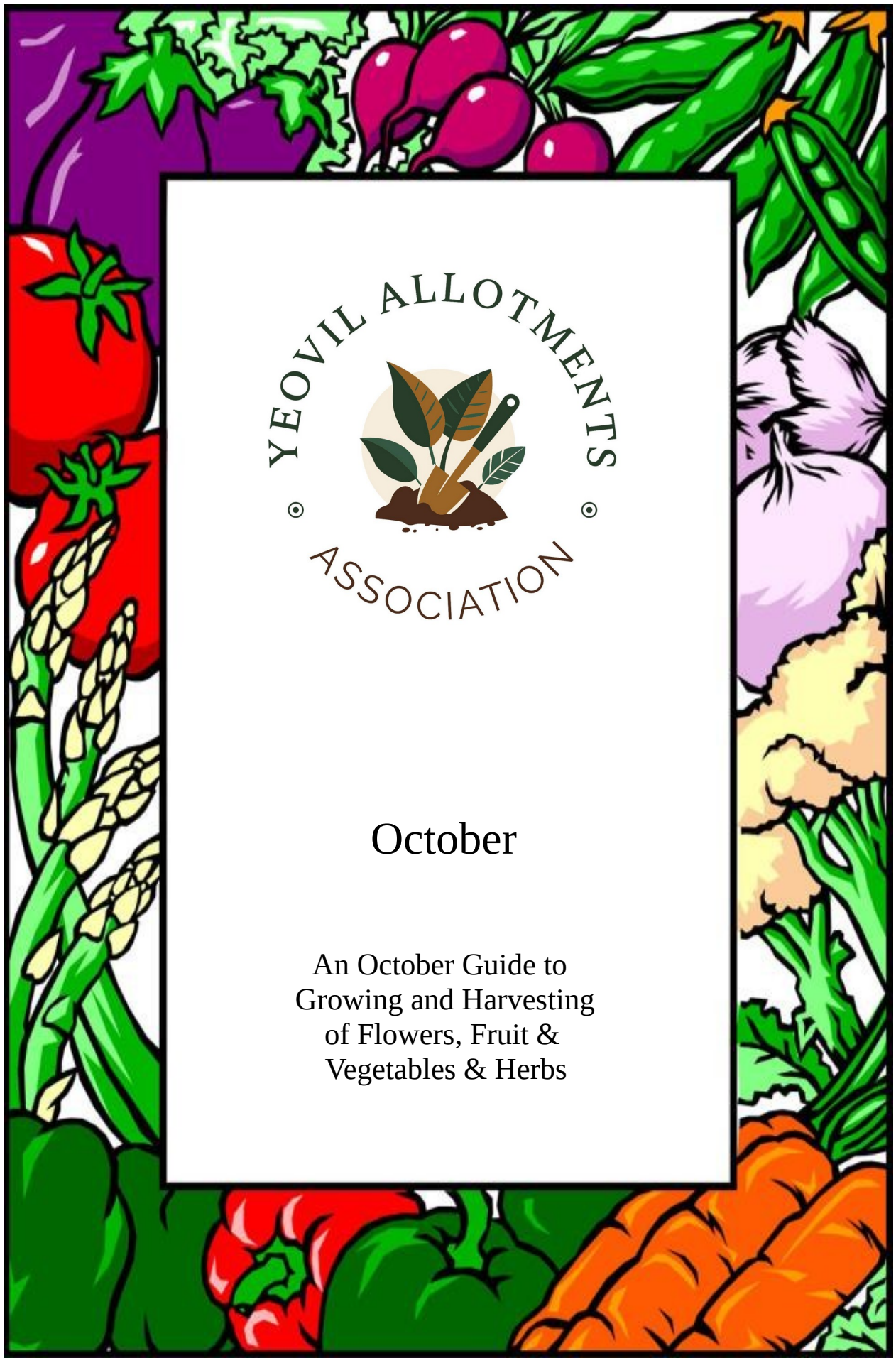

October

An October Guide to
Growing and Harvesting
of Flowers, Fruit &
Vegetables & Herbs

Dear Fellow Allotmenteers,

Welcome to October's Guide. We are now in the Autumn season with the leaves in change . 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 the Autumn /early Winter. I hope you enjoy the read.

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

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

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

info@yeovil-allotments-association.co.uk

Many thanks for reading,

Gareth Richards
Treasurer
Eliz Flats, Plot 14

October Gardening: Your Monthly Garden Guide

October can be a glorious month in the garden, with clear blue skies and crisp days. Everywhere you look, the autumn leaves are a blaze of rich warm reds, oranges and yellows; a last extravagant explosion of colour. Winter might be on the horizon, but if you're wondering what to grow in October, then you'll be pleased to know that there are still plenty of options, whether you're looking to bring some new life into your fruit garden, or want to prepare your flower beds for a colourful bloom next year. Wrap up warm, get outdoors and enjoy your garden's autumn display!

What to grow in October and other October gardening tips

There are plenty of jobs to do in the garden in October. It's time to tidy up after summer, get ready for winter and start planting for next spring. Whether you want to know what to plant in October or you're just looking for some October lawn care advice, select a category below and find out how to care for your garden this autumn.

Grow your own

When we think of October in the fruit and vegetable patch, it's largely images of bountiful harvests and oversized, brightly coloured squashes that occupy our thoughts. You might be surprised to learn that when it comes to planting new crops, there's no shortage of options for growing in October. So, whether it's getting some winter-hardy seeds in the ground or planting some new fruit trees, roll up your sleeves for a busy month in the garden.

Vegetables

You'll likely have already planned what you want to harvest this month, but in terms of what veg to plant in October, there are a few alliums to get in the ground, as well as peas and beans. Don't neglect your

vegetable patch maintenance either; there are still some essential jobs to do to see your veggies into winter.

What vegetables to plant in October

Once you've cleared the beds of the last of the summer crops and stocked your fridge with all of those fresh veggies, it's time to plant for winter and spring crops. Some winter-hardy seeds can still be sown outdoors, while others are best under glass or in a cold greenhouse.

