



August

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

Dear Fellow Allotmenters,

Welcome to August's Guide. We are now in high Summer with longer days of sunshine and lighter evenings. I hope you enjoy the read.

It is only a general guide 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 the magazine, 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

August Gardening: Your Monthly Garden Guide

August is often one of the hottest and driest months of the year, reliably bringing the summer to a glorious close. An abundance of warm and dry weather means that there's a lot to do to keep our gardens looking at their best. Watering becomes a critical activity as we give plants a helping hand in the heat, the vegetable patch is cropping heavily, and the lawn is in full use as a place to enjoy the sun. If you're wondering what to grow in August, then there are still plenty of options including fruit, veg, flowers, trees and shrubs.

What to plant in August and other August gardening tips

August is a great time to enjoy the best of your garden, but there are still plenty of jobs to do. Whether you want to know what to plant in August or you're just looking for some general August gardening tips, select a category below and find out how to look after your fruit, vegetables, plants or lawn.

Grow your own

Vegetable garden or fruit patch, you'll find plenty to keep you busy in the garden in August. Both will be yielding substantial harvests at this time of year and, with your crops flourishing, you'll likely find that they also require a lot of maintenance to keep them under control and safe from invasive weeds. Make sure your gardening tools are sharp!

Vegetables

Whether you're looking to pick a bountiful harvest this month or have been asking yourself, 'what vegetables can I plant in August?' you'll be pleased to learn that the options are abundant. Just make sure that you don't skip out on your veg patch care and maintenance – August can be a challenging month for your veggies.

What vegetables to plant in August

August is the perfect time to think about quick-growing vegetable plants that can be picked before the year comes to an end. When it comes to choosing what vegetables to plant in August, these seeds can be sown straight into soil outside, filling the gaps left by any vegetables you've recently harvested:

Plant seedlings of the following

How to grow salad leaves

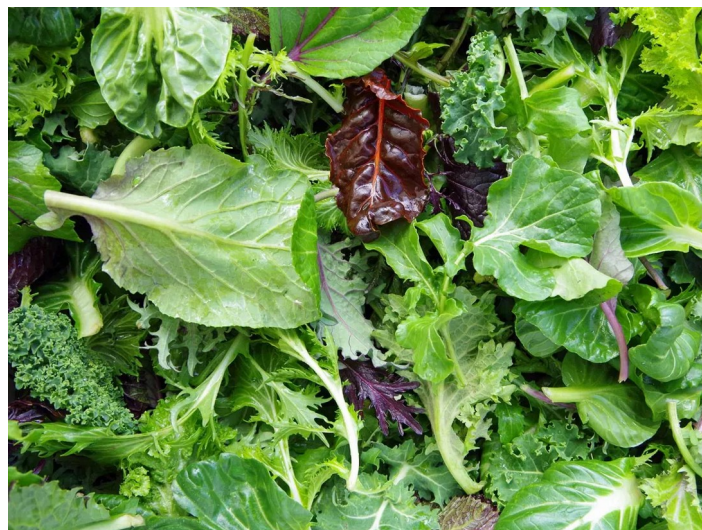
Bags of salad leaves are quite expensive to buy and have a fairly short lifespan in the fridge. Grow your own and you can pick exactly how much you want and need. By growing a range of different types and sowing at different times of year, you can have fresh salad leaves available nearly all year round.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

Salad leaf varieties

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

- Chinese cabbage:** Often sold as Chinese leaves, it is fast growing and can be ready for cutting in as little as 6 weeks.
- Corn salad or lamb's lettuce:** Hardy, making it the perfect choice for winter and early spring salads. It forms small rosettes of bright green, succulent leaves.
- Endive:** Usually blanched to reduce its bitter content.

- Land cress or American cress:** A tasty watercress substitute, ready to eat in 7 to 8 weeks.
- Rocket:** An easy to grow, fast-maturing salad. Late summer sowings will continue cropping into the winter if the plants are protected by cloches.
- Winter purslane:** An attractive winter salad also known as claytonia or miner's lettuce.
- Oriental vegetables:** There are numerous ways of using these, from adding to salads, stews and soup, for stir-fries and as a lightly steamed vegetable. They include Chinese mustard greens, choy sum, Japanese mustard spinach (komatsuna), mibuna and mizuna and texel greens.



What you'll need to start growing salad leaves

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

- Garden fork and spade
- Trowel

- Well-rotted **farmyard manure**
- General purpose fertilizer
- Salad leaf seeds

For container sowing:

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

How to grow salad leaves

Cultivation

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

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

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

Sowing salad leaves

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

How to care for salad leaves

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

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

To encourage fast growth that is tender and full of flavour, feed plants every 3 weeks with [a balanced liquid feed](#).

Harvesting salad leaves

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

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

Common salad pests and diseases

Grey mould/botrytis mould

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

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

Slugs and snails

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

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

Lettuce root aphid

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

- Water regularly especially during dry periods.
- Grow lettuce under insect-proof mesh.
- Pull up and destroy affected plants.

Key features of salad leaves

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

How to plant, grow and care for spring onions

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

Spring onions varieties

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

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

What you'll need to grow spring onions

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

For growing spring onions in pots:

- Container with drainage holes
- Compost**

Sowing spring onions

Spring onions are easy to grow from seed and will grow in any fertile, well-drained soil, in full sun. For a continual harvest in summer, sow

spring onions at three-week intervals from March to August. To grow spring onions over winter, sow in September and harvest in spring.

