



July

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

Dear Fellow Allotmenters,

Welcome to July's Guide. We look forward to the longer days of sunshine and lighter evenings as Summer is here. I hope you enjoy the read.

It is only a general guide and has been composited from the Internet.

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

July Gardening: Your Monthly Garden Guide

We never know quite what the weather will be like in July, so when the sun shines, take every opportunity to get out and enjoy your garden. Many plants are in full bloom now, and there's plenty to do to keep them healthy and looking great, whether it's watering vegetables during dry spells, deadheading faded flowers or keeping on top of the weeding. If you're wondering what to grow in July then there are plenty of fruit, veg and even flowers that you can plant at this time of year. But most importantly, make some time to simply sit and appreciate the stunning results of your hard work!

What to plant in July and other July gardening tips

You'll really start to reap the rewards of your gardening efforts this month with so much fruit and veg to harvest. Don't worry if you don't have any crops, though; elsewhere there's plenty to do in the garden. If you're wondering what to plant in July and how to keep your displays healthy, choose your favourite category below and read our July gardening tips.

Grow your own Whether you have a vegetable patch, a fruit patch, or you've been putting your energy into growing herbs and spices that are packed full of flavour, you'll likely find that much of your time this month is going to be spent harvesting your crops. There are also quite a few vegetables that can be planted in July, but prioritise making space in your fridge for a bountiful harvest.

Vegetables

When it comes to what veg to grow in July, you'll find that leafy greens are generally the most suited to the warmer weather, with plenty of

options for both indoor and outdoor planting. If you're looking to get a harvest in, then you'll probably find that a few of your root veg are ready but July is more about those fresh salad leaves and juicy tomatoes.

What vegetables to plant in July

The veg garden is in full swing in July and there's plenty to do, with winter vegetable seedlings to plant out, successional crops like salad leaves to sow, and delicious vegetables to harvest for the dinner table. Keep up with the watering, weeding and feeding to give your vegetables everything they need to ripen, and be on the lookout for any signs of pests and diseases.

If you're wondering what vegetables to plant in July, then the following can all be sown outdoors directly into well-prepared soil, whether in beds, borders or containers.

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

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

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

How to care for peas

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

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

When to harvest peas

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

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

A few facts about peas

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

Common pest and disease problems with peas

Powdery mildew

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

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

Pea Moth

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

- Grow crops under insect-proof mesh
- Early spring and early summer sowings are less affected

Mice

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

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

Pigeons

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

- Grow plants under netting

Key features of peas

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

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-fruited 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/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.

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

Frost damage

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

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

Verticillium wilt

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

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

Slugs and snails

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

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

How to grow onions

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

What are the best onion varieties to plant?

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

- Onion 'Stuttgarter Giant': produces firm, tasty, slightly flattened bulbs, good for storing.
- Onion 'Red Baron': a late maturing variety with dark red bulbs, stores well.
- Onion 'Jetset': an early maturing variety with yellow-brown bulbs, stores well.

- Onion 'Sturon': a reliable variety with good bolt resistance, producing flavourful round bulbs that store well.
- Onion 'Troy': suitable for autumn planting, with good bolt resistance, producing tasty yellow-skinned bulbs.



Onion growing equipment list

To grow onions at home, you will need:

- Onion sets (like bulbs, but harvested earlier)
- Spade
- Fork
- Supply of compost or well-rotted farmyard manure such as **Miracle-Gro Premium All Purpose Compost**
- **Fertiliser**
- Netting

When to plant onions

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

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

How to plant onions

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

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

Caring for onions

Follow these tips for a good onion harvest:

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

- Water regularly in dry periods.
- Remove any flowerspikes as soon as they appear.
- Stop watering once the leaves start yellowing – this means that the bulbs are starting to swell.

Harvesting onions

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

Storing onions

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

Common pests and diseases of onions

Onions bolting

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

- Choose varieties that have been heat-treated to reduce the risk of bolting, or look for bolt-resistant varieties.

- Cover plants with fleece to protect them against sudden cold snaps in spring.
- Water plants regularly in hot, dry periods.