The following can all be planted outside in October:
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

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

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

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.

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 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.

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•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

If you have access to cloches or a greenhouse, then the following can be sown inside to produce winter crops:

- Winter lettuce
- Pak choi
- Mizuna

Vegetable plant maintenance in October

If you have any tomatoes that you're struggling to ripen, you can bring them indoors and place them in paper bags with a banana or apple (these fruits emit ethylene that helps to ripen the vegetables). Check them regularly and remove tomatoes as they ripen, as well as any that are going mouldy.

Once the last of the beans have been harvested, cut the plants down to ground level and leave the roots in the ground to release their stored nitrogen into the soil. Asparagus foliage can be cut back to 5cm (2 inches) above ground level.

Once you've got your harvest in and finished planting out any new plants, you might find that your veg garden is a bit bare, so it's a good opportunity to mulch the soil. Use an organic mulch such as compost, shredded leaves from the recent autumn falls, or you can even use a combination of bark and wood chips.

What vegetables to harvest in October

When it comes to harvesting veg, October is *the* month in the calendar year. Most vegetables are almost finished producing crops by now, so make the most of this final harvest. The following vegetables should be ready to harvest in October:

How to grow peas

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

Pea varieties

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

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

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

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

Cultivation of peas

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

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

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

When to sow peas

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

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

Choosing your spot and which peas to grow

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

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

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

Sowing peas

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

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

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.

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 and care for runner beans

Runner beans (Phaseolus coccineus) are among the easiest and most rewarding vegetables to grow. And with their colourful flowers and heart-shaped leaves, they look as good as they taste. Follow our simple guide for a bountiful harvest of runner beans.

Best runner beans to plant

Whether you're planting runner beans in rows on your allotment or just growing a few plants in a pot, there are plenty of varieties to choose from. Here are some of the most popular types of runner beans:

- Runner bean 'Red Rum' AGM – a heavy cropper that does well in all weather conditions.
- Runner bean 'Celebration' AGM – very attractive, with pink flowers and tender, tasty pods, almost stringless when young.
- Runner bean 'Tenderstar' – pretty pink and red bicolour flowers and smooth, tender, stringless pods.
- Runner bean 'Scarlet Emperor' – bright red flowers and masses of smooth dark green pods that can reach up to 35cm (14in) in length.
- Runner bean 'Snowstorm' – white flowers and plenty of tasty pods.
- Runner bean 'Hestia' – a dwarf variety growing to 45cm (1.5ft) tall, ideal for containers.

Essential equipment

To grow runner beans you will need:

- Bean seeds
- Small pots
- **Multipurpose compost**
- 2.4m long poles to create a support framework
- String
- Garden fork and spade
- Garden compost or well-rotted **farmyard manure**

When and where to plant runner beans

Sow runner beans indoors in pots in mid-spring, or sow directly into the ground outdoors in late spring and early summer once all risk of frost is gone.

A rich, well-drained soil in full sun is ideal for planting runner beans. You can also **grow them in containers** filled with multipurpose compost.

Sowing runner beans indoors

1. Fill small pots with multipurpose compost.
2. With a dibber or pencil, make a hole 5cm (2in) deep in the compost and drop in a bean seed. Plant one seed per pot and sow a few extra pots in case seeds fail to germinate or young plants are eaten by slugs and snails.
3. Cover over with compost and firm it down gently.
4. Water the pots and put them on a sunny windowsill or in a greenhouse to germinate. This should take about one week.
5. Let the seedlings grow on indoors until all risk of frost is past, then plant them out. Harden the seedlings off for a week before planting by placing the pots outside during the day and bringing them back in at night.

Sowing runner beans directly outdoors

1. Dig the area over a few weeks before planting and clear the soil of all weeds and stones. Dig in well-rotted farmyard manure or compost to improve the soil structure and drainage.
2. Rake the soil to create a level surface with a light, crumbly texture.
3. Put in sturdy supports for the bean plants, such as two rows of poles sloping towards each other. Traditionally, the poles are tied together at the tops to create an A-frame but tying them in the middle to create an X-shape makes it easier to pick the beans, as

they are not all clustered together at the top of the frame. Space the poles 45-60cm (1.5-2ft) apart. If you are only growing a few plants, a wigwam of poles makes a good support for them to climb up.

4.Sow the bean seeds 5cm (2in) deep, sowing two seeds at the base of each pole.

5.Water regularly.

6.Once the seedlings are around 10cm (4in) tall, pull out the weaker seedling from each pair.

Tips on how to care for runner beans

•Beans will twine automatically around their supports, but you may need to tie the young seedlings into the poles at first.

•Once the plants reach the tops of the supports, pinch out the growing tips. This will encourage the plants to put out side shoots, producing more beans.

•Water regularly, especially during dry periods and when the flowers are setting (i.e. developing into beans).

•Protect young plants from slugs and snails, using crushed eggshells, sawdust, beer traps, copper tape on pots, or wildlife-friendly pellets.

•Colonies of **aphids** often appear on young shoots. In large quantities they can distort the plant's growth and reduce vigour. Check young plants and wipe off aphids as soon as you see them to stop them becoming a problem. Natural predators like ladybirds will help to control aphid infestations. If using pesticide sprays, always check that they are suitable for use on edible plants. To avoid harming pollinators, don't spray when the plants are in flower.

- In hot, dry weather, flowers sometimes drop off the plant without developing into beans. To ensure you are caring for runner beans, regular watering will help, and the problem usually resolves itself once cooler weather returns.

Growing runner beans in containers

If you're short on space, dwarf runner beans are ideal for containers, growing into bushy plants around 45cm (1.5ft) tall.

1. Choose a container at least 30cm (1ft) in diameter, with good drainage holes. Fill with multipurpose compost.
2. Sow seeds 5cm (2in) deep directly into the compost in late spring or start seedlings indoors in mid-spring and transplant into the container once they are big enough (around 10cm/4in tall).
3. Water regularly and feed the plants with a high potassium feed (such as tomato feed) fortnightly once the flowers start setting.