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

Growing spring onions in pots

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

Growing spring onions in water



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

1. Choose spring onions that have a few roots at the base of the plant.
2. Trim the tops of the leaves.
3. Place the spring onions in a clear glass jar and fill it with water so that the white bulb ends of the plants are underwater. Place the jar in a sunny position.
4. Cut off the green leaves of individual plants as you need them for cooking and leave the bases in the water to regrow fresh leaves.
5. Change the water every 2-3 days to keep it fresh.

How to care for spring onions

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

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

How and when to harvest spring onions

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

Storing spring onions

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

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

Common spring onion diseases

Onion white rot

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

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

Onion downy mildew

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

- Space plants when planting to ensure good air circulation.
- Remove any affected leaves.
- Water in the morning rather than the evening.

How to grow and care for salad rocket

Salad rocket, like its name, is a fast-growing salad leaf, perfect for adding a peppery spiciness to your salads. It will give a crop for most of the year, and if allowed to, will seed freely providing new plants for the next season too. This is a tough plant that needs little care,

and a great way to easily grow some healthy food. Here we run through how to grow rocket and offer some handy rocket growing tips.

Types of salad rocket to grow

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

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

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

Varieties of salad rocket:

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



What you'll need to grow salad rocket

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

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

To grow rocket directly in the soil you will need:

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

1.Create a shallow drill in the soil, no more than 1cm deep, using the trowel or hoe.

2.Water the drill, and then place 2 seeds 6cm (2") apart, along the length of it. If sowing more than one row, allow 15cm (6") between the rows.

3.Cover the seeds with soil, and water again using the fine rose on your watering can.

4.Water every day until seedlings germinate.

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

When to plant salad rocket

Sow from spring through to late summer and then cover with fleece or a cloche when it gets cold to continue harvesting rocket in the autumn.

Rocket can be grown indoors, although can go to seed very quickly with too much heat or sunlight.

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

Where to plant and place your salad rocket

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

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

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

Caring and nurturing your salad rocket

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

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

Frequently asked questions about salad rocket

Is rocket safe to eat?

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

Is rocket easy to grow from seed?

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

Can rocket be grown as a perennial?

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

Common pests and diseases of salad rocket

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

Why are my rocket leaves covered in tiny holes?

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

Key features of salad rocket

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

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

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

Tender vegetable plants

Potatoes, Tomatoes, Runner Beans, Dwarf French Beans, Aubergine, Marrow, Courgette, Sweet Pepper, Cucumber, Sweetcorn, Calabrese

Hardy vegetable plants

Cabbage, Cauliflower, Purple Sprouting Broccoli, Kale, Sprouts, Carrots, Onion, Shallot, Leek, Lettuce, Pea, Parsnip, Radish, Spinach, Swede, Turnip



Getting The Best Results

1. Gradually improve your soil with bulky organic matter wherever you are growing vegetables other than root crops.
2. Feed the soil before you plant so that it is full of vital nutrients to help produce a tasty crop quickly.
3. Plant or sow at the correct time giving the crop enough room to grow unhindered.
4. Water whenever the soil or compost is drying out.
5. Keep weeds at bay. They will compete with your vegetables for light, moisture and plant foods. Get rid of them with the right weedkillers suggested in the 'weed control' section.
6. Watch out for pests that want to eat your crop before you do. Cabbage caterpillars are notorious for destroying brassicas. Whitefly can ruin your tomatoes and the roots of your carrots can be tunnelled by the maggot of the carrot fly. Take the appropriate action recommended in the 'pest & disease control' section of this website.

All of the above will give you a crop into late autumn and beyond. August is also a good opportunity to plant out any remaining [Kale](#), winter/spring [cauliflowers](#) and winter [cabbage plants](#), if you have them.

Growing vegetables in August

Between deciding what vegetables to plant in August and bringing in a bountiful harvest, you're going to be spending a lot of time in your vegetable patch this month. So, it's a good opportunity to carry out some maintenance and give your vegetable plants a little extra care to help

them get through one of the hottest, driest months of the year. Here are some jobs for the vegetable patch in August:

- **Asparagus** - monitor your plants closely for asparagus beetle, which will weaken future crops. These can be removed by hand.
- **Aubergines** - remove the top growing point to allow the plant to divert its energy into the developing fruit.
- **Beetroot** - thin out the plants gradually so that each has about 8cm (3 inches) of growing space. Use the leaves as they are, and grate smaller roots into salads.
- **Broad beans** - once they have finished cropping, cut the plants to ground level. The roots will decay in the soil and provide a source of nitrogen to other plants.
- **Celery** - water it well, surround the stalks with newspaper and then earth up with soil.
- **French** and **runner** beans – water these well in dry weather and add a mulch of peat-free compost or grass clippings afterwards to conserve moisture.
- **Peas** – protect your peas from birds by covering them with netting, or dangling shiny objects nearby which will move in the wind to deter any feathery pests.
- **Sweetcorn** - tap the stems of each plant every week to help pollination.
- Blight can devastate **tomato** and **potato** crops at this time of year. Look out for brown patches on the plants and remove any affected

plant material immediately before it has the chance to spread to the edible parts of the plant.

- Hoe the vegetable patch to reduce competition from weeds for moisture. Hand weed asparagus, **carrots** and beetroot as they can be easily damaged, and consider using a weed control.

