce pollination by bees, leading to a poor

crop. Always plant out of frost pockets, which again can reduce pollination.

They prefer a fertile soil enriched with lots of organic matter, which holds plenty of moisture in spring and summer, doesn't dry out or become waterlogged.

Apple tree varieties

There may be more than 3,000 varieties of apple, but your local garden centre or nursery will probably only stock a few of the favourite, best selling ones. First decide whether you want eaters or cookers, and then try to find out which varieties are local to your area - as they'll probably be more suited to your soils and climate.

Some of the most popular are:

- **Eaters:** Braeburn, Cox's Orange Pippin, Discovery, Egremont Russet, Gala, Scrumptious, Sunset.
- **Cookers:** Bramley's Seedling, Bountiful, Grenadier.
- **Dual purpose:** Blenheim Orange, James Grieve.

Rootstocks for apples

Apple trees are available grafted onto one of a range of different rootstocks, which control the overall size the tree will grow to as well as how early in their life they start fruiting. The most common ones are shown below. The eventual size will vary, depending on your soil; on heavy clay and fertile soils the trees will grow bigger, on very poor soils a very dwarfing rootstock may produce a weak tree.

- **M27 (extremely dwarfing):** Suitable for trees up to 1.8m (6ft) high.
- **M9 (very dwarfing):** Suitable for trees growing in pots or a tree up to 1.8-2.4m (6-8ft).
- **M26 (semi-dwarfing):** The best rootstock for growing in a pot, cordons and espaliers. Trees will reach up to 3m (10ft).
- **MM106 (semi-vigorous):** Producing trees up to 4.5-5m (15-17ft).

Apple pollination

Almost all apple varieties need another different apple variety that flowers at the same time to help pollinate it and produce good crops of fruit. Even those described as self-fertile will crop better if there are other suitable varieties growing nearby.

In most urban neighbourhoods another suitable tree should be within bee flying distance for this not to be a problem. In isolated gardens another variety from the same or adjoining pollination group will be needed for heavy cropping.

Planting apples

Plant bare-root trees between November and March, and container-grown ones preferably in autumn, winter or spring. Dig a hole 60 x 60cm (2 x 2ft) and 30cm (12in) deep. Create optimal apple tree growing conditions by adding a layer of organic matter - such as compost or well-rotted manure - to the base of the hole and dig in. Place the roots of the apple in the planting hole and adjust the planting depth so that the old soil mark on the trunk is level with the soil surface.

Now mix in more organic matter to the soil and fill in the planting hole. Stake the tree with a rigid tree stake and two tree ties so that it is fully supported against the prevailing winds. Water in well, apply **a granular general feed** over the soil around the tree and add a 5cm (2in) deep

A mulch of well-rotted garden compost or **bark chippings** around the root area.Large patio pots (minimum of 40-50cm/16-20in in diameter) can be used to grow apple bushes growing on dwarfing rootstock (M27 or M9). Use **John Innes No 3 Compost**, as its weight will help with stability.

How to care for apples

Once established, apple trees are unlikely to need regular watering, except in extreme drought conditions. But watering during fruit set will

help ensure a bumper crop. Trees growing in containers, however, will need regular watering in spring and summer to prevent the compost drying out.

Add **a controlled-release granular plant food** to the soil surface each spring to ensure the tree is fed throughout the growing season.

How to prune apple trees

If you buy a fully trained tree, apples need little in the way of pruning for the first few years. Beyond that, it pays to know what, how and why you're pruning, as wrong or excessive pruning can lead to crop reduction. Most times all you need to do is remove dead, diseased, dying or damaged branches, branches that rub against each other and those that cross from one side of the tree to another.

If you constantly have to prune the top of the tree to reduce its height, then you've probably bought one growing on the wrong rootstock!

Pruning apple trees is pretty simple if you know a few basic rules:

- **Free-standing trees: Prune in winter**. If the variety is a tip bearer, thin the branches out, to open up the centre of the tree, ensuring that the remaining branches have their tips uncut.
- **Spur-bearing varieties:** Cut shoots back to about 4 buds to encourage new flowering and fruiting spurs to develop. Thin out excess spurs.
- **Trained trees (espaliers, cordons and pyramids):** Prune in late summer, when the new growth is cut back to 2 buds. They may benefit from a second prune in winter, when some of the older spurs can be thinned out.

Thinning fruit on apple trees

Apples tend to thin themselves by dropping some of their fruit in early summer, known as the 'June drop'. If you still have a bumper crop that the tree can't fully carry in mid- to late summer you will need to thin out. Thin dessert apples to leave 1-2 fruit every 10-12.5cm (4-5in) and cooking apples to 15-

20cm (6-8in). The centre of each fruit cluster has an apple called the king fruit, and it's best to remove this one as it usually develops into a misshapen fruit.

How to harvest apples

To check if the fruit is ready to harvest, gently cup one with your hand, lift, and lightly twist. It should come off in your hand easily with the stalk attached.

Early cropping varieties should be eaten straight away, as they will only keep for a few days. Mid-season varieties should be eaten within a few weeks. Late cropping varieties are often tough and tart when harvested, so need to be stored before being ready for eating.

Store fruit in a dark cool place with good ventilation. Place in a well-ventilated or slatted box, spaced out so air can circulate between the fruit. Check regularly and remove any that are rotting.