Onion fly

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

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

Allium leaf miner

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

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

Onion white rot

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

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

Leek rust

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

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

Key features of onions

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

How to grow basil

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

Types of basil to grow

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

- Basil 'Sweet Green' – traditional sweet basil, ideal for Italian dishes.

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

Essential equipment to grow basil

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

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

Where to grow basil

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

How to sow basil

You can sow basil indoors from late February onwards.

- 1.Fill pots with multipurpose compost and firm down.

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

Caring for basil

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

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

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

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

Harvesting basil

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

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

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

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

Storing basil leaves

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

- To freeze basil leaves, remove all leaf stalks and wash the leaves. Blanch the leaves in boiling water for a couple of seconds, then drain and rinse in iced water. Pat the leaves dry and place in an airtight container in a freezer.

- To dry basil leaves in an oven, turn it on to its lowest heat, then place the basil leaves on a baking tray and leave them in the oven for two to four hours until they crumble when bent.
- To air-dry basil, cut leafy shoots with long stems, tie them in bunches and hang the bunches somewhere cool and well ventilated, in bright but indirect light. Air-drying basil takes about a month.

Common pest or disease problems of basil plants

Black spots on basil leaves

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

- Avoid splashing the leaves when watering.

Powdery mildew

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

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

Fusarium wilt

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

- There are no chemical controls available.

- Avoid planting basil in soil where basil plants have been previously affected by fusarium wilt.

Slugs and snails

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

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

Glasshouse whitefly

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

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

Glasshouse red spider mite

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

- Ensure good ventilation in greenhouses.
- Mist plants to raise the humidity levels, or damp down greenhouse floors.
- A predatory mite can be used as a biological control.

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

Key features of basil

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

How to plant, grow and care for courgettes

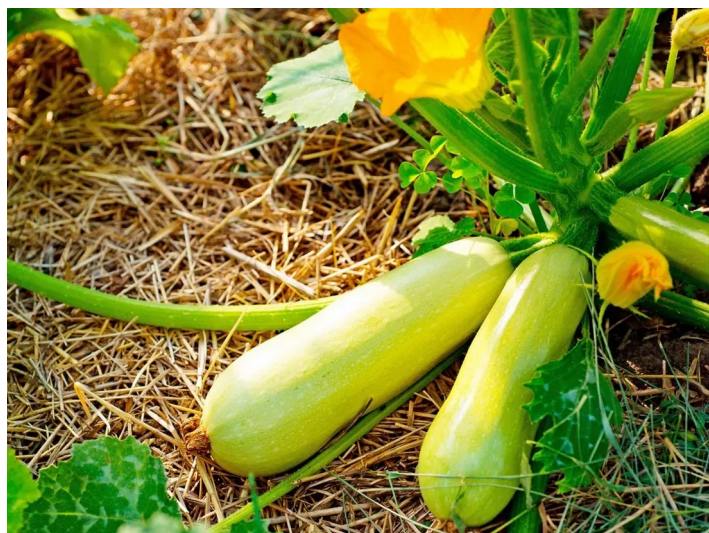
Courgettes are a common summer staple in the vegetable garden and are relatively easy to grow. They taste great in salads, lightly steamed, stuffed or roasted. Courgettes and marrows are the same thing – although courgettes plants are bred to be a much bushier and to produce lots of small, tasty fruit.

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

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 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 salad leaves

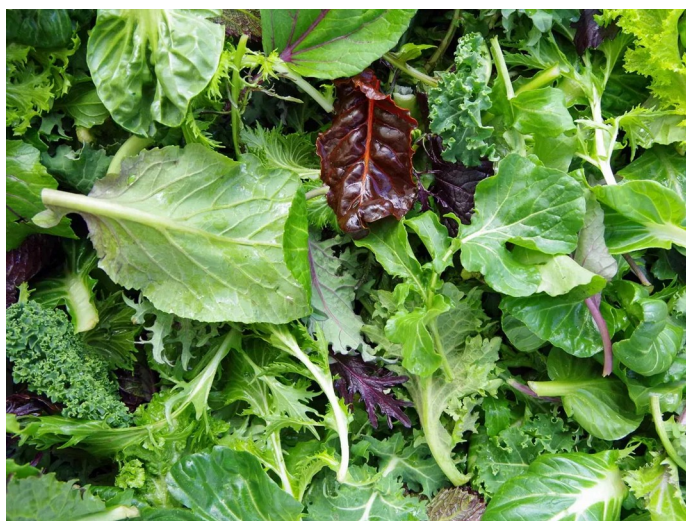
Bags of salad leaves are quite expensive to buy and have a fairly short lifespan in the fridge. Grow your own and you can pick exactly