What vegetables to harvest in August

August will see you pull one of the biggest vegetable harvests in the calendar, as your hard work from earlier in the year really starts to pay off. Any of the following will be ripe for the harvest in August:

How to grow cucumbers

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

Choosing the best cucumbers to grow

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

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

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

Indoor cucumbers

- Cucumber 'Emilie' AGM
- Cucumber 'Femdan' AGM
- Cucumber 'Carmen' AGM

Outdoor cucumbers

- Cucumber 'Marketmore' AGM
- Cucumber 'Burpless Tasty Green'

What you'll need to start growing cucumbers

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

- 1.9cm pots for sowing seeds
- 2.Dibber
- 3.Multipurpose compost such as **Miracle-Gro Premium All Purpose Compost**
- 4.Long canes or other supports
- 5.Spade
- 6.25-30cm diameter pots for indoor-grown cucumbers
- 7.Compost or farmyard manure for outdoor cucumbers



When to sow your cucumber seeds

- When to sow cucumbers depends on whether you are growing indoor or outdoor varieties, and also on where you plan to grow them.
- In heated greenhouses, sow indoor cucumbers from late winter to early spring.
- If your greenhouse is unheated, wait until mid-spring before sowing indoor cucumbers.
- Start outdoor cucumbers off indoors by sowing in pots in late spring.
- Outdoor cucumbers can be also sown outside directly into the soil in early summer. They need a sheltered, sunny spot in good soil.

How to grow cucumbers from seed

- 1.Fill 9cm pots with multipurpose compost.
- 2.Using the dibber (or a pencil), make a hole 2.5cm (1in) deep in the centre of the compost.
- 3.Sow one seed per pot, placing it in the hole on edge rather than flat. This reduces the risk of the seeds rotting.
- 4.Cover with compost, and water well.
- 5.When sowing cucumber seeds directly outdoors, sow them 2.5cm (1in) deep, as for pots, and cover the young seedlings with cloches or horticultural fleece to give them protection in cool weather.

How and when to plant your cucumbers?

Once the seedlings are big enough to handle (usually around 3-4 weeks after germination), transplant indoor cucumbers into individual 25-30cm diameter pots filled with multipurpose compost. Place a long cane in each pot to support the plant as it grows.

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

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

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

How to care for your cucumbers?

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

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

- Pinch out any flowerless side shoots once they reach 60cm (2ft) long (for indoor cucumbers) or have produced seven leaves (outdoor cucumbers).
- Remove male flowers from indoor cucumbers to prevent pollination (see below).

How to pollinate cucumbers

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

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

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

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

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

When to harvest your cucumbers

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

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

Common pest or disease problems with cucumbers

Powdery mildew

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

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

Cucumber mosaic virus

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

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

Cucumber plants wilting

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

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

Glasshouse red spider mite

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

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

Glasshouse whitefly

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

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

Key features of cucumbers

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

How to grow peas

Nothing beats home-grown peas for their tenderness and taste. That's because when they are picked, their sugars start to turn to starch and so they quickly lose 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 flower spikes as soon as they appear.
- Stop watering once the leaves start yellowing – this means that the bulbs are starting to swell.

Harvesting onions

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

Storing onions

1. Place the bulbs in a single layer on a drying rack or on a slatted shelf that allows air to circulate around the bulbs.
2. Leave them outside in the sun or in a greenhouse for a couple of weeks to dry.
3. Once the skins are dry and papery, store the bulbs in net bags or plait the foliage to form bundles.
4. Store somewhere light, cool and well-ventilated. Bulbs stored in the dark are more likely to sprout.

Common pests and diseases of onions

Onions bolting

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

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

Onion fly

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

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

Allium leaf miner

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

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

Onion white rot

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

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

Leek rust

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

- Space plants well to ensure good air circulation.
- Remove and destroy any affected leaves.
- Don't plant onions in soil where this has previously been a problem.

Key features of onions

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

How to plant, grow and care for courgettes

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

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

Courgette varieties

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

Different varieties to try include:

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



What you'll need to start growing courgettes

For indoor sowing:

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

- Propagator or warm windowsill
- Courgette seeds

For outdoor planting:

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

Cultivating courgettes

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

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

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

How to grow courgettes from seed

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

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

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

How to care for courgette plants

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

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

Can you grow courgettes in pots?

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

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

Harvesting courgettes

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

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

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

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

Common pests, diseases and problems of courgette plants

Powdery mildew

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

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

Yellow courgette leaves

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

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

Cucumber mosaic virus

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

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

Grey mould/botrytis mould

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

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

Courgettes rotting when small or not setting

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

Slugs and snails

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

- Check plants at night and remove slugs and snails by hand.
- Covering the soil around plants with crushed eggshells or [a grit barrier](#).
- Scatter environmentally-friendly [slug pellets](#) if other methods are not sufficient.

Key features of courgettes

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

How to grow 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 sweetcorn

Sweetcorn, or maize, is sweet, tender and delicious – especially when cooked as soon as it is picked. Plenty of sun and dry weather are needed for the plants to grow well and to set cobs full of well formed kernels.

Sweetcorn varieties

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

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



What you'll need to start growing sweetcorn

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

- Garden fork and spade
- Trowel
- Well-rotted farmyard manure
- General purpose fertiliser
- **Liquid feed**
- Sweetcorn seeds
- Cloches or clear plastic covers (1 per plant)

For indoor sowing:

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

How to grow sweetcorn

Cultivation

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

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

Sowing sweetcorn

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

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

To get an early start and produce an earlier crop, sow seeds in individual pots or cells filled with a good seed sowing compost in late April or early May and germinate in gentle warmth. Keep the plants indoors until early June, when they will be ready for planting out.

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

How to care for sweetcorn

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

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

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

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

How to harvest sweetcorn

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

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

Common sweetcorn pests

Birds

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

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

Slugs and snails

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

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

- Covering the soil around plants with crushed eggshells or grit may have some effect.
- Scatter environmentally-friendly [slug pellets](#) if other methods are insufficient.