Common apple pests and diseases

Apples may also be susceptible to the following pests, diseases and problems: Apple sawfly, **Woolly aphids**, **Apple scab**, Brown rot, Bitter pit.

Flowering season(s)	Spring
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 5m (17ft)
Ultimate spread	Up to 2.4m (8ft)
Time to ultimate height	6-10 years

When grown well, pears are succulent and juicy – so much so they're best eaten in the bath so you don't get covered in their juice! They are also highly ornamental thanks to their spring display of blossom.

Pears are also an easy tree fruit to grow at home. They are usually grown trained into half standards or, better still, bush trees, but they can also be trained into other shapes, such as espaliers and cordons along a fence or wall. These take up very little space – perfect for small gardens – so you don't need an orchard to grow several varieties.

The easiest and quickest way to grow pears is to buy a young, ready-trained tree.

How to grow pears

Cultivating pears

Pears need a warm, sunny site, which isn't too exposed – strong winds can reduce pollination by bees, leading to a poor crop. Always plant out of frost pockets, which again can reduce pollination.

They prefer a fertile soil enriched with lots of organic matter, which holds plenty of moisture in spring and summer, doesn't dry out or become waterlogged.

Pear varieties

There may be several hundred varieties of pear, but your local garden centre or nursery will probably only stock a few of the favourite, best selling ones. First decide whether you want eaters (dessert varieties) or cookers, and then try to find out which varieties are local to your area – as they'll probably be more suited to your soils and climate. Some of the most popular and commonly available are:

- **Eaters/dessert:** Beth, Concorde, Conference, Doyenne du Comice, Onward, Williams Bon Chretien
- **Cooker:** Catillac
- **Dual purpose:** Jargonelle, Shipover

To find out more about these and all the other varieties available, visit a good website, such as Orange Pippin or Frank P Matthews, where you will find descriptions and images of the fruit.

How to grow pears

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To find out more about these and all the other varieties available, visit a good website, such as Orange Pippin or Frank P Matthews, where you will find descriptions and images of the fruit.

Rootstocks

Pear trees are available grafted onto different rootstocks, which control the overall size the tree will grow to, as well as how early in its life it starts fruiting. The two most common ones are shown below. The eventual size will vary, depending on your soil; on heavy clay and fertile soils the trees will grow bigger.

- **Quince A Semi-dwarfing:** The ideal root stock for bush trees and espaliers; produces a tree of 3-4.2m (10-14ft)
- **Quince C Dwarfing:** Slightly earlier into cropping and best for cordons; produces a tree of 2.4-3m (8-10ft)

Pollinating pears

Some pear varieties are self-fertile and will produce fruit without growing another compatible variety close by. These are the best ones to choose if you only want 1 tree or only have room for 1 and include ‘Concorde’, ‘Conference’ and ‘Williams Bon Chretien’.

Other, non self-fertile varieties will need to be grown close to another different pear variety that flowers at the same time to help pollinate it and produce good crops of fruit. Even those described as self-fertile will crop much better if there are other suitable varieties growing nearby.

In most urban neighbourhoods another suitable tree should be within bee flying distance for this not to be a problem. In isolated gardens another variety from the same or adjoining pollination group will be needed for heavy cropping.

Planting pear trees

Plant bare-root trees between November and March, and container-grown ones preferably in autumn, winter or spring.

Dig a hole 60x60cm (2x2ft) and 30cm (12in) deep. Add a layer of organic matter – such as compost or well-rotted manure – to the base of the hole and dig in. Place the roots of the tree in the planting hole and adjust the planting depth so that the old soil mark on the trunk is level with the soil surface.

Now mix in more organic matter to the soil and fill in the planting hole. Stake the tree with a rigid tree stake and two tree ties so that it is fully supported against the prevailing winds. Water in well, apply a **granular general feed** over the soil around the tree and add a 5cm (2in) deep mulch of well-rotted garden compost or bark chippings around the root area.Large patio pots (minimum of 40-50cm/16-20in in diameter) can be used to grow pear bush trees. Use **John Innes No 3 Compost** with soil for pears trees, as its weight will help with stability.

How to care for pears

Once established, pear trees are unlikely to need regular watering, except in extreme drought conditions. But watering during fruit set will help ensure a bumper crop.

Trees growing in containers, however, will need regular watering in spring and summer to prevent the compost drying out.

Add a controlled-release or granular plant food to the soil surface each spring to ensure the tree is fed throughout the growing season. Then mulch the soil with well-rotted manure, garden compost or bark chippings

Pruning pear trees

If you buy a fully trained tree, pear trees need little in the way of pruning for the first few years. Beyond that, it pays to know what, how and why you're pruning, as wrong or excessive pruning can lead to crop reduction. Most times all you need to do is remove dead, diseased, dying or damaged branches, branches that rub against each other and those that cross from one side of the tree to another.

If you constantly have to prune the top of the tree to reduce its height, then you've probably bought one growing on the wrong rootstock!

Pruning pear trees is pretty simple if you know a few basic rules:

- **Free-standing trees:** Prune in winter (December/January). Cut shoots back to about 4 buds to encourage new flowering and fruiting spurs to develop. Thin out excess spurs.
- **Trained trees (espaliers, cordons and pyramids):** Prune in late summer, when the new growth is cut back to 2 buds. They may benefit from a second prune in winter, when some of the older spurs can be thinned out.