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 salad 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, chapsuey greens, Japanese mustard spinach (komatsuna), mibuna and mizuna and texel greens.



What you'll need to start growing salad leaves

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

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

For container sowing:

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

How to grow salad leaves

Cultivation

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

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

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

Sowing salad leaves

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

How to care for salad leaves

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

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

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

Harvesting salad leaves

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

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

Common salad pests and diseases

Grey mould/botrytis mould

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

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

Slugs and snails

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

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

Lettuce root aphid

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

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

Key features of salad leaves

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

How to grow sweetcorn

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

Sweetcorn varieties

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

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



What you'll need to start growing sweetcorn

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

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

For indoor sowing:

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

How to grow sweetcorn

Cultivation

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

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

Sowing sweetcorn

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

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

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

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

How to care for sweetcorn

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

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

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

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

How to harvest sweetcorn

When the silks (female flowers) on top of the cobs have turned chocolate brown, test the kernels for ripeness. Pull back some of the the leaves that cover the cob and press one or two kernels with a thumbnail. If the

content is creamy then it's ripe to eat. If the content is clear, the cob is unripe, so wait. If the content is solid then you've left it too long.

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

Common sweetcorn pests

Birds

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

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

Slugs and snails

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

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

Mice

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

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

Key features of sweetcorn

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

How to grow and care for sweet peas

Sweet peas (*Lathyrus odoratus*) are an incredibly popular summer climbing plant. They produce masses of flowers all summer long - providing they are picked regularly - and most (but not all) varieties have a delicious scent. Sweet peas are easy to grow from seed, or you can also buy young plants from garden centres in spring.

Suggested planting locations and garden types

You can plant sweet peas in flower borders and beds, patios, containers, cut flowers, city and courtyard gardens, cottage and informal gardens, walls and fences. Sweet peas need a sunny position and good, well-drained soil. Before sowing sweet pea seeds or planting out, improve the soil with bulky organic matter or soil conditioner to help hold plenty of moisture.



What you'll need to start growing sweet peas

This list of equipment will get your sweet pea growing off to a great start. Here's what you'll need:

- Garden fork and spade
- Trowel
- Well-rotted [farmyard manure](#)
- General purpose fertilizer
- [High-potash feed](#)
- 9cm (3.5in) pots
- [Seed sowing compost](#)
- Pea sticks, [bamboo](#) canes or other support framework
- String or twine
- Sweet pea seeds

Sowing sweet peas

For best results, sow seeds in long pots filled with a good seed sowing compost in March or April. Sow seeds individually in 9cm (3.5") pots or 5-7 seeds in a 12.5cm (5") pot. Germinate and grow on the plants at about 15°C (60°F). If several seeds are sown into a pot, pot on seedlings individually into 9cm (3.5in) pots when they reach about 5cm (2") high.

You can sow seeds directly into the ground in March or April or even May, but the results are usually not as good. In milder areas, you can also sow in pots during October or November and overwinter the young plants in a cold frame or unheated greenhouse. This will produce plants that flower earlier the following year.

Some varieties have a hard seed coat and may be difficult to germinate. The advice to chip away part of the hard seed coat using a sharp knife to help germination isn't always necessary. If you want to try, make a small nick on the opposite side to the 'eye'. Certainly don't soak the seeds in water as this can lead to rotting.

How to care for sweet peas

When plants are about 7.5-10cm (3-4") high, pinch out the growing tips to encourage branching, bushier plants and so more flowers.