Mice

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

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

Key features of sweetcorn

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

How To Grow and Care For Chilli Plants At Home In 7 Easy Steps

It seems that most people now have at a few chilli pepper plants at home - it's become trendy, partly due to how easy they are to grow. Find out how to grow the freshest, tastiest chillies at home and save yourself time and money!

Growing chillies at home

To ensure a reliable crop, chilli peppers need a warm, sunny position outside or they can be grown in a greenhouse, grow frame or covered structure. **Very hot chilli varieties** are definitely better under cover, as this helps develop the intense heat, taste and flavour.

Although they can be grown in well-prepared, moisture-retentive soil, they usually crop better and more reliably if grown in containers.

Varieties of chilli pepper to grow

The following are all good reliable varieties of chilli:

- Apache
- Cayenne
- Demon Red
- Etna
- Fuego
- Habanero
- Hungarian Hot Wax
- Jalapeño
- Joe's Long Cayenne
- Prairie Fire
- Super Chili
- Thai Hot Dragon

One of the hottest chillies you can grow at home is Dorset Naga, which is extremely hot.

The hotter the variety the longer the whole growing process will take (from germination through to ripening) so bear this in mind when selecting your preferred type.



Sowing chilli pepper seeds

You can sow seeds from February to April. It is usually better to sow as early as possible, even January if you're growing very hot chillies, as they need a long summer to crop well.

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 plants for 10-14 days before planting outside.

1. Soak chilli seeds overnight in warm water before planting OR gently sandwich between damp kitchen roll, place in a plastic bag and leave in the airing cupboard for a couple of days to improve germination.
2. Chilli seeds love hot weather so, grow in a greenhouse or even in a pot on the kitchen window sill for a bit of extra heat to your chilli plants.
3. Sow chilli seeds as early as possible (January or February for the hot varieties).

4. Ideally sow chilli seeds at a temperature of between 18-21°C (65-70°F).

5. Sow seeds in small pots and very shallow (about 5mm deep). Transfer to a larger pot when two leaves have developed, try not to touch the forming roots when re-potting to prevent accidental damage.

6. Water regularly but don't allow the soil to become waterlogged. Cover the seed tray with Vermiculite, it helps with water and heat retention, both of which the chilli seeds love.

7. If planting seedlings outside gradually harden the seedlings off for 10-14 days (leave outside during the day and bring in over night).

8. Feed with a chilli feed or seaweed extract.

How to care for your chilli plants

Plants are ready to put into their permanent cropping position once the roots fill the 9-10cm pots. Pot them up into 20-23cm (8-9in) 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.

Pinch out the growing tip when plants reach about 15-20cm (6-8in) high to encourage bushy growth and better cropping. You can also pinch back the sideshoots if lots of smaller chillies are needed.

Water regularly and feed with a balanced general feed, switching to a **high potassium feed** when the first chillies have set.

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

Looking after a chilli plant

1. Chilli plants like growing in containers where the temperature can be easily regulated.
2. If growing outside select a sunny, sheltered, well drained position. If growing inside a sunny window sill or conservatory is perfect, just remember - don't let the soil dry out.
3. Pinch out the growing tip when the chilli plant gets to about 20cm high - this encourages bushy growth and better crops.
4. Feed with **Tomorite** every other week as soon as flowers start to appear.
5. Pollination does need to occur to get fruits. Rub the bristles of a small paint brush, or your little finger, gently over the flower heads to ensure that pollination occurs. If growing outside the chances for natural pollination are higher so this is not necessary.
6. Give at least 2 inches of water per week once the fruits have appeared, spray rather than water at the base to prevent over watering.
7. Chilli plants grown indoors can be treated as perennial houseplants and will need a good prune in the winter months.

How to harvest your chillies

Pick the fruit as needed when it has reached a good size. You can either pick them when they're green (when the flavour is quite mild) or leave them on the plants until they have turned red, which develops a stronger, hotter flavour.

Harvest your chillies by snipping the top of the stalk with sharp secateurs. Frequent harvesting of the fruits allows the chilli plant to devote its energies to developing more fruit.

Chillies can be dried or frozen for later use. Dried chillies make an interesting alternative for festive decorations.



Common chilli pests

Chilli plants can be susceptible to the following plant pests: **Aphids**, **Whitefly** and **Red spider mite**.

Key features of chilli plants

Flowering season(s)	Summer
Foliage season(s)	Spring, Summer, Autumn
Sunlight	Full sun
Soil type	Chalky, Clay, Loamy, Sandy
Soil pH	Neutral
Soil moisture	Moist but well-drained
Ultimate height	Up to 60cm (2ft)
Ultimate spread	Up to 45cm (18in)
Time to ultimate height	6 months

How To Plant and Grow Potatoes: The Ultimate Guide

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

Varieties of potato

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

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

When to plant potatoes

When you buy your seed potatoes, take some time to research the variety name and what kind of potato they are, as different varieties are suitable for different cooking methods. Generally, young potatoes are better for boiling and salads, as they contain less starch and so don't break down as quickly, while larger potatoes are best suited to mashing and baking.

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

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

Potato growing equipment list

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

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

How to plant potatoes

Rather than use old sprouting potatoes from the back of your cupboard, it is recommended to buy certified seed potatoes, as they will be disease-free. Seed potatoes are available from late winter to spring. If you

purchase them prior to planting, you can give them a head start by allowing them to chit.