Harvesting runner beans

Harvest runner beans when the pods are between 15-20cm (6-8in) long, before the beans start to swell in the pods. Harvesting runner beans encourages the plant to produce more, so pick frequently.

Common runner bean problems

Pods failing to set

One of the most common runner beans problems is plants flowering but failing to develop pods. This can be caused by a range of environmental conditions, including very hot weather, lack of water, few pollinators, and birds damaging flowers. The problem often resolves itself as the season progresses.

- Water plants regularly in dry periods.
- Plant near other flowering plants to attract more pollinators.

Blackfly

One common runner bean pest is the blackfly. Blackflies are a small black sap-sucking insect that infests the soft new shoots on bean plants, stunting and distorting them. The best way to get rid of blackfly on runner beans is to check regularly and tackle the problem as soon as it appears.

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

Slugs and snails

Slugs and snails will eat the leaves of young runner bean seedlings, and can be identified by the slime trails that they leave, as well as the damage they do. As the plants grow taller, they are less at risk of slug and snail damage.

- Check plants at night and remove slugs and snails by hand.
- Covering the soil around plants with crushed eggshells or grit may have some effect.

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

Key features of runner beans

Flowering season(s)	Summer, Autumn
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 1.8m (6ft)
Ultimate spread	Up to 30cm (1ft)
Time to ultimate height	6 months

How to grow tomato plants at home

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

Tomato varieties

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

Tomato plants are divided into cordon and bush types, dependent on how they grow. Cordon tomatoes (also sometimes called ‘indeterminate’ tomatoes) grow tall, producing one main stem that needs to be trained up a cane or other support. Bush tomatoes, as the name suggests, grow into short, bushy plants. They don’t need training, but may need some additional support when laden with fruit. Bush tomatoes are sometimes also called ‘determinate’ tomatoes. Here are a few tomato varieties to look out for:

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

Where to grow tomatoes

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

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

Equipment list for growing tomatoes

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

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

How to grow tomatoes from seed

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

1. Fill 9cm pots with multipurpose compost.
2. Sow a seed on top of the compost in each pot, then cover it lightly with a thin layer of compost.
3. Water the pots, cover with clingfilm and place in a greenhouse or on a sunny windowsill.
4. Once the seeds have germinated, remove the clingfilm. Water the pots regularly to keep the compost moist.
5. When the seedlings are about 15cm tall, plant them in their final locations.

How to plant tomatoes outdoors

1. Check the weather report before deciding when to plant tomatoes outdoors and wait until all danger of late frosts is past, usually around late May or early June.
2. Before planting, prepare the ground by digging in lots of compost or well-rotted farmyard manure.
3. Harden seedlings off for a week before planting outside, by putting the seedlings outside in their pots during the day and bringing them back inside at night.

How to grow tomatoes in planters

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

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

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

Caring for tomato plants

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

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

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

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

When to harvest tomatoes

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

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

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

Common tomato plant problems, pests and diseases

Tomato blight

Blight is the biggest problem for tomato growers. This is an air-borne fungal disease most likely to occur in warm, humid conditions. Brown patches on leaves are the first indication of blight, and should be removed and disposed of immediately.

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

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

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

Whitefly

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

- •An **insecticide spray** will control whitefly

Tomato leaf mould

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

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

Blossom end rot

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

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

Key features of tomatoes

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

Can I grow tomatoes at home?

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

Do tomatoes grow indoors?

Yes, tomatoes can grow indoors in the UK. Use grow lights, warm conditions, and a sunny spot to encourage healthy growth. Consider dwarf or cherry tomato varieties ideal for indoor cultivation.

How to grow pumpkins

Delicious in pies, soups and stews, and full of vitamins and minerals, pumpkins are a tasty autumn and winter treat. Follow our simple guide to growing pumpkins for a bumper harvest.

Choosing the best pumpkins to grow

Pumpkins (botanical name Cucurbita pepo) belong to the same family as squash. There's a wide range of different pumpkins available, from the huge 'Dill's Atlantic Giant', which can produce fruits weighing up to 800kg (around 1750lb) to the tiny 'Jack Be Little' which bears miniature pumpkins just 7cm (3") across.

Most pumpkins need space, but if you don't have a big garden, you can grow smaller varieties as climbers. And if you want a change from the traditional orange-skinned pumpkin, there are pumpkins with striped, knobbly or pleated skins, and even white or blue pumpkins. It's safe to say, there's a pumpkin for every taste! Here are few to look out for:

- Pumpkin 'Evergold' – the classic pumpkin, perfect for both cooking and carving.
- Pumpkin 'Becky' – smooth orange fruits around 20cm (10in) across, with very tasty flesh.
- Pumpkin 'Munchkin' – a small variety producing fruits with attractive pleated orange skins.
- Pumpkin 'Queensland Blue' – an unusual variety with blue-green skin and rich, sweet orange flesh.

Your essential equipment list for growing pumpkins

Here's what you'll need for growing perfect pumpkins in your garden.

For seed sowing:

- 9cm pots
- Seed compost such as **Levington Seed & Cutting Compost**
- Labels
- Propagator or clear plastic bags

For planting out:

- Compost or **farmyard manure**
- Spade
- Slate tiles or bricks

For growing pumpkins as climbers:

- Wooden poles, around 2m (6.5ft) long
- String

How to grow pumpkins from seed

Sow pumpkin seeds indoors early in the year, in mid to late April, as the plants have a long growing season.

1. Fill individual 9cm pots with seed compost.
2. Plant the seeds 2.5cm (1in) deep, on their sides.

3.Water the pots and place them in a propagator or in clear plastic bags in a well-lit position at a temperature of around 20°C (68°F). The seeds should germinate in around five to seven days.

4.After germination, take the pots out of the propagator or plastic bag and let the seedlings grow on in a greenhouse or on a sunny windowsill until they are large enough to be planted out.

How to plant pumpkins

Planning when to plant pumpkins depends on the weather. Pumpkins won't grow in the cold, so wait until late May or early June before planting them in a sunny, sheltered position.

A few weeks before planting, create planting pockets by digging a hole for each plant, approximately 20cm (10") square x 20cm (10") deep. Allow 2-3m (6.5-10ft) between plants and between rows.