Plant out overwintered plants in mid-spring and those sown in spring in late spring or early summer, after first hardening them off. The plants may need protection from cold and late frosts, so it may be better to wait until after the final spring frost. Plant 20-30cm (8-12") apart.

After planting out, water the plants thoroughly to settle them in and again during dry spells.

Feeding regularly throughout summer with a high potash liquid feed will help promote continuous flowering.

Cut flowers frequently as they become ready, and certainly before the flowers fade and they produce seed pods. Otherwise they will stop flowering.

Drying out, drought and temperature-related stress causes flower bud drop.

Training and supports for sweet peas

Sweet peas are usually grown up pea sticks, wigwams of bamboo canes, trellis or post and netting supports. They can either be left to their own devices and allowed to scramble for a natural look or carefully trained and tied in.

Dwarf, bushy varieties of sweet peas are perfect for pots, hanging baskets or even as ground cover.



Sweet pea cordon training

Cordon training is used by professional growers and gardeners who regularly exhibit plants as it produces the best, top quality blooms. But it is labour intensive.

In the cordon system, sweet peas are trained as single-stemmed plants, tied to individual bamboo canes. All the sideshoots and tendrils are carefully removed when

they form, so that all the plant's energy is put into producing flowers, and the plants have to be tied in regularly to the canes.

Common pests and diseases in sweet peas

Powdery mildew on sweet peas

Powdery mildew is a fungal disease that appears as a white powder on sweet pea 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 sweet peas when planting to ensure good air circulation.
- Remove any affected growth promptly.
- Water regularly in dry periods.

Slugs and snails on sweet peas

Slugs and snails will attack young sweet pea seedlings, eating the leaves. They can be identified by the slime trails that they leave, as well as the damage they do.

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

Aphids on sweet peas

Aphids can be a problem on sweet peas. They are sap-sucking insects which can quickly infest new shoots on young sweet pea plants, stunting growth.

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

How to plant, grow and care for spring onions

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

Spring onions varieties

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

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

What you'll need to grow spring onions

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

For growing spring onions in pots:

- Container with drainage holes
- Compost**

Sowing spring onions

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

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

Growing spring onions in pots

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

Growing spring onions in water



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

onions in water:

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

How to care for spring onions

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

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

How and when to harvest spring onions

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

Storing spring onions

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

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

Common spring onion diseases

Onion white rot

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

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

Onion downy mildew

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

- Space plants when planting to ensure good air circulation.

- Remove any affected leaves.
- Water in the morning rather than the evening.

How To Plant and Grow Potatoes: The Ultimate Guide

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

Varieties of potato

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

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

When to plant potatoes

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

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

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

Potato growing equipment list

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

- Seed potatoes
- Potato **fertiliser**
- Deep container or **grow bag**
- Trowel
- Garden fork and spade

- Watering can
- Storage crates, bags, or sacks

How to plant potatoes

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

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

Planting potatoes in the ground

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

Planting potatoes in containers

If your soil is a heavy clay, or you are short of space, you might have more success growing potatoes in raised beds, or containers. While you can grow maincrop potatoes in containers, the restricted room for tubers

to form may mean it is preferable to select first- or second-early varieties, as they have smaller tubers.

- 1.Allow about 10 litres of compost per seed potato, so for a 40-litre container, plant up to four seed potatoes.
- 2.When planting potatoes in containers, use a good quality compost and potato feed, and make sure the container, or sack has adequate drainage holes.
- 3.Fill the container a quarter full with compost and place the seed potatoes on the compost surface, again with their shoots or eyes facing up.
- 4.Continue to cover the seed potatoes with more compost to about an inch below the top of the container. Give it a water and wait for the shoots to appear.

How to grow potatoes

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

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

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

How to grow potatoes in your garden

Potatoes will grow in almost any soil, however, they cultivate much better if the soil is enriched with heaps of organic matter. Potatoes grow best in

an acid soil so **add well-rotted manure** and garden compost. It is also important that you do not lime soil at any time.