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

Planting potatoes in the ground

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

Planting potatoes in containers

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

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

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

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

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

How to grow potatoes

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

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

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

How to grow potatoes in your garden

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

How to grow potatoes in grow bags

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

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

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

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

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

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

Growing seed potatoes

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

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

Chitting potatoes



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

There are a number of methods for growing potatoes – for example, under black polythene or in large containers. To plant using black polythene, plant the tubers through the black polythene. An advantage of this method is that there is no longer a need to earth up the new potatoes so there is no digging involved to harvest them. If you choose

to use containers, line the bottom of the container (15cm/6in) with **potting compost** and then plant the tuber below.

Keep adding the compost until the container is full, as the stems begin to grow. Remember, newly emerging foliage is susceptible to damaging frost – avoid this by earthing up with the surrounding soil or by covering the shoots with a fleece.

Planting seed potatoes

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

Caring for potatoes

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

How to harvest potatoes

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

After harvest, you can leave the potatoes somewhere dry to cure, giving soil left on the potatoes a chance to dry up, which makes cleaning easier. When selecting which potatoes to eat and which to store, test the skin

with a finger. Those with skin which tears easily when pressed should be used quickly, while those with a firmer skin can be stored. Store somewhere dark, cool, and well ventilated, such as a paper bag or burlap sack.

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

Common potato pests and diseases

Potato blight

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

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

Potato blackleg

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

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

Potato scab

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

- There is no remedy for potato scab as such as you most likely will not recognise the issue until harvest time.
- The best advice is to **keep your potatoes well watered** as scab worsens in dry weather.

Potato rot

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

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

Slugs

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

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

Key features of potatoes

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

How to grow tomato plants at home

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

Tomato varieties

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

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

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

Where to grow tomatoes



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

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

Equipment list for growing tomatoes

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

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

How to grow tomatoes from seed

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

- 1.Fill 9cm pots with multipurpose compost.
- 2.Sow a seed on top of the compost in each pot, then cover it lightly with a thin layer of compost.
- 3.Water the pots, cover with clingfilm and place in a greenhouse or on a sunny windowsill.

4.Once the seeds have germinated, remove the clingfilm. Water the pots regularly to keep the compost moist.

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

How to plant tomatoes outdoors

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

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

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

How to grow tomatoes in planters

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

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

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

Caring for tomato plants

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

layer of compost around outdoor tomatoes to help keep soil moisture levels constant.

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

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

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

When to harvest tomatoes

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

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

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

Common tomato plant problems, pests and diseases

Tomato blight

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

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

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

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

Whitefly

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

- An **insecticide spray** will control whitefly

Tomato leaf mould

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

- Remove and destroy all affected plant parts.
- For plants growing under cover, increase ventilation and, if possible, the space between plants.

- Try to avoid wetting the leaves when watering plants, especially when watering in the evening,
- Copper-based fungicides can be used to control diseases on tomatoes.

Blossom end rot

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

- Keep soil and compost consistently moist
- Apply a liquid [tomato fertiliser](#)

Key features of tomatoes

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

FAQs

Can I grow tomatoes at home?

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

Do tomatoes grow indoors?

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

How to grow 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

Remember to pick your **courgettes** when they're roughly 10cm (4 inches) long, and before they have the chance to turn into marrows. You should continue to water them well, and you can use a naturally derived tomato feed – such as Tomorite® – on them once a fortnight.

Rather than doing one large harvest, continue to harvest your **French** and **runner beans** regularly as it will help the plants produce more pods.

Fruit

If you're asking yourself what fruits to plant in August, then your energy may be better placed taking a well-earned break and enjoying the fruits of your labour, as there's not much you can plant in August. Don't get too comfortable, though – there's still plenty of care and maintenance to keep you busy in your fruit garden.

What fruits to plant in August

While there aren't many fruits that you can plant in August, strawberries are an exception and will overwinter to produce larger crops in the summer.

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

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.

Growing fruit in August

Wandering around the garden picking your homegrown fruit provides a good chance to check the same plants for pests and diseases, pruning opportunities or any other general care.

Pests and diseases

Birds are particularly active at this time of year and have a sweet tooth, favouring **figs**, **cherries**, and your ripening berries, so consider

protecting these with nets if you don't want to lose them to any cheeky beaks!

Check for any damage to your **apples** and **pears**. If you find an exit hole on the fruit and further tunnelling towards the centre, this may be the result of codling moth caterpillars. These are hard to treat at this time of year but make a note to put up some pheromone traps next spring before the moths have a chance to lay their eggs.

Brown rot is a fungal disease that spreads quickly and can affect many different types of fruit. Remove any affected materials and make a note to prune the plants later in the year to improve air circulation.

If wasps are a problem in your garden, put out a wasp trap to draw them away from the fruit. You can make these yourself quite easily by piercing holes in the lid of an old jam jar, placing some jam inside, and leaving the jar nearby. Just make sure you don't put it in a part of the garden that you or your family are likely to frequent.

Pruning

The key to effective pruning and therefore keeping your plants growing healthily is timing. Your plum trees should be approaching full growth in August, so take the opportunity to give them a prune – if you leave it until the colder months the cuts can introduce disease.

General care

Make sure you put supports in place for apple and pear trees – either cordons or espaliers – to help direct new growth in a way that retains the intended shape over the next year.

If you have summer-fruiting **raspberry** canes that produced fruit earlier in the year, then you can now remove the canes. Remove the ones that

are brown and woody, and thin out the newer green ones so they are about 25cm (10 inches) apart.

Sever the runners from old strawberry plants and move these young plants to a new location if the bed looks crowded – try to leave about 30cm (12 inches) between the plants. You can also cut back the foliage on grape vines to expose the fruit to the sun. This will cause them to ripen faster.