Fill each hole with compost or well-rotted farmyard manure. Pumpkins are hungry plants and need rich, fertile soil to produce good fruits.

To train pumpkins as climbers, drive three sturdy poles firmly into the ground around a planting pocket and tie them together at the top to create a tripod or wigwam to support the plants. Make sure the structure is strong, as even small pumpkin plants weigh a lot by harvest time. Allow 1m (3.5ft) between climber-grown pumpkin plants.

Harden seedlings off for a week before planting, by placing the pots outside during the day and bringing them back in again at night.

Plant one seedling in each planting pocket. Firm the soil around the plant and water well.

Tips for pumpkin care

Caring for your pumpkins is essential as they grow. Water your pumpkins thoroughly once a week. In very hot, dry weather, increase this to twice a

week. Always water the soil, not the leaves, to reduce the risk of fungal disease.

If you're growing pumpkins as climbers, tie the trailing stems to the support poles as they grow.

When fruits start to develop, feed the plants fortnightly with a high potassium liquid feed (tomato feed is ideal). Slide a piece of slate under each pumpkin or place them on bricks to keep them off damp ground and protect them from slugs and rot. Pumpkin plants will usually produce two to three fruits per plant, although the smaller varieties can produce more.

Key steps for harvesting pumpkins

1. Leave the fruits to ripen on the plants as long as possible for the best flavour. If there's a risk of early frosts, protect the pumpkins with cardboard and straw.
2. To judge when to harvest pumpkins, knock gently on the fruit. If they sound hollow, they're ready to harvest.
3. Use secateurs to cut pumpkins off the vine, leaving a long stalk on the fruit.
4. Before storing pumpkins, first cure the skins by leaving the fruits out in the sun for around 10 days. In poor weather, place them in a greenhouse, or on a sunny windowsill.
5. Once the skins have cured, store the pumpkins in a well-ventilated, cool room, at a temperature of around 7-10°C (44-50°F). Check periodically for any signs of rot and remove any affected fruits. Stored pumpkins can last for up to six months.

Potential pumpkin problems

Pumpkins can be affected by **powdery mildew**, a fungal disease that leaves white powdery markings on the leaves, and in heavy cases can

stunt the plants' growth. Drought makes plants more susceptible to powdery mildew, so reduce the risk of infection by watering regularly, and avoid wetting leaves when watering. Remove and dispose of any affected leaves as soon as you see them.

In cool weather, fruits sometimes fail to develop, or drop off the plant while small. This is due to the flowers not being pollinated. Once the weather warms up, the problem usually resolves.

Key features of pumpkins

Flowering season(s)	Summer, Autumn
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 45cm (18in)
Ultimate spread	Up to 3m (10ft)
Time to ultimate height	4 months

How to grow butternut squash

Butternut squash are a late season favourite, with attractive fruits which will keep well throughout the autumn and winter. The flesh is a deep orange colour, and the flavour warming and gently sweet. Growing them in the UK is straightforward and very satisfying - let's look at how to grow this rewarding plant.

Squashes are grown as annuals in Britain, and are classified as either summer- or winter-squash. The seeds of both are sown in late spring.

Butternut squash is a type of winter squash, usually harvested from September onwards, and brought indoors to mature before the first frosts arrive. Winter squash such as butternuts are excellent for storing and will keep for up to six months in the right conditions.

Summer squash, such as courgettes, are grown to be used straight away. The skins do not thicken in the same way that winter squash skins do. The fruits are more prolific and quicker to grow, taking as little as 10 weeks from sowing to harvest. Winter squash have a longer growing period, needing four to five months from sowing to harvesting.

The botanical name for butternut squash is Cucurbita moschata. They are also known as butternut pumpkin, and gramma. Some of the varieties worth trying include:

- Butterbush F1. Unusually for butternut squash, this one is a compact variety which has more of a bush habit. Great if short on space, this one can be grown in containers.
- Butterscotch. Produces small fruit, this one also has more of a bush habit, making it great for containers.
- Harrier F1. Slightly paler skin than other varieties, this one will produce fruits that store very well.
- Hunter. Produces lots of small fruit which will store well.
- Sweetmax F1. A good one for the climate of the United Kingdom, this variety flowers early, giving the fruits longer to mature.
- Tiana F1. This one produces lots of smaller fruits weighing about 1kg each, so expect great flavour.
- Waltham. Stores very well and has a small seed cavity, meaning more flesh to eat!

If your interest has been piqued by the wonderful butternut squash, have a look at other types of winter squash. There are spaghetti types,

which have stringy flesh just like pasta of the same name. There are also some with dramatic skin, such as the polar white pumpkin, and the orange and yellow speckles and stripes of the ‘blaze’ variety. There are then of course the traditional pumpkins, available in various shades and sizes.

What you’ll need to grow butternut squash

Although seed packets say that butternut can be sown from March onwards, they need warm overnight temperatures. They are quick to germinate, so a sowing in late April or May will soon catch up, without the worry of protecting plants from cold weather.

To grow butternut squash you will need:

- 12cm (5") pots.
- **Compost**.
- Butternut squash seeds.

To sow the butternut squash seeds:

1. Fill pots with compost.
2. Place one seed in the centre of each pot, gently pushing it into the compost so that the ‘sharp’ long edge faces upwards, about 1cm (½") deep.

3.Water, and move to a warm place, such as a windowsill or greenhouse.

Once seeds have germinated and are showing three or more leaves, or if you have bought plants, they can be planted outside. This will be in May or June, once the risk of frost has passed. You will need:

•Garden fork.

•**Compost**, **manure** or other organic matter.

•Trowel.

•Butternut squash plants.

•One cane or stick per plant.

1.Work in plenty of organic matter using the garden fork, to each spot where a butternut squash will be planted.

2.Use the trowel to create a hollow mound in the soil. This is so that the hollow will retain water rather than it running off.

3.Dig a hole in the middle of the hollow, big enough for a butternut squash to be planted.

4.Fill the hole with water. Once it has soaked in, remove the plant from the pot and place in the hole, backfilling with soil and gently firming in.