Thinning fruit

Pears tend to thin themselves by dropping some of their fruit in early summer, known as the 'June drop'. Pears can be prone to producing too much fruit, but don't usually need much thinning. If it is necessary, thin clusters to 2 fruit, 10-15 cm (4-6in) apart.

Harvesting pears

You should harvest pears just before they are fully ripe, otherwise they soon become too soft and inedible. They should be firm, with a colour change to their skin. You can test early varieties by tasting for sweetness. To check if later varieties are ready to harvest, gently cup one with your hand, lift, and lightly twist. It should come off in your hand reasonably easily with the stalk attached.

Pears benefit from a period of ripening before eating. Early varieties usually only need a week or so, whereas later varieties may need a month or so.

Store fruit in a dark cool place with good ventilation. Place in a well-ventilated or slatted box, spaced out so air can circulate between the fruit. Check regularly and remove any that are rotting.

Flowering season(s)	Spring
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 4.2m (14ft) depending on rootstock
Ultimate spread	Up to 1.8m (6ft) depending on rootstock
Time to ultimate height	5-10 years

Plums, and their closely related damsons and gages, are all easy fruits to grow at home. They produce large (often too large!) reliable crops of fruit, which is available in a

range of coloured skins and flesh. Dessert plums and gages produce sweet flesh and can be eaten fresh straight from the tree. The more tart culinary plums and gages, and damsons make delicious jams, preserves, pies and crumbles.

More compact modern varieties and semi-dwarfing rootstocks ensure that even small gardens can have their own tree – and make them perfect for growing in large containers.

Plums, gages and damsons are also highly ornamental, producing lots of gorgeous blossom in spring.

How to grow plums, damsons and gages

Cultivating plums, damsons and gages

Plums, damsons and particularly gages need a warm, sunny site, which isn't exposed – strong winds can reduce pollination by bees, leading to a poor crop. As a result, they are often grown as a fan, trained up against a south-facing wall or fence.

Always plant out of frost pockets, which again can affect the flowers and reduce pollination and fruit set.

They prefer a fertile soil enriched with lots of organic matter, which holds plenty of moisture in spring and especially in summer when the fruit is ripening, doesn't dry out or become waterlogged.

Plum, damson and gage varieties

Plums are large, usually soft-fleshed – perfect for eating or cooking, depending on the variety. Gages are small, round

and generally very sweet. Damsons are hardy and have a tart flavour, which is excellent when cooked.

If you only want to grow one tree, make sure you choose a variety that is self-fertile. The following are all self-fertile varieties.

Plums varieties

- **Dessert:** Blue Tit (compact growth), Early Laxton, Opal, Victoria (dual purpose)
- **Culinary:** Czar, Marjorie's Seedling (dual purpose), Pershore

Gage varieties

•Cambridge Gage (dual purpose), Early Transparent Gage, Imperial Gage (Denniston's Superb), Oullins Gage (dual purpose)

Damson varieties

- Farleigh, Merryweather, Prune Damson

Plum, damson and gage pollination

Many plum, damson and gage varieties are self-fertile, meaning you only need to grow one tree, rather than having to worry about pollination from another variety that flowers at the same time. So it is a better and easier choice to stick to self-fertile varieties.

Rootstocks for plums, damsons and gages

Plum, damson and gage trees are available grafted onto different rootstocks, which control the overall size the tree will grow to as well as how early in their life they start fruiting. The

eventual size will vary, depending on your soil; on heavy clay and fertile soils the trees will grow slightly bigger.

- **Pixy:** Semi-dwarfing rootstock, perfect for bush trees growing in good light or loamy soils and produces a tree reaching 3-4m (10-13ft) high
- **Saint Julian A:** Semi-vigorous and suitable for bush, half standard and fan-trained trees up to 4.5-5m (14-16ft) high
- **Torinel:** Also semi-vigorous, suitable for all uses, including pyramids, and produces trees similar to Saint Julian A

Planting plums, damsons and gages

Plant bare-root trees between November and March, and container-grown ones preferably in autumn or spring. Bare-root trees often establish better than container-grown ones.

To start planting plum trees, dig a hole 60x60cm (2x2ft) and 30cm (12in) deep. Add a layer of organic matter - such as compost or well-rotted manure - to the base of the hole and dig in. Place the roots of the tree in the planting hole and adjust the planting depth so that the old soil mark on the trunk is level with the soil surface.

Now mix in more organic matter to the soil and fill in the planting hole. Stake the tree with a rigid tree stake and two tree ties so that it is fully supported against the prevailing winds. Water in well, apply **a granular general feed** over the soil around the tree and add a 5cm (2in) deep mulch of well-rotted garden compost or bark chippings around the root area.You can also grow trees in large patio pots (minimum of

40-50cm/16-20in in diameter). Use John Innes No 3 Compost, as its weight will help with stability of the container.

How to care for plums, damsons and gages

Once established, plum, damson and gage trees are unlikely to need regular watering, except in very dry conditions, but may need watering when the fruit is developing to help ensure a bumper crop.

Trees growing in containers, however, will need regular watering in spring and summer to prevent the compost drying out.

Add **a controlled-release granular plant food** to the soil surface each spring to ensure the tree is fed throughout the growing season. Because plums and gages produce such heavy crops, they respond well to feeding.