There are likely to be a few dry spells this month, so make sure you water any new fruit bushes and trees so that they establish strong roots to provide you with fresh fruit for years to come.

We all know what wasps look like and what they do! They can be a huge nuisance during warm summers, especially when you're enjoying the garden, eating and drinking. Many people are severally allergic to wasp stings.

Description

Social wasps, the species that live together in nests, are certainly an irritant, spoiling the pleasure of drinks on the patio and food from the barbecue, they also come into the home looking for sweet treats. And last but certainly not least, some people are severely allergic to wasp stings.

Sprays are effective against individuals but for everyone that is dealt with others will appear.

Treatment and control

Seek out the source

The only way for permanent control is to find the nest, wait for the evening when the wasps have stopped flying and place

approved insecticide dust in the entrance to the nest. More than one application may be required. They may even feed on the sweet secretion from sap-sucking insects, known as honeydew.

The leaf cutter bee is a fascinating insect. If you see one in your garden watch its antics, rather than be worried about its presence or try to control it.

Description

The leaf cutter bee is a native bee that cuts pieces of plant leaves to line its nest.



Symptoms

Quite large, semi-circular notches taken cleanly from the side of rose, beech and other shrub leaves.

Treatment and control

Don't begrudge these useful and fascinating animals a waterproof nest, so controls are unnecessary. They are solitary bees and won't sting you.

If you can track down the nest then a potted beech placed strategically close may provide all the nesting material they need without attacking your roses.

Despite their small size, flea beetles can cause a lot of damage – especially as they like eating the leaves of young plants and seedlings – often leading to them becoming stunted or even dying.

Description

Flea beetles are very small beetles (not surprising, given their name!). They are mostly about 2mm (about 1/10in) long, but big bugs can be 3-4mm. Commonly shiny black, but some have a yellow stripe down each wing case, some even come in a dark metallic blue. Athletic little pests, they will jump off the leaves if they are disturbed, so go gently if you wish to make sure of catching them. They often appear in quite large numbers and do a lot of damage.

Symptoms

Certain species of the adult flea beetle are fond of cabbages, Brussels sprouts, swede and other brassicas; some like potatoes; others are equally fond of wallflowers, alyssum, aubrieta and nasturtiums. Whatever the species, they all eat little round holes in the leaves, peppering the whole leaf surfaces. Either that or they leave the holes part-finished and the remaining tissue turns brownish white. It's not just the adults, as the larvae can also cause problems. They feed on the root systems of the plants concerned, so if the plant is wilting as well as suffering from holed leaves look underground.

Watch out for **fuchsias**. The blue metallic flea beetle loves these plants and both the adult beetle and the larvae can be found feeding on leaves at the shoot tips.

Treatment and control

General tips

Beetles don't like it wet, so frequent watering or misting of the foliage will help keep them away.

Keep young plants and seedlings growing strongly, so they can get through this susceptible phase of their growth cycle.

Covering plants with horticultural fleece or small mesh netting will help reduce damage by excluding the adult beetles.

Chemical control

Spray affected plants with a suitable and approved insecticide.

Our guide to chafer grub control

Chafer grubs live underground in the soil, where they devour plant roots. They can become a major problem – especially in lawns. They are the larvae of the cock chafer (or Maybug), garden chafer and Welsh chafer.

Description

There are 3 species of chafer grubs, which all look the same – the only difference between them is their size. They have white bodies, brown heads and 3 pairs of legs, close to the head end. When disturbed they curl up into the shape of a 'C'.

Don't confuse them with **vine weevils**.

The chafers (or Maybugs) produce the largest grubs, up to 5cm (2in) long. They live in beds and borders and feed on roots and vegetables. Garden chafer and Welsh chafer grubs are often smaller - upwards of 2cm (¾in) long. They too like roots but restrict themselves to lawns. These succulent grubs provide tasty morsels for birds (rooks, magpies, crows and especially starlings) who can often be seen tearing up patches of grass in their search for them.



Symptoms

In flower beds and borders, plants wilt and rapidly decline because of their lack of roots. In lawns, yellow patches appear, especially in early spring - and of course flocks of feeding, feathered friends.

Treatment and control

General tips

Thankfully these grubs are relatively uncommon, because once fully grown chafer grub control can be very difficult and the damage they inflict can be considerable.

Biological control

A pathogenic nematode is available, which can be watered onto the soil. This microscopic worm-like creature enters the grub's body and releases a killer bacteria. Unfortunately, it is only effective when the weather is warm, and the soil is moist and at a temperature of 12-20°C (54-68°F).

Nematodes are available from a number of mail order biological control suppliers, including [Green Gardener](#).

Physical control

In beds and borders, infestations are rarely extensive and if the grubs can be seen around the roots they can easily be removed by hand – or on a trowel.

In the lawn, you can revert to the old fashioned method. [Water the lawn](#) thoroughly in the evening and cover with blankets, carpet, polythene sheets etc. This will bring most of the grubs to the surface. Then get up at dawn(!), remove the cover and allow the dawn chorus to deal with the problem for you!

Cockroaches are one of those household pests you don't want to come face to face with – especially in the kitchen.

Description

Cockroaches are a nocturnal household pest that will eat almost anything, even the grease on walls and the wallpaper. They are usually only seen when lights are switched on suddenly in a room.

Treatment and control

General tips

When first noticed, clean kitchens and bathrooms thoroughly, paying particular attention to under and behind equipment, bath panels and cupboards to get rid of any eggs that have been laid in debris.

Spraying the site

Spray with a suitable and approved insecticide behind cookers, under fridges and washing machines, behind cupboards and along skirting boards. Spray into any cracks and crevices where the pests may hide.