5.Insert a stick or cane in the hollow, close to the plant, so that it is easy to see where to water once the plant puts on leafy growth.

Look out for large yellow flowers which will be enjoyed by bees as they visit to pollinate the butternut squash plants.

Where to plant and grow your butternut squash

Butternut squash prefer hot, humid conditions, so ideally plant out in a sunny spot away from cool winds. They like rich soil, so add a **suitable compost** to the soil before planting out. Feed regularly with **Miracle-**

Gro® Performance Organics Fruit & Veg Concentrated Liquid Plant Food.

Butternuts are usually vining plants and can be left to sprawl across the ground, or trained up supports. Allow 1.5 metres (5') between plants. The fruits can easily reach 3kg, so if they are allowed to climb, make sure each hanging fruit is propped up with strong supports to stop it snapping from the plant. Bush varieties, grown in containers, are the exception as they need less space - allow 1m (3') between plants.

Caring and nurturing for your butternut squash

British weather is quite temperamental, so be prepared to protect early sowings. Monitor night-time temperatures in the weeks after they have been planted out, and if temperatures are forecast to fall below 12°C (54°F) overnight, place a cloche or fleece over them.

Once fruits have appeared, feed fortnightly with **Miracle-Gro® Performance Organics Fruit & Veg Concentrated Liquid Plant Food**. Butternut squash are hungry plants will benefit from a plentiful supply of nutrients. Water regularly for larger fruits.

In early September remove any leaves shading young fruit, so that the sun can reach the skin to ripen it. Allow butternut squash to ripen on the plant if possible.

Harvesting butternut squash

Butternut squash are ready to harvest from September and October onwards, when the skins lose their greenness and start to turn orange. Squash must always be harvested before the first frosts. The skin should be hard and difficult to push a fingernail into.

Using a sharp pair of secateurs, cut the butternut squash from the plant, leaving 15cm (6") of browning vine either side of the top of the squash. They can be used straight away, but the flavour will develop more if left to cure.

Always handle butternut squash by the bottom of the fruit, and not the stem, however tempting it is to carry them by what looks like a handle. The attached vine acts like a seal on the fruit, stopping bacteria from reaching the flesh.

Once in storage, check the skin of the squash near to the stem every fortnight. Look out for darkening or soft patches, which indicate that the fruit is starting to spoil and should be used. Store at about 10-15C (50-60F) in a ventilated place.

Common pests and diseases with butternut squash

Butternut squash plants are very resilient to most pests and diseases. As mentioned earlier, they do like warm weather, and a cool summer can limit the amount of fruit produced. This is somewhat uncontrollable - just wait for warmer conditions to arrive.

Slugs and snails. Will attack young plants and can kill them completely. Encourage frogs, toads and hedgehogs, which will eat these predators. Try placing crushed eggs shells, coffee granules or copper coins around plants to deter them.

Powdery mildew. Very common on all types of squash, appearing as a white powder on the upper surface of leaves. Unattractive and reduces

the vigour of plants. Avoid by keeping plants well watered, and remove any infected leaves from the plant.

How to grow French beans

French beans are a versatile vegetable, producing attractive, long, thin pods, and creamy haricot beans. They are a heavy cropper, with each plant producing potentially hundreds of beans from each single bean sown. Like many other types of bean, they are a great nutritional source of protein and iron, and offer superb value as the seed can be saved and resown from year to year.

French beans, or Phaseolus vulgaris, can be climbing (pole) or dwarfing (bush) types. There are thousands of varieties to choose from, with variously coloured flowers and pods.

Climbing French beans are great where ground space is lacking, or where height will add interest to an area. Varieties to try include:

- ‘Blue Lake’. Green pods containing lots of pale green - white beans.
- ’Cobra’. Traditional green pods produced in abundance.
- ‘Golden Gate’. A very heavy cropper producing flat yellow pods.
- ‘Neckargold’. Very long round yellow pods.
- ‘Violet podded’. Attractive and easy-to-find mid-dark purple pods.

Dwarf French beans grow to about 30cm (1’) tall and can work well when grown around much taller plants, such as sweetcorn or climbing beans. They can be grown in a row or a square, or placed in gaps in the flower bed to create a ‘potager' effect. Varieties to try:

- ‘Barlotta’. Very attractive green pods speckled with red flecks.
- ‘Blauhilde’. Light purple flowers and long, dark purple pods.

- ‘Ferrari’. A quick grower producing straight green beans.
- ‘Purple teepee’. Purple pods reach an impressive 15cm (5") long.
- ‘Yin Yang’. Green pods, and spectacular black and white beans.

French beans can be sown throughout late spring and summer to keep more crops coming, so it’s worth trying several varieties.

What you’ll need to grow French beans

French Beans are frost-sensitive, so need to be given a head-start indoors. To do this you will need:

- French bean seeds
- A jar of warm water
- Seed tray or pots
- **Multipurpose compost**
- Dibber

From late April to mid-July:

1. Add the bean seeds to the jar of warm water, and allow to soak for 12 hours.

2.Fill a seed tray or pot with multipurpose compost.

3.Use the dibber to create 5cm (2") deep holes in the compost. Allow 3-5cm (1-2") between seeds.

4.Sow one seed in each hole, cover with compost and water well.

French beans germinate quickly, and you should see them sprouting after about a week.

Move the French beans outside once all risk of frost has passed, usually from mid-late May onwards. You will need:

•Long canes or sticks (for Climbing French Beans)

•String (for Climbing French Beans)

•A trowel or dibber

•French bean plants

To transplant them successfully:

•If growing Climbing French Beans, insert canes or sticks into the ground 15cm (6") apart and secure to one another with string.

•Use the trowel or dibber to create a hole big enough for each germinated bean root ball to fit. Create two holes around each pole for Climbing French Beans, or 1 hole per 30cm (1") for each Dwarf French Bean.

•Fill the hole with water, and allow to soak in.

•Place each plant in a hole, backfill with soil and firm in gently.