Trees that produce poor crops of fruit will benefit from feeding with **sulphate of potash**.

Their flowers can be very susceptible to frost damage, so wherever practical cover with horticultural fleece when severe frost is predicted.

Birds will often damage the fruit, so net small trees and fans as the fruit ripens.

How to prune plums, damsons and gages

If you buy a fully trained tree it will need little in the **way of pruning** for the first few years at least.

Pruning must always be carried out when the tree is in full growth – usually any time from May to the end of August. Pruning at other times of year risks infections from disease –

particularly **bacterial canker**, which can kill even fully grown trees.

It pays to know what, how and why you're pruning, as wrong or excessive pruning can lead to crop reduction. Most times all you need to do is remove dead, diseased, dying or damaged branches, branches that rub against each other and those that cross from one side of the tree to another.

If you constantly have to prune the top of the tree to reduce its height, then you've probably bought the wrong variety growing on the wrong rootstock!

What and how you prune depends on the way the tree is being grown and trained; the 3 commonest are bush, pyramid and fan.

Bush

Pruning is mainly limited to removing crossing, weak, vertical and diseased growth. If the tree is still overcrowded, then further pruning and thinning can be done in July.

Pyramid

Shorten the central main stem by around two-thirds early in the tree's life. Repeat every year until the tree has reached 1.8m (6ft) high on Pixy rootstock and 2.4m (8ft) on St Julien A.

After that, shorten it to 2.5cm (1in) or less each May to keep the tree at the same height. Vertical shoots

at the top of the tree competing with the central main stem should be removed.

Fans

Prune back branches growing away from the support to 3 to 4 leaves. Prune back fruited shoots to a suitable sideshoot to replace the removed shoot.

Thinning fruit

Once fruit has set, it may need thinning to ease congestion, which can lead to a lot of smaller fruits. Wherever possible, thin to 5-7.5cm (2-3in) apart.

Overly heavy crops one year can lead to small, insignificant crops the next. Also, very heavy crops can weigh down the branches and even snap them. So it pays to support heavily-laden branches with a Y-shaped prop, put in place in early summer.

How to harvest plums, damsons and gages

Pick the fruit once it has developed a good colour, but before it turns too soft, holding it by the stalk if possible, not the fruit itself.

The fruit of dessert varieties is best eaten fresh, but can be stored in the fridge in a plastic bag for up to 7-10 days.

Flowering season(s)	Spring
Foliage season(s)	Spring, Summer, Autumn
Sunlight	Full sun
Soil type	Clay, Loamy
Soil pH	Neutral
Soil moisture	Moist but well-drained
Ultimate height	Up to 8m (26ft) depending on rootstock
Ultimate spread	Up to 5m (16ft) depending on rootstock
Time to ultimate height	10-15 years

Growing fruit in November

Prepare soil for a new fruit tree by digging a square hole and removing all perennial weeds (the roots will spread out better in a square hole than a round one). Drive a stake vertically into the ground from the bottom of the hole and plant the tree about close to the stake, loosely attaching it to the top of the stake. Fill the hole back in with a mixture of soil and compost, and firm the soil around the base of the tree. Make sure to plant any grafting point of the tree above the soil (the knobbly bit a few inches above the root).

The same soil preparation process can be followed for the fruit bushes below, although there is no need to stake them

How to grow raspberries

What could be better than a bowl of sweet, freshly-picked raspberries in summer? These delicious fruits are easy to grow in a sunny garden, and if you're short on space you can even grow

raspberries in a pot. Enjoy them fresh in summer and autumn, and freeze them for use in winter pies and tarts.

Varieties of raspberry

Raspberries (Rubus idaeus) are divided into summer-fruiting and autumn-fruiting types. Autumn-fruiting varieties are a good choice for novice gardeners, as they are less prone to raspberry beetle (a pest that eats the fruit) and are also easier to prune than summer-fruiting types. Here are some of the most popular varieties:

Summer-fruiting raspberries

- ‘Malling Promise’ – vigorous plant with abundant big sweet berries
- ‘Glen Moy’ – heavy crops on almost spine-free canes
- ‘Glen Ample’ – lots of big, succulent raspberries
- ‘Glen Fyne’ – one of the best varieties for flavour

Autumn-fruiting raspberries

- ‘Autumn Bliss’ – compact, ideal for containers
- ‘Autumn Treasure’ – large sweet fruit on spine-free canes
- ‘Fall Gold – Large yellow fruits with exceptional flavour

What you’ll need to grow raspberries

- Secateurs
- Gloves
- Raspberry plants

For planting raspberries in the ground:

- Garden fork
- Garden spade
- Soil conditioner or well-rotted **farmyard manure**

•Slow-release fertilizer e.g. **fish blood and bone**

For summer-fruiting raspberries:

•Wooden posts 2.4m (8ft) long

•Wire

For growing raspberries in containers:

•60cm (2ft) diameter container

•**Soil-based compost**

•**High-potash feed**

How to grow raspberries

Raspberries do best in a soil that is moist but well-drained and slightly acidic. If your soil is alkaline, you will have more success growing raspberries in pots rather than in the ground.

Plant raspberry canes in autumn or winter in a sunny, sheltered spot, about 50cm (20in) apart, in rows spaced 1.5-2m (5-6ft) apart.