Although rabbits in the wild are a welcome sight – in the garden it's a totally different matter. They can cause extensive damage to trees, shrubs, herbaceous perennials, fruit and vegetables. New plantings and soft spring growth are often the most susceptible.

Description

Although rabbits mainly feed on dusk to dawn, they can be active during the day. They are prolific breeders, producing large numbers of young, which congregate together in groups known as warrens. The main breeding time is from January to July, but litters of young can be produced throughout the year.

Symptoms

- Rabbits can do various kinds of damage.
- Shoots of herbaceous perennials and vegetables are grazed down to ground level.

- Foliage and young shoots of trees and shrubs can be grazed up to a height of around 50cm (20in) when rabbits stand on their hind legs.
- The bark of trees and shrubs can maybe be gnawed away from the trunk. This is common in winter when other food is unavailable.
- They also dig holes in flower beds and lawns.

Treatment and control

One of the best methods of control is to prevent rabbits from getting into the garden in the first place. Rabbit-proof fences of wire mesh should be at least 1.2m (4ft) high with the lower 30-45cm (12-18in) buried in the ground; the bottom 15cm (6in) should be bent outwards to stop the rabbits tunnelling underneath.

Where complete fencing is not possible, you can protect small areas, or even individual plants, with wire-netting barriers.

Plastic tree guards can be used to protect the trunks of young and small trees and shrubs.

Chemical repellents and deterrents are available, but they rarely give complete protection, especially during wet weather.

Some plants are more resistant than others, but even the young growth of these can be damaged, especially when other food sources aren't available.

Rabbits can be controlled by shooting, gassing or trapping, but this is best carried out by a professional company.

Codling moth can be a serious problem of apples, eating out the centre of the fruit, ruining it. As the old saying goes: What's worse than finding a codling moth grub in your apple? Half a codling moth grub!

Description

The larvae, maggots, of the moth attack the fruit of apples and pears. The eggs are laid on the developing fruitlets just before, during or just after petal fall.

Symptoms

The codling moth larvae are pale pink and bury into apples and pears. They start to eat the middle of the fruit, then make an exit hole, drop onto the ground and pupate.

Treatment and control

Spray apples and pears with a suitable and approved insecticide spray in early to mid-June and repeat 14 days later.

What fruit to harvest in August

If you've already collected your August vegetable harvest then hopefully you've left some energy for your fruit garden because there are so many different fruits ripening in August. Relish eating them fresh from the plant, still warm from the summer sun, or freeze them to enjoy later in desserts. Depending on the variety grown, all of the following fruit can be harvested this month:

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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

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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/botrytis 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.

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- 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 raspberries

What could be better than a bowl of sweet, freshly-picked raspberries in summer? These delicious fruits are easy to grow in a sunny garden, and if you're short on space you can even grow raspberries in a pot. Enjoy them fresh in summer and autumn, and freeze them for use in winter pies and tarts.

Varieties of raspberry

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

Summer-fruiting raspberries

- 'Malling Promise' – vigorous plant with abundant big sweet berries
- 'Glen Moy' – heavy crops on almost spine-free canes
- 'Glen Ample' – lots of big, succulent raspberries

- ‘Glen Fyne’ – one of the best varieties for flavour

Autumn-fruiting raspberries

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

What you’ll need to grow raspberries

- Secateurs
- Gloves
- Raspberry plants

For planting raspberries in the ground:

- Garden fork
- Garden spade
- Soil conditioner or well-rotted farmyard manure
- Slow-release fertilizer e.g. fish blood and bone

For summer-fruiting raspberries:

- Wooden posts 2.4m (8ft) long
- Wire

For growing raspberries in containers:

- 60cm (2ft) diameter container
- Soil-based compost
- High-potash feed

How to grow raspberries

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



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

1. Before planting, dig the soil over to clear it of weeds and stones, and dig in plenty of soil conditioner or well-rotted farmyard manure to improve the soil structure.
2. Provide a support framework for summer-fruiting raspberries (autumn-fruiting raspberries are generally self-supporting). To make the support framework, knock sturdy 2.4m (8in) high posts into the ground at the end of each row and stretch 3 rows of heavy-gauge wires between the posts, spaced about 60cm (2ft) apart.
3. Dig a trench 45cm (18in) wide and 20-25cm (8-10in) deep and cover the base with a good layer of organic matter, such as compost or well-rotted farmyard manure.

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

Growing raspberries in pots

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

How to care for raspberries

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

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

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

How to prune raspberries

Prune summer-fruiting raspberries after the last fruit has been picked. Cut down all the dark brown canes that produced fruit to ground level.

New canes that grew in the current year will fruit in the following year; retain the strongest 6-7 new canes for next year's crop.

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

Common raspberry pests and diseases

Raspberry cane blight

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

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

Raspberry beetle

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

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

Key features of raspberries

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

How to grow peach trees

What better way to round off a summer meal than with a luscious peach? Even better, a peach you've grown yourself? But can you grow peaches in the UK? With a sheltered sunny location and careful nurturing, you can grow peaches in the UK. *Prunus persica* originates from China and in the age of the grand country house was extensively grown in specially designed glasshouses. Follow this guide to learn how to grow peaches in your garden at home.

Types of peach trees to grow

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

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



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

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

What you'll need to grow peach trees

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

To grow peaches in a container you will need:

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

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

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

- Polythene sheeting shelter: in winter this protects the tree from peach leaf curl.
- Horticultural fleece: in early spring this protects the delicate blossom from frost. Remove it during the day for any early pollinating insects to reach the flowers.
- Strong netting: from April through to harvesting because birds love to eat the peaches off the tree.