French bean seeds can also be sown directly in the soil throughout the summer. Sow more than needed as some are likely to be given up to slugs, snail and mice.

Where to plant and grow your French beans

Climbing French Beans can grow up to 2 metres (6') high, so grow in a sheltered position to protect the plants and supports from wind. Climbing French Beans can look great as a tall pyramid shaped centrepiece of a bed, or in a more traditional row.

Dwarf French Beans do not need support, and can be grown in the ground or in containers.

All French beans are tender, so have cloches or fleece ready to protect them when night-time temperatures are forecast to drop to below 10°C (50°F).

French beans will grow well in sandy, clayey, or medium soils. They prefer neutral or neutral-alkaline soil, which should be moist but well-drained. They enjoy full sun, but will tolerate shade as long as it is warm.

Caring and nurturing for your French beans

Check supports of Climbing French Beans to ensure they are sturdy and able to withstand strong winds. Water in spells of very dry weather to encourage flower production.

Harvest French bean pods from July through to October. This will help the plant to produce more beans. Snip them off with scissors. Always cook French beans before eating them to remove the poisonous ‘phytohaemagglutinin’ toxin.

Towards the end of the summer, leave some beans to ripen on the plant to be harvested as haricot beans or to grow again next season. The pods should at this point be brown and rattle when shaken. Remove from the plant and leave in a warm, dry place such as a windowsill. Crack open the crispy pods and place the beans in a container for eating throughout the coming months. Place a few in a labelled envelope for sowing next year.

French beans do not need feeding and can actually improve nitrogen levels in the soil. In the autumn, cut plants just above soil level, leaving

the roots behind. These will help to boost nitrogen levels as they decay in the soil. The tops can be added to the compost heap.

Common pests and diseases with French beans

Established French beans are largely unaffected by pests and diseases, but there are a few worth looking out for...

Bean Mosaic Virus

The main symptom is puckering of leaves and gnarled pods. Control aphids which can spread the disease and remove badly affected plants.

Black bean aphid and blackfly

These cluster in large numbers around new growth, sucking sap, damaging leaves and flowers, and reducing the ability of the plant to produce beans. Squish by hand, and encourage predators such as ladybirds.

Slugs and snails

Slugs and snails can attack young plants which have just been planted out, and also young beans which are trailing on the ground. Remove by hand, encourage frogs, toads and hedgehogs which will predate them,

and use grit to discourage them. See our helpful article for more tips on protecting French beans from **slugs and snails**.

Key features of French beans

Flowering season(s)	Summer, Autumn
Foliage season(s)	Spring, Summer, Autumn
Sunlight	Partial shade, Full sun
Soil type	Chalky, Clay, Loamy
Soil pH	Alkaline
Soil moisture	Moist but well-drained
Ultimate height	Climbing varieties up to 1.8m (6ft)
Ultimate spread	Up to 60cm (2ft)
Time to ultimate height	3 months

Sweet peppers (or capsicum) come in a good range of fruit colours when mature - red, orange, yellow and even purple. This makes them an excellent ornamental vegetable to grow - even in mixed flower borders or in pots on the patio. Although they tend to crop better when grown under cover - such as in a greenhouse or grow frame - sweet peppers are reliable croppers outside in warm, sunny summers.

How to grow peppers

Cultivating sweet bell peppers

To ensure a good, reliable crop, peppers need a warm, sunny position outside, or they can be grown in a greenhouse, grow frame or similar covered structure. Although they can be grown in well-prepared, rich, moisture-retentive soil, they usually crop better and more reliably if grown in containers.

Pepper varieties

The following are all good, reliable varieties: Ace, Bell Boy, California Wonder, Gypsy, Mohawk, Redskin.

Sowing peppers

For greenhouse growing, you can sow from mid-February to early April. For growing outdoors, sow in mid- to late March.

Sow seeds at 18-21°C (65-70°F) in pots of **good seed sowing compost**. Transplant the seedlings individually into 9-10cm (3-4in) pots when two true leaves have formed, and grow them on at around 16-18°C (60-65°F).

Gradually harden off the sweet pepper plants for 10-14 days before planting outside.

How to care for peppers

Plants are ready to put into their permanent cropping position once the roots fill the 9-10cm pots.

Pot them up into 23-25cm (9-10in) pots of good compost in late April (if growing in a heated greenhouse), mid-May (unheated greenhouse) or late May/early June if growing outside. They can also be grown in growing-bags, but will need very careful watering. Support them with bamboo canes or similar and tie them in as they grow.

Pinch out the growing tip when plants reach about 20cm (8in) high to encourage bushy growth and better cropping.

Water regularly and feed with **a balanced general feed**, switching to **a high potash feed** when the first fruit has set.

Mist the foliage regularly, especially under cover, with tepid water to discourage red spider mite and to improve flower set and cropping.

Harvesting peppers

Pick the fruit as needed when it has reached a good size, is green, swollen and glossy. Or you can keep the fruit on the plant to change colour, but this may reduce the overall crop.

Flowering season(s)	Spring, Summer
Foliage season(s)	Spring, Summer, Autumn
Sunlight	Full sun
Soil type	Clay, Loamy, Sandy
Soil pH	Neutral
Soil moisture	Moist but well-drained
Ultimate height	Up to 90cm (3ft)
Ultimate spread	Up to 60cm (2ft)
Time to ultimate height	6 months

Beetroot are pretty easy to grow, as long as you keep them growing well in good or reasonable soil. They are

even delicious when eaten raw, boiled and then cooled for salads, and used in soups and stews. Baking them whole is the best way to keep their unique flavour.

For the best flavour, beetroot need to be grown quickly, picked when reasonably small and cooked fresh. The ornamental and colourful leaves look great in the garden - and, when young, can even be added to salads.

How to grow beetroot

Cultivation

Beetroot prefer a position in full sun. They will grow in light shade, but avoid areas that get no direct sun at all.

Improve the soil by digging in well-rotted compost - avoid manures and other fresh soil improvers as they can lead to bolting (going to seed early) or the roots not developing correctly. Remove any large stones and any areas of compacted soil as these can affect good root development.