How to grow potatoes in grow bags

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

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

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

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

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

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

Growing seed potatoes

By buying seed potatoes, you are able to begin growing them before planting them in January/February time. Seed potatoes are actually small tubers specifically grown for the purpose. Remember, always **buy**

certified seed potatoes - this way you will then know they are free from virus infections.

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

Chitting potatoes



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

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

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

Planting seed potatoes

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

Caring for potatoes

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

How to harvest potatoes

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

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

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

Common potato pests and diseases

Potato blight

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

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

Potato blackleg

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

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

Potato scab

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

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

Potato rot

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

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

Slugs

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

- Check plants (at night) and remove slugs by hand.

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

Key features of potatoes

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

How To Grow and Plant Garlic With Our Simple Steps

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

Hardneck and softneck garlic

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

Hardneck bulbs are hardier than softnecks, so are a good choice for areas with cold winters. The bulbs often have stronger, more complex

flavours than softneck garlicks. On the downside, the bulbs don't store as well as softnecks do.

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

Hardneck garlic varieties to grow

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

Softneck garlic varieties to grow

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

How to grow garlic



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

Garlic growing equipment list

To grow garlic in your garden you will need:

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

How to plant garlic

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

- 1.Before planting garlic, prepare the soil by digging in plenty of compost or well-rotted farmyard manure. If your soil is very heavy clay, add grit, or plant bulbs in containers instead.
- 2.Remove any weeds and stones.

3. Apply a general-purpose fertiliser in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions, and rake in.
4. Break the garlic bulbs into individual cloves.
5. Plant the cloves 15cm (6in) apart and 2.5cm (1in) deep, with tips just below the surface and pointing upwards. Space rows 30cm apart.
6. Water after planting, to help settle the soil around the cloves.
7. Cover the area with horticultural fleece or cloches to stop birds pulling up the seedlings as they appear. Once the plants grow larger, they are less attractive to birds and the protection can be removed.

Growing garlic in containers

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

1. Choose a container at least 30cm in diameter and 20cm deep, with good drainage holes.
2. Fill with a good quality multipurpose compost and add a slow-release fertiliser.
3. Plant the cloves 10-15cm (4-6in) apart and 2.5cm (1in) deep, with tips just below the surface and pointing upwards. Don't plant bulbs right up against the edge of the container – leave space for them to swell as they grow.
4. Water regularly to keep the compost moist.

Caring for garlic

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

- Keep beds weed-free. Remove weeds by hand to avoid damaging the bulbs with a hoe.
- Water during long dry periods.
- Stop watering once the leaves start turning yellow and the bulbs start to swell.
- On hardneck bulbs, pick any flowerscapes before they flower, to keep the plant's energy focused on developing the bulb. The flowerscapes are edible and very tasty!

Harvesting garlic



While garlic is growing, you can harvest a leaf now and then to add to

salads, but don't take too many at a time from any one plant.

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

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

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

How to store garlic

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

Common garlic diseases

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

White rot

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

Leek rust

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

Key features of garlic

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

How to grow pumpkins

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

Choosing the best pumpkins to grow

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

Most pumpkins need space, but if you don't have a big garden, you can grow smaller varieties as climbers. And if you want a change from the traditional orange-skinned pumpkin, there are pumpkins with striped,

knobbly or pleated skins, and even white or blue pumpkins. It's safe to say, there's a pumpkin for every taste! Here are few to look out for:

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



Your essential equipment list for growing pumpkins

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

For seed sowing:

- 9cm pots

- Seed compost such as Levington Seed & Cutting Compost
- Labels
- Propagator or clear plastic bags

For planting out:

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

For growing pumpkins as climbers:

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

How to grow pumpkins from seed

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

- 1.Fill individual 9cm pots with seed compost.
- 2.Plant the seeds 2.5cm (1in) deep, on their sides.
- 3.Water the pots and place them in a propagator or in clear plastic bags in a well-lit position at a temperature of around 20°C (68°F). The seeds should germinate in around five to seven days.
- 4.After germination, take the pots out of the propagator or plastic bag and let the seedlings grow on in a greenhouse or on a sunny windowsill until they are large enough to be planted out.