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

Where to plant and place your peach trees

Peaches grow best fan-trained (see above) against a sunny, sheltered south or south-west facing wall or fence. Peach trees are often sold bare-rooted and should be planted between November and March about 15-20cm from the wall, at a slight angle towards the wall. If planting more than one peach, space them at least 3.5m to 4m apart.

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

Caring and nurturing your peach trees

Follow these care tips for growing successful crops of peaches:

- Peaches prefer warm conditions in a sunny spot and protection from frost: see above.
- In late winter feed peach trees with a **continuous release feed** followed by a mulch of **well-rotted manure**. For peaches grown in containers, apply a liquid feed high in potassium such as **tomato food** every two weeks during the growing season.
- Keep the ground moist throughout the growing season and water peach trees generously during hot sunny weather as the soil near a wall can quickly dry out. Make sure peach trees in containers don't dry out.
- Thin out any badly placed or misshapen fruits from the growing clusters to allow the remaining fruits space to develop. This should

be done when the fruits are about 1cm wide. Aim to leave about 15cm between each peach.

- The fruits are ready to harvest when their skins have coloured up and the flesh around the stalk yields slightly. Cup your hand around the peach and remove it from the tree by giving a slight twist. Peaches do not store well and are best eaten when freshly picked.
- Prune peach trees immediately after harvesting. Because peaches flower on one year-old growth, remove as much old growth as possible. Cut back stems which have fruited to a new shoot, and tie in the new growth to the support to replace the old growth.
- Re-pot container grown peach trees approximately every three years.
- After the first year, never prune peach trees in the winter, as this can lead to disease.
- Peaches tend to be self-fertile, so you should harvest enough fruit even with one plant.

Common pests and diseases with peach trees

What is peach leaf curl?

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

To control it, remove infected leaves before the spore layer forms. Encourage the growth of replacement leaves by feeding and watering the tree. Fan trained trees can be protected from mid-winter to late spring with a temporary open-sided shelter made from polythene sheeting.

Can aphids attack my peach trees?

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

Frequently asked questions about peach trees

Do you need two peach trees to produce fruit?

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

How big do peach trees get?

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

What is the lifespan of a peach tree?

Peach trees live for an average of 12 years.

Where do peach trees grow best?

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

Key features of peach trees

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

How to grow cherry trees

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

Types of cherry trees to grow

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

- Prunus 'Accolade' gives interest throughout the year, with large pink flowers in the spring, and bright orange-red leaves in the autumn.
- Prunus apetala. A small tree growing to 5.5m (17') with white to light pink flowers, and very dark fruit.
- Prunus 'Kanzan'. A pink flowering variety which has a large spread of up to 8 metres (25') wide.
- Prunus nipponica, or Japanese alpine cherry. This Japanese cherry blossom tree is very tolerant of cold conditions, this variety usually has light pink flowers with attractive yellow-orange leaves in the autumn.
- Prunus pendula 'Pendula Rubra'. A weeping cherry tree cultivar, with an arching habit offering dark pink flowers.
- Prunus 'Royal Burgundy'. Grown for its stunning foliage, the leaves of this variety emerge as a copper colour, turning to bright red and eventually purple.
- Prunus sargentii. A pink flowering cherry tree with bronze to orange leaves.
- Prunus serrula. Also known as the birchbark cherry, paperbark cherry, and Tibetan cherry tree. Grown for its shiny copper coloured bark, a medium sized tree reaching 6-9m (18-27' high).
- Prunus 'Shogetsu'. Large flowers which turn from pink to white.
- Prunus × subhirtella 'Autumnalis Rosea'. Unusual insofar that this cultivar will flower in a mild winter, as well as in the spring.
- Prunus 'The Bride'. A small tree with bright white flowers.



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

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

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

What you'll need to grow cherry trees

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

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

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

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

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

Where to plant and place your cherry trees

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

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

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

Caring and nurturing your cherry trees

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

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

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

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

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



Common pests and diseases with cherry trees

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

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

Why do my cherries have small holes in them?

Cherry fruit fly can lay eggs in young fruit, and when these hatch the worm-like larvae eat the flesh and then exit the fruit, leaving a small hole.

You can prevent this by encouraging birds into the garden (protect with netting when fruits are forming). Squish small populations by hand, and spray with **BugClear™ Ultra Gun!** If the problem persists.

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

Canker is a serious disease which can kill a cherry tree and can spread to other trees. Remove infected sections of the plant using secateurs or a

pruning saw, cleaning the tool carefully before using again. Destroy the affected material.

Frequently asked questions about cherry trees

Do cherry trees have thorns?

No, cherry trees are thornless.

Can you grow a cherry tree from a cherry pip?

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

Are cherry trees poisonous to horses?

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

Key features of cherry trees

Botanical Name	<i>Prunus spp.</i>
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

All about growing currants

Bursting with vitamin C, blackcurrants are an easily grown soft fruit.

They make a great jam, health-promoting drinks and are a vital

ingredient of summer pudding. Redcurrants are tart, but make great jams and jellies, while whitecurrants are sweet enough to be eaten fresh from the plant.

How to grow currants

Cultivation

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

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

Currant varieties

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



Planting currants

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

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

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

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

How to care for currants

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

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

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

Pruning and training

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

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

Redcurrants and whitecurrants

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

Blackcurrants

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

Harvesting currants



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

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

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

Most will not store well unless frozen, dried or preserved as jams. There should be plenty more to come later in the year though, so enjoy them straight from the plant whilst thinking about what you might do with any surpluses.



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