Before sowing, give the soil a light dressing of **a general granular feed**.

Beetroot can also easily be grown in containers - providing they are deep enough.

Beetroot varieties

Various beetroot shapes - round and long - and colours are now available, making beetroot a very ornamental vegetable to grow. Try growing them in the flower garden!

Most people prefer the traditional red globe varieties, although there are white, orange or yellow globes and red varieties that produce long, cylindrical, tapered roots.

The most popular variety is Boltardy, but the following are all good to grow: Albinia Vereduna, Babieto di Chioggia, Bikores, Bonel, Burpees Golden, Cheltenham Green Top, Cylindra, Detroit 2 Crimson Globe, Pablo, Red Ace and Wodan.

Sowing Beetroot

Wait until late March or April to sow your first beetroot as they dislike cold soil. For earlier sowing you could pre-warm the soil first with plastic sheeting or cloches. Then sow at fortnightly intervals until July for a succession of roots. Those sown from June onwards can be used for storing during winter.

Take out a drill about 2.5cm (1in) deep. Sow thinly to avoid overcrowding and having to thin out too much. Cover with soil and water in well.

When the plants are about 2.5cm (1in) high, thin out if necessary to leave them 10cm (4in) apart.

How to care for beetroot

Always try to avoid the soil drying out or the roots will turn woody, tough and lose their flavour. On the other hand, a widely fluctuating water supply causes splitting, so aim to

keep the soil evenly moist, watering every 10-14 days during prolonged dry spells. You can help preserve soil moisture by adding a mulch along the row of plants.

Harvesting

Harvest the roots when they’re young and tender, rather than leaving them to get too big. Pull up alternate plants once they reach golf ball size, and leave the others to reach maturity. Harvest when no bigger than a cricket ball.

Problems

Beetroot may be susceptible to the following problems: Bolting, Cracking, Woody growth and texture.

Foliage season(s)	Spring, Summer, Autumn
Sunlight	Partial shade, Full sun
Soil type	Chalky, Clay, Loamy, Sandy
Soil pH	Neutral
Soil moisture	Moist but well-drained
Ultimate height	Up to 15cm (6in)
Ultimate spread	10cm (4in)
Time to ultimate height	3 months

Fruit

October is a busy time in the garden when it comes to vegetables, but what fruit can you plant in October? The answer is generally bare root fruit trees, along with the ever-reliable strawberry. There’s also plenty to harvest this month, so make sure you brush up on your fruity dessert recipes.

What fruit to plant in October?

As well as harvesting the last of the fruit, October is a good month to plant fruit trees, bushes and plants while the soil is still warm from the summer. This will give them time to settle in over winter, ready to produce a bountiful crop next year. The following fruits will all be ideal for planting in October:

These fruit trees and bushes can all be planted in October:

The Ultimate Guide To Grow, Plant and Care for Strawberries

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

Understanding the different types of strawberry

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

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

It's also worth mentioning the alpine, or wild strawberry, Fragaria vesca. Technically an everbearing strawberry, it also does well in gardens. The fruits are small and a bit dry but with an intense flavour. They spread easily and make excellent groundcover, which is another perk as the dainty leaves are ornamental.

Strawberry varieties

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

Some of the best varieties include:

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

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

When to plant strawberries

Strawberries are available as bare-root runners, that are best planted in the spring or as young plug and potted plants.
You can plant strawberries at any time of the year, as long as the soil is workable and not waterlogged or frozen. However, mid-spring or early autumn are the ideal times to plant strawberries for an effective and bountiful harvest.

How to plant strawberries

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

Examine your strawberry plants

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

Choosing where to grow strawberries

When left to their own devices, strawberries may become very invasive, which is why many gardeners prefer to grow them in containers. Traditional strawberry planters are specialised containers that allow multiple plants to be grown in a small amount of space. Strawberries grow well in most containers and hanging baskets, as long as drainage holes are present. Try a multipurpose compost as a growing medium and space the strawberries about 20cm (8in) apart.
When planting strawberries, try a sunny location as they fruit well in full sun. They will tolerate part-shade, although fruit yields may be smaller. Strawberries like fertile but well-drained soil. If you are planting them

directly in the ground or a raised bed, it's worth incorporating some manure or general fertiliser into the soil before planting. Space the plants 30-45cm (12-18in) apart, in rows 60-90cm (24-36in) apart

Planting strawberries

Using a trowel, dig a planting hole twice as large as the plant's root ball. Make sure the plant's crown, where the leaves meet the roots, is level or ever so slightly proud of the compost surface. Planting strawberries too deep can lead to rot, and planting too high will dry the roots out. Backfill around the plant's roots and firm down the soil with your hands.

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

When to harvest strawberries

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

How to care for strawberry plants

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

Regular feeding is also important when growing strawberries, as they are hungry plants. Most gardeners like to use a high-potassium liquid feed every two weeks, such as **Miracle-Gro Performance Organics Fruit &**

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

Common strawberry plant pests and diseases

Grey mould/bortrytis mould

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

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

Powdery mildew

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

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

Frost damage

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

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

Verticillium wilt

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

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

Slugs and snails

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

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

How to grow 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 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**
- **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.

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

When do fig trees produce fruit?

Fig trees produce two crops of fruit in a year, one on the previous year's wood and the second on the current year's growth. In the UK only the

first crop is likely to ripen, in early summer. In very long hot summers or on greenhouse-grown figs, the second crop may ripen in late summer.

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.

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.

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

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

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.

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.

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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

Growing fruit in October

As the seasons transition from warm and dry to cold and wet, it's important to keep on top of your fruit plant maintenance, cutting back any of the plants that have finished their summer fruiting. **Raspberries** can be cut back to ground level, and you can tie the new canes that have grown this year into supports, ready to produce fruit next year.

You should also cut back the leaves from your **strawberry** plants and, if you mulched them with straw earlier in the year, you can now remove it to improve ventilation around the plants. Similarly, you can lift and divide your **rhubarb** plants to improve ventilation and to stop them from overcrowding each other. Use a spade to split the clumps up and replant the pieces, making sure each has a healthy bud or 'eye' that will produce shoots next year.