1. Before planting, dig the soil over to clear it of weeds and stones, and dig in plenty of soil conditioner or well-rotted farmyard manure to improve the soil structure.
2. Provide a support framework for summer-fruiting raspberries (autumn-fruiting raspberries are generally self-supporting), To

make the support framework, knock sturdy 2.4m (8in) high posts into the ground at the end of each row and stretch 3 rows of heavy-gauge wires between the posts, spaced about 60cm (2ft) apart.

3. Dig a trench 45cm (18in) wide and 20-25cm (8-10in) deep and cover the base with a good layer of organic matter, such as compost or well-rotted farmyard manure.
4. Plant the canes, allowing 45cm (18in) between each cane. Add a handful of slow-release fertilizer such as fish, blood and bone when planting each cane.
5. Backfill the trench with soil mixed with organic matter. Gently firm in around the roots and water in well.
6. Cut the canes down to 25cm (10in) above ground level, to encourage them to produce plenty of fruit-bearing shoots.

Growing raspberries in pots

1. Choose a large container, at least 60cm (2ft) in diameter.
2. Fill the container with a soil-based compost such as John Innes no 3.
3. Plant up to six raspberry canes per pot, spaced equally around the edge of the pot.

How to care for raspberries

Tie the canes of summer-fruiting raspberries to the wires with soft twine as they grow.

Water plants in dry periods, and water container-grown plants regularly to prevent the compost from drying out. Feed container-grown plants fortnightly with a high potash feed like Tomorite once the fruits start to develop.

Keep the plants clear of weeds. If using a hoe, take care not to damage the roots just below the surface of the soil.

How to prune raspberries

Prune summer-fruiting raspberries after the last fruit has been picked. Cut down all the dark brown canes that produced fruit to ground level. New canes that grew in the current year will fruit in the following year; retain the strongest 6-7 new canes for next year's crop.

To prune autumn-fruiting raspberries, cut all canes back to ground level in February.

Common raspberry pests and diseases

Raspberry cane blight

Raspberry cane blight is one of the most serious raspberry diseases. It is a fungal disease that causes canes to die back, turning dark brown and breaking easily.

- Remove and destroy any affected stems, cutting back below soil level.
- Water plants regularly and mulch to reduce drought stress, which can make plants more prone to infection.

Raspberry beetle

Raspberry beetle affects mainly summer-fruiting raspberries as well as some early-flowering autumn varieties. Adult beetles lay eggs on the flowers and the larvae burrow into the developing fruits and eat them. Affected fruits develop dry patches around their stalk, and white maggots will be found inside the fruit.

- Plant autumn-fruiting varieties, which are less affected.
- Encourage natural predators like birds, hedgehogs and ground beetles.
- Pyrethrin sprays should not be used when plants are in flower to avoid harming pollinators, so are not practical against raspberry beetle.

Key features of raspberries

Flowering season(s)	Spring, Summer
Foliage season(s)	Spring, Summer, Autumn
Sunlight	Full sun
Soil type	Clay, Loamy
Soil pH	Neutral
Soil moisture	Moist but well-drained
Ultimate height	Up to 1.8m (6ft)
Ultimate spread	Up to 30cm (1ft)
Time to ultimate height	1 year

How to grow and care for fig trees

Fig trees (Ficus carica) are Mediterranean natives that thrive in climates with hot, dry summers and cool winters, making them well-suited to many areas in the UK. These versatile trees can be grown in gardens or large containers, offering delicious fruit and lush, green foliage.
Figs grow into medium to large trees, but they can be pruned to a manageable size or trained in pots.

Top six fig tree care tips

1. Choose a position in full sun, sheltered from strong winds. For the best results, train your fig tree against a sunny south- or south-west facing wall.
2. Prepare the soil by enriching it with compost or a **soil improver** before planting.
3. Feed fig trees grown in the ground with a **high potash feed** in spring, and feed container-grown fig trees every 2-3 weeks during the growing season with a **high potash liquid feed**.

4. Prune fig trees twice a year, first in spring after the last hard frost and again in early summer.
5. Propagate fig trees using cuttings taken in autumn.
6. In long hot summers, some fig trees may produce two harvests; the first in early summer from fruit set the previous autumn, and the second in late summer from fruit produced on the current year's growth. Fig trees grown indoors in greenhouses are more likely to produce two crops in a year as they get enough reliable warmth.

Essential shopping list

- A potted fig tree
- **Compost** or soil improver for planting
- Fertiliser

7.

- **Mulch** to retain moisture and suppress weeds
- A sturdy stake for support
- Wildlife-safe crop protection netting
- Secateurs for pruning

How to plant fig trees

Site selection: Choose a sunny spot protected from strong winds. Figs thrive in free-draining soil with a neutral pH, so avoid planting in waterlogged areas.

1. Soil preparation: Dig a square hole wider than the rootball and around 60cm deep. Fig trees fruit best with their roots restricted, so line the sides of the hole with paving slabs and place a 10-20cm layer of rocks and crushed rubble at the bottom to stop the roots growing through.

2. Planting: Place the fig tree at the same depth as it was in the pot. Add a mound of compost under the root ball if necessary to position it correctly. Add **Levington® Fish, Blood & Bone Multi Purpose Plant Food**, backfill the hole with soil, firm the soil gently around the roots and water thoroughly.
3. Mulching: Spread **mulch** around the base, avoiding direct contact with the trunk, to retain soil moisture and prevent weeds.