How to plant pumpkins

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

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

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

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

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

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

Tips for pumpkin care

Caring for your pumpkins is essential as they grow. Water your pumpkins thoroughly once a week. In very hot, dry weather, increase this to twice a week. Always water the soil, not the leaves, to reduce the risk of fungal disease.

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

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

Key steps for harvesting pumpkins

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

Potential pumpkin problems

Pumpkins can be affected by **powdery mildew**, a fungal disease that leaves white powdery markings on the leaves, and in heavy cases can stunt the plants' growth. Drought makes plants more susceptible to powdery mildew, so reduce the risk of infection by watering regularly, and avoid wetting leaves when watering. Remove and dispose of any affected leaves as soon as you see them.

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

Key features of pumpkins

Flowering season(s)	Summer, Autumn
Foliage season(s)	Spring, Summer, Autumn

Sunlight	Full sun
Soil type	Clay, Loamy
Soil pH	Neutral
Soil moisture	Moist but well-drained
Ultimate height	Up to 45cm (18in)
Ultimate spread	Up to 3m (10ft)
Time to ultimate height	4 months

How to grow butternut squash

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

Squashes are grown as annuals in Britain, and are classified as either summer- or winter-squash. The seeds of both are sown in late spring. Butternut squash is a type of winter squash, usually harvested from September onwards, and brought indoors to mature before the first frosts arrive. Winter squash such as butternuts are excellent for storing and will keep for up to six months in the right conditions.

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

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

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

If your interest has been piqued by the wonderful butternut squash, have a look at other types of winter squash. There are spaghetti types, which have stringy flesh just like pasta of the same name. There are also some with dramatic skin, such as the polar white pumpkin, and the orange and yellow speckles and stripes of the 'blaze' variety. There are then of course the traditional pumpkins, available in various shades and sizes.



What you'll need to grow butternut squash

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

To grow butternut squash you will need:

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

To sow the butternut squash seeds:

1. Fill pots with compost.
2. Place one seed in the centre of each pot, gently pushing it into the compost so that the 'sharp' long edge faces upwards, about 1cm (½") deep.
3. Water, and move to a warm place, such as a windowsill or greenhouse.

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

- Garden fork.
- Compost**, **manure** or other organic matter.
- Trowel.
- Butternut squash plants.
- One cane or stick per plant.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Where to plant and grow your butternut squash

Butternut squash prefer hot, humid conditions, so ideally plant out in a sunny spot away from cool winds. They like rich soil, so add a **suitable compost** to the soil before planting out. Feed regularly with **Miracle-Gro® Performance Organics Fruit & Veg Concentrated Liquid Plant Food**.

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

Caring and nurturing for your butternut squash

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

Once fruits have appeared, feed fortnightly with **Miracle-Gro® Performance Organics Fruit & Veg Concentrated Liquid Plant Food**.

Butternut squash are hungry plants will benefit from a plentiful supply of nutrients. Water regularly for larger fruits.

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



Harvesting butternut squash

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

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

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

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

Common pests and diseases with butternut squash

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

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

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

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

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Types of Cavolo Nero to grow

Cavolo Nero translates as 'black cabbage' in Italian and is sometimes called this, as well as 'black Tuscan palm' or 'dinosaur kale'.

The leaves are very dark green - nearly black – and are flat and strap-like, but with a bumpy texture resembling that of dinosaur skin. The plant also grows upright with the leaf tips peeling over like a palm tree.

Cavolo Nero has an earthier and sweeter flavour than other types of kale. It is very well regarded in famous kitchens across the culinary world, where it is used cooked in pasta dishes, stir-fries and soups, as well as raw in salads.



What you'll need to grow Cavolo Nero

If growing from seed, sow between March to May. You will need:

- A pot or seed tray
- Seed compost, such as **Levington® John Innes Seed Compost**
- Watering can with fine rose
- Cavolo nero seeds

- 1.Loosely fill the container with seed compost.
- 2.Water the compost well, allowing it to drain away and the compost to fall beneath the lip of the container.
- 3.Place the Cavolo Nero seeds on top of compost, allowing 1cm between them.
- 4.Cover the seeds with more compost, allowing a small gap between the surface and the lip of the container.
- 5.Water again, and keep well watered.