Move citrus trees indoors to a bright, frost-free place and reduce the watering frequency, letting the compost dry out between watering. Make sure you use an organic, peat-free compost.

Finally, make sure you protect your trees against pests and disease. Wrapping grease bands around **apple trees** will help to protect against winter moths as the bands stop the wingless female moths climbing up the trunks to lay their eggs in the branches. Scour your garden and pick up any damaged fallen fruit to stop fungal spores spreading.

> **You simply can't beat a delicious rhubarb crumble made with your very own sweet, tart rhubarb stems.**

Rhubarb (Rheum x hybridum) is a hardy perennial that keeps on coming back for years, giving you a fresh harvest of juicy stems every spring. Here's our simple guide to growing rhubarb.

Equipment list for growing rhubarb

To grow delicious rhubarb, you will need:

1. Rhubarb crowns.
2. A spade.
3. A supply of compost or well-rotted farmyard manure such as **Miracle-Gro Premium All Purpose Compost**.
4. A balanced garden fertiliser.

Rhubarb varieties

There are many different varieties of rhubarb available, but some stand out from the crowd. Here are a few of our favourite types of rhubarb:

•Rhubarb ‘Hawkes Champagne’ AGM: a compact, high-yielding variety, producing bright red stems with a sweet taste.

•Rhubarb ‘Timperley Early’ AGM: bred especially for indoor forcing, this variety also grows well unforced, producing an early harvest of pink stems streaked with green.

•Rhubarb ‘Victoria’: one of the oldest varieties but still popular, producing a heavy crop of pink-tinged green stems with a good balance of sweetness and acidity.

•Rhubarb ‘Glaskin’s Perpetual’: a late-cropping variety producing large, juicy pink- and green-streaked stems with a sweet flavour.

Where to grow rhubarb

A sunny site is best for growing rhubarb, although it can cope with some shade. Rhubarb needs a soil that is both fertile and free-draining, as the crowns will rot if left to sit in cold, wet soil. To improve the soil’s structure and fertility, dig in lots of **compost** or well-rotted farmyard manure a few weeks before planting.

How to grow rhubarb

Rhubarb is usually grown from crowns. These are young plants, between one to two years old, that look like bundles of tuberous roots, topped by a few buds.

The best time to plant rhubarb is in late autumn or early winter when the plant is dormant, although it can also be planted in early spring. Make sure you do the following:

1.Clear the area of all weeds and stones.

2.Plant the rhubarb crowns 1m (3ft) apart with 1.2m (4ft) between rows.

3.Plant the crowns with their buds just below the surface of the soil.

Caring for rhubarb

Once established, rhubarb will largely take care of itself, but for the best harvest, follow these tips:

•In spring, cover the plants with fleece to protect the new stems from sudden cold snaps. If the stems are caught by frost, they are likely to blacken and wilt, but the plants themselves will survive and produce more stems.

•Feed the plants with a **balanced fertiliser** in spring.

•Water regularly in dry spells.

•Deadhead any flowers as soon as they appear, to focus all the plants' energy into producing stems and leaves.

•Once the foliage has died back in autumn, cut off all old leaves and compost them. Provided the soil is well-drained, the plants will not be harmed by cold winter weather. In fact, the crowns need a period of temperatures below 3°C (37°F) to stimulate new growth in spring.

•Mulch around the plants in autumn with a thick layer of organic compost or well-rotted farmyard manure. Take care not to bury the crowns when mulching, or they may rot.

•Rhubarb plants need to be divided every five to six years to rejuvenate them. In winter, when the plants are dormant, dig up any crowns that need to be divided. Using the sharp edge of a spade, cut the crowns into three or four separate segments, making sure each segment has at least one bud. Replant each segment as a new plant.

Forcing rhubarb

Forcing rhubarb is a technique used by gardeners for many years as a way of getting an early rhubarb harvest. Discovered by accident at the Chelsea Physic Gardens in the early 19th century, the forcing process simply involves excluding all light from the plants. This stimulates them to grow, producing pale, tender stems with a delicate flavour that can be harvested around two to three weeks before the normal crop.

In mid to late winter, select the crowns you wish to force and cover them with straw, then place large containers over these crowns to block out all light. You can buy purpose-made rhubarb forcing pots, but an upturned bucket or dustbin works equally well. When the stems reach the tip of the container, they are ready to harvest.

Forcing rhubarb weakens the plant, so only force established plants, and don’t force the same plant two years running.

Rhubarb problems to look out for

Rhubarb is generally trouble-free, but in wet soil it can suffer from crown rot. This causes the crowns to turn brown and soften, and the rot may spread to stems and leaves. Dig up all affected plants as soon as possible and destroy them.

Harvesting rhubarb

Harvesting rhubarb does require a little patience, but the results are well worth it. To give new plants a chance to establish themselves well, don’t harvest any rhubarb at all in the first year after planting. In the second year, you can harvest a few stems from each plant, but make sure to leave at least three or four strong stems on the plant.

In the following years, you can harvest up to half of the stems on each plant.

When to pick rhubarb

Harvest from mid-spring when the stems have a good colour and the leaves are fully unfurled. Don't cut the stems to harvest them, just hold them at the base and pull firmly to detach them from the crown.

Stop harvesting rhubarb after mid-June to give the plants a chance to build up their reserves again for next year's crop.

Note: Never eat rhubarb leaves, as they are toxic. Cut them off the harvested stems and either throw them away or compost them.

Plant rhubarb in your garden this autumn and you'll be enjoying delicious tarts and crumbles for years to come!

FAQs

When is the best time to pick rhubarb?

In the UK, the best time to pick rhubarb is from April to June when stalks are around 30-40 cm long. Avoid harvesting in the first year to let the plant establish.

Can I grow rhubarb in a pot?

Yes, rhubarb can be grown in pots! Use a large, deep container with rich, well-draining soil and place it in a sunny spot for best results.

What fruit to harvest in October

October is a busy month in the fruit garden as well as in the vegetable patch. The following fruits should all be ready to harvest in October:

Strawberries

Raspberries

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