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3. Mulching: Spread mulch around the base, avoiding direct contact with the trunk, to retain soil moisture and prevent weeds.

Growing fig trees in containers

1. Fig trees grow well in containers, which restrict their roots and promote good fruit production. Growing figs in containers in cold areas allows the trees to be moved indoors in winter to protect the developing fruits from frost.
2. Choosing the right container: Select a pot or container with good drainage, slightly larger than your plant's rootball.

3. Compost: Use a free-draining, peat-free soil-based compost like John Innes No. 3.
4. Planting: Fill the container halfway with potting mix, place the fig tree centrally, and backfill until the root ball is covered. Firm the soil gently and water thoroughly to settle the roots.

Container-grown figs require consistent watering, especially during warmer months, as pots dry out quickly. Keep the soil moist but not waterlogged, and ensure excess water drains freely. Feed every 2-3 weeks during the growing season with a liquid high-potash feed. Container-grown fig trees will need to be repotted every 2-3 years.

Growing fig trees indoors

Although several species of fig, such as the weeping fig (Ficus benjamina) and fiddle-leaf fig (Ficus lyrata) make very attractive houseplants, fruiting fig trees (Ficus carica) will not grow well indoors, as they can't get enough direct sunlight. However, container-grown fig trees can be grown indoors in greenhouses all year round, and the additional warmth can encourage a second crop of fruit to ripen in late summer.

Caring for fig trees

Fig trees are relatively low maintenance but benefit from regular care to stay healthy and productive.

Pruning fan-trained fig trees:

Fig trees are often trained against a wall to take up less space and make harvesting easy. To prune a fan-trained fig:

1. In spring, cut back one-third of the new shoots produced the previous year (particularly any weak or spindly shoots) to stubs 2.5cm long.
2. On mature plants, cut back one or two old branches to 5cm.
3. Remove any shoots growing the wrong way, i.e. towards the wall or outwards away from it.
4. Tie in new shoots.
5. In summer, shorten all side shoots to 5 leaves.

Pruning free-standing fig trees:

1. In spring, remove any dead, damaged or crossing branches
2. On mature plants, cut one or two old branches back to 5cm stubs
3. In summer, shorten all side shoots to 5 leaves.

Safety tip: Fig sap is an irritant, so wear long sleeves and gloves when pruning, and wash any sap off your skin immediately. To avoid drips, start pruning from the bottom of the tree and work upwards.

Feeding fig trees:

- Garden trees: Feed in early spring with a high-potash fertiliser such as **Levington Fish, Blood & Bone Multi Purpose Plant Food**.
- Container trees: Feed every 2-3 weeks during the growing season with a high-potash liquid feed like a **tomato feed**.

Fig tree problems:

- Birds and wildlife: Protect ripening fruit with tightly secured wildlife-safe netting.

- General pests: While uncommon, occasional issues like aphids or scale can be treated with **organic sprays** if needed.

Harvesting figs

Figs are best picked fresh from the tree when they are perfectly ripe.

1. Signs of ripeness: Figs are ready to harvest when they hang down on the branch, feel soft to the touch, and emit a sweet fragrance. Ripe figs will come away from the branch easily. They do not ripen after being picked, so wait until they are ready before harvesting.

2. Protecting your crop: Birds and other wildlife are attracted to ripe figs. Use a wildlife-safe crop protection net with holes no larger than 4mm to protect the fruit. Ensure the net is pulled tightly over the tree or use a frame to create a cover.

Some fig varieties produce two crops a year: the breba crop happens in early summer on old wood and a larger main crop happens in late summer on new growth. In the UK, the second crop is only likely to ripen in long hot summers.

Propagating fig trees

It's easy to grow a fig tree from a cutting. Here's how it's done:

1. **Take hardwood cuttings** from healthy branches in autumn. Cut off side stems around 20-30cm long, cutting just below a node (nodes are the bumps on the stem).

2. Remove the leaves.

3. Plant the cuttings into pots filled with **multipurpose compost** mixed with perlite for good drainage, and keep them moist.

4. Position in a sheltered, bright location and wait for roots to establish. When new leaves start to appear, the plants can be potted on.

Growing a fig tree from a fig seed is possible but can be tricky as the **germination** success rate is low. To find out whether your fig seeds are viable (i.e. likely to germinate), cut the fig in half, scoop out the flesh containing the seeds and place them in a jar of water for a couple of days. Viable seeds will sink to the bottom of the jar, while non-viable seeds will float.

Fill a seed tray with well-draining **seed compost** and sow the viable seeds on the surface. Place in a sunny spot and water regularly to keep the compost moist. Seeds should germinate within 2 weeks. Once the seedlings are large enough to handle, prick them out and pot them on into individual pots filled with multipurpose compost. It takes several years for seed-grown fig trees to produce fruit.

FAQs

How long does a fig tree take to grow?

Fig trees grow quickly in the right conditions and may produce fruit within a couple of years of planting. To help your fig tree grow faster and produce heavy crops of fruit, ensure it has fertile soil, water and plenty of sunlight.

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Can I grow a fig tree indoors?

Fig trees do not grow well indoors, as they can't get enough direct sunlight. However, container-grown fig trees can be grown indoors in greenhouses all year round.