By June, the seeds will have germinated and will be ready for pricking out to individual pots. You will need:

- Pots
- Compost, such as **Miracle-Gro® Peat Free Premium Fruit & Vegetable Compost**
- Watering can with fine rose
- Dibber or an upturned pencil
- Seedlings

- 1.Loosely fill each pot with compost.
- 2.Water the compost, allow to drain away, and use the dibber or pencil to make a deep hole in the middle of each pot of compost.
- 3.Gently tease the seedlings apart, and place one in each pot of compost, in the middle of the hole. The bottom leaves of the seedling should be just above the top of the hole.

4. Add more compost to the hole and around the stem of the seedling, water again, and leave to grow on, keeping well watered.

In July, the Cavolo Nero plants can be transplanted to their final positions. They are the perfect plant to transplant out to fill the gaps left by recently harvested garlic and broad beans. In optimum growing conditions each plant can grow up to 1m (3') in height and width, so allow plenty of space between them. Simply:

1. Create a hole in the soil big enough for the seedling and rootball.
2. Fill the hole with water, allow it to drain away, and then place the seedling in the hole and backfill with soil.
3. Water well until established and showing signs of new growth.

Where to plant and place your Cavolo Nero

Cavolo Nero can be grown in containers, but will need to be watered and fed more frequently to provide the plant with the same conditions as open soil. It prefers light and sandy soil with good drainage.

The bold and distinctive, large shape of Cavolo Nero gives structural interest to any border or vegetable patch. Plant them with shorter, brightly coloured plants in front, where the contrasting tones of their dark green blistered leaves can look stunning.

They like full sun to partial shade, but enjoy cold weather, so grow them outside rather than indoors. They really do look spectacular against a cold, white backdrop of snow or frost.

Caring and nurturing your Cavolo Nero

Regularly water Cavolo Nero in warm weather, adding a mulch of **Miracle-Gro® Peat Free Premium Fruit & Vegetable Compost** once or twice during the growing season to help the soil to retain moisture.

The plant is very hardy to cold weather, and the flavour of Cavolo Nero is said to improve after a few frosts. Harvest from October through to April,

always leaving some green growth on the plant. Harvest the bottom outer leaves first, as new growth will sprout from the top, centre of the plant.

Remove any flower shoots which appear whilst you are still harvesting leaves. Allow the plant to flower in early spring, once you have finished harvesting leaves from the plant, to provide a source of nectar and pollen for bees and other pollinators.

Common pests and diseases with Cavolo Nero

Why are the leaves of my Cavolo Nero shredded and disappearing?

Caterpillars of the cabbage white butterfly will quickly strip green leafy growth from Cavolo Nero. Prevention is better than cure - add fine netting as soon as they are planted out, to prevent the butterflies from landing on them and laying eggs.

Why are the leaves of my Cavolo Nero covered in tiny pinholes?

Flea beetles love munching on Cavolo Nero 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.

Why are the leaves of my young plants disappearing, with shiny, slimy mucus left in their place?

Slugs and snails can devastate young Cavolo Nero plants, so protect from these pests by following our **top tips**.

What are the groups of flat grey-white bugs on the underside of the leaves of my Cavolo Nero?

Cabbage whitefly look unpleasant, but do not usually do much damage to a plant. Tolerate them as far as possible, and wash off prior to eating.

What are the groups of tiny green bugs on my Cavolo Nero?

Aphids suck sap from a plant, and have a particular taste for new, fresh growth. They can limit the production of new leaves, so should be tackled. Squish by hand, and encourage ladybirds and hoverflies, which will feast on them.

Frequently asked questions about Cavolo Nero

Do I need to protect my Cavolo Nero from birds?

It's a good idea to do this, as birds like to eat brassicas. However Cavolo Nero seems to appeal slightly less than other varieties, so you might be lucky! Place netting or humane bird scarers nearby if you are worried.

Can I eat Cavolo Nero raw?

Yes, Cavolo Nero can be eaten raw.

Is Cavolo Nero safe for dogs and other