Can fig trees grow in shade?

Although fig trees can tolerate a little light shade, they need around 6-8 hours of direct sunlight to grow well and produce good crops of fruit.

All about growing currants

Bursting with vitamin C, blackcurrants are an easily grown soft fruit. They make a great jam, health-promoting drinks and are a vital ingredient of summer pudding. Redcurrants are tart, but make great jams and jellies, while whitecurrants are sweet enough to be eaten fresh from the plant.

How to grow currants

Cultivation

All currants appreciate a sunny position, although light, dappled shade is acceptable. They need a moist, but free-draining soil that doesn't become waterlogged in winter.

It will pay dividends to improve the structure of all soils by adding lots of organic matter, such as compost or soil improver. This is particularly the case with clay soils, where it will improve drainage, and on light sandy soils, where it will increase its moisture-holding capacity.

Currant varieties

- **Blackcurrant:** Ben Lomond and Ben Sarek are traditional heavy yielding varieties.Ebony and Wellington produce much sweeter fruit. Jostaberry is a cross between blackcurrant and gooseberry and produces huge fruit
- **Redcurrant:** Red Lake has very large fruit. Laxton's No.1 is a heavy cropper. Rovada produces huge strings of large fruit
- **Whitecurrant:** White Grape has the best taste, but White Versailles carries a heavier crop

Planting currants

Plant bare-root plants in late autumn (October to November) or in February. Leave 1.8m (5ft) between currant bushes.

Plant bare-root currants in winter. November or December are best, although it can be done right up to the end of February, whenever the soil isn't frozen solid or waterlogged. Container-grown currants can be planted at just about any time of year.

Dig a hole 60x60cm (2x2ft) and 30cm (1ft) deep. Add a layer of organic matter into the base of the hole and dig in. Place the roots of redcurrants and whitecurrants in the planting hole at the same depth as they were originally growing, so that the old soil mark is at soil level. Place the roots of blackcurrants in the planting hole so that the old soil mark is now at least 8cm (3in) below the new soil level. This will encourage a continuous production of new stems from below ground level.

Now mix in more soil improver to the soil and fill in the planting hole. Add **a general granular plant food** and water in well. Finally, add a 5cm (2in) deep mulch of well rotted garden compost, bark or other bulky organic material around the root area.

How to care for currants

Plants will need watering during dry weather, especially as the fruit is swelling.

Feed the plants every spring with **a high potash plant food** and replenish the mulch layer of organic matter. Avoid using a hoe to control weeds as this tool could easily damage the shallow rooting system. Instead, hand weed or use a weedkiller.

As soon as the fruit start to turn colour, birds will be attracted to the plants. Drape nets over the bushes in June to keep them away.

Pruning and training

Although they come from the same plant family, redcurrants and whitecurrants are pruned totally differently to blackcurrants.

All three currants can be grown as bushes, that usually reach about 1.5m (5ft) tall and the same wide, although redcurrants and whitecurrants can also be grown as vertical cordons.

Redcurrants and whitecurrants

Fruit forms on fruiting spurs (stubby sideshoots), so pruning is designed to encourage more of these. During winter, cut back the new leader growth put on in the previous summer by half. Then reduce sideshoots growing from these main branches to about 5cm (2in) in length. During summer (June) cut back all new sideshoots so they carry just 4 or 5 leaves.

Blackcurrants

The main annual pruning should be carried out in winter when plants are dormant. Start 2 years after planting by cutting out weak branches and twiggy stems. Cut out completely about one-third of all old stems to encourage new growth from below ground level. During subsequent winters, do the same pruning so that no wood on the bush is more than 4 years old.

Harvesting currants

Most currant varieties will ripen during July and into August. Pick fully ripened fruit in stages. The fruit at the top of the truss will be the largest and will ripen first. Pick every week during dry weather – if the fruit is wet they will not store well, but turn mouldy. All currants freeze well.

Mature plants will produce 3-4kg (6-9lb) of fruit each year.

Flowering season(s)	Spring
Foliage season(s)	Spring, Summer
Sunlight	Partial shade, Full sun
Soil type	Chalky, Clay, Loamy, Sandy
Soil pH	Neutral
Soil moisture	Moist but well-drained
Ultimate height	Up to 1.5m (5ft)
Ultimate spread	Up to 1.5m (5ft)
Time to ultimate height	5-7 years

Fruit and veg can be easily grown in pots and containers

If you only have a small garden or even just a patio, you can still easily grow your own tasty fruit and vegetables. Many fruit and veg can be grown in pots and other containers and some vegetables will crop even better when grown well in containers!

Choosing a pot, container or planter

With many people wanting to have a go at 'growing your own' but worried that they don't have enough space, this article will give you advice and tips on making the most of a small space using all sorts of pots and containers whether you have a tiny garden, a sunny patio or just a balcony. Any container will be suitable as long as it is big enough

for the crop you want to grow, has or can have drainage holes put in and is filled with a good compost.

Terracotta containers look good, but they do dry out quicker than plastic ones and can be very heavy to move around. You can line them with an old compost bag with holes punctured at the bottom to stop them drying out. Many places sell colourful recycled plastic pots which are lighter and good at retaining water although in a hot summer the plants can overheat. Metal containers can look very smart but again I would advise lining with plastic to help with moisture and overheating.

You can grow lettuces, salad leaves and quick-maturing salads in shallow window boxes, but for most fruit and veg usually the bigger the container the better. It will provide a good cool root run and need watering less frequently. For instance, French beans are better in 15-20cm (6-8in) pots; carrots, parsnips, beetroot and other root vegetables need a pot that is deep enough for their roots – or you could look for round or stump-rooted varieties that won't need such a deep root run.

Fruiting vegetables, such as tomatoes, aubergines, peppers and cucumbers, do really well in containers, as the slightly restricted root run helps encourage better flowering and heavier cropping.

The following pot sizes work best for these popular vegetables:

- Peppers 20-23cm (8-9in) pots.
- Aubergines 23-25cm (9-10in) pots.
- Tomatoes 25-30cm (10-12in) pots.
- Cucumbers 30cm (12in) pots.

You can also grow in **gro-bags** - but be aware once the crops are reaching maturity, they will need very frequent watering. Giant planters are deeper, contain more compost, and so don't dry out so quickly.

Best compost for vegetables

As the majority of vegetables are annuals and will only be growing for a few months, any **multi-purpose compost** should produce tasty crops. Any that are specially formulated for fruit and vegetables will be even better and it’s always best to feed your crops once they start putting on growth, flowering and fruiting.

Best compost for fruit

As fruit trees and bushes are more-or-less permanent crops, they do better in a loam-based **John Innes No.3 compost**. These composts are also heavier and firmly anchor the pot in place and are especially good for tall growing crops, where the pot may get blown over in windy weather.

Top tips for growing fruit and vegetables in containers

- In order to have a successful and productive edible container garden, it is very important that you care for your plants, as they will depend on you for water and **feed**.
- Always aim to keep the compost as evenly moist as possible - without allowing it to dry out nor become waterlogged. Regular watering in the early morning or evening is usually the best way.
- Always use a good peat free potting compost that contains enough nutrients to feed the plants for several weeks; check the bag to see how long the compost should feed for. After that time, your plants should be fed with a **plant food** to keep them growing strongly and cropping prolifically. A general purpose **liquid plant food** is perfect for all leafy and rooting crops, whereas **a high potash feed** is needed for all flowering and fruiting crops.
- **Feeds specifically recommended for fruit and veg** are a great choice as they may contain nutrients that help promote great flavours.
- Many veg can be grown from seed but if you lack indoor space to start more tender varieties such as tomatoes then most garden centres and DIY stores offer seedling plants that are ready to be planted out as soon as the frosts have gone.
- Have a go at upcycling or recycling for a fun and quirky way to grow your own.

Growing fruit in November

Pruning the following fruit trees will encourage new growth into next spring. Remove dead wood, and congested and rubbing branches to promote good air flow through the plants.

Once you've got on top of your pruning, you should mulch all of your fruit plants with a suitable peat-free compost or bark to help protect

them over the winter months. Alternatively, you can use something like a combination of decorative bark and pine.

While you're doing that, check the fruit trees for signs of bacterial canker. Foliage will have fallen from the tree as expected in November, making it easier to spot the symptoms of this devastating disease. Look for dark, sunken and sometimes weeping patches of bark on tree stems and branches. Treat it by removing the wound and all surrounding tissue.

Finally, add a barrier to your raspberries to prevent them from spreading and popping up where they aren't always wanted. Burying a thin but rigid barrier about 2.5cm (1 inch) deep along the edge of the raspberry patch will help to stop them spreading.

Bacterial canker is a disease that affects members of the Prunus family – including cherries and plums. Even large, badly affected trees can be killed by this disease.

Description

Bacterial canker is a disease that is particularly common on **cherries** and plums – both edible and ornamental – as well as apricots, peaches and other Prunus species. The disease weakens the plant and can cause extensive dieback if not treated. Plants under stress and growing in poorly-drained soils are more susceptible to this disease.

Symptoms

Bacterial canker symptoms vary, depending on the plant but are generally seen as sunken, dead and damaged areas of bark on the branches and stems. Look for swollen stems that ooze a gummy sap.

On the leaves, brown round spots appear that fall out later to leave a hole – as if it had been hit by shotgun pellets, giving rise to its popular name of the **shot hole**.

Treatment and control

Cut out all cankered areas, pruning back around 10-15cm (4-6in) beyond the affected parts into healthy wood.

Bacterial canker often enters the tree through wounds – including pruning wounds made in autumn and winter. Never prune members of the Prunus family in autumn and winter when they are dormant – only prune when the tree is in leaf and in active growth. The best time is July and August.

Always sterilise pruning tools to prevent the spread of the disease. Maintain good hygiene and burn all prunings.

Spray with a suitable fungicide

For canker on plums and cherries, treat with a copper fungicide (containing copper oxychloride) 3 times a year: mid-August, mid-September and mid-October. Copper fungicides are also useful controls for **peach leaf curl**.

What fruit to harvest in November

The last of the fruit should be harvested now, before any heavy frosts. You may manage to get a final harvest out of the following:

- Apples
- Bullace plums
- Grapes
- Pears

- Quince

Recommendation: Apples and pears can both be stored well if wrapped individually in newspaper and kept in a cool dark place. Check them regularly for signs of decay, as diseases can spready quickly – remove any afflicted fruits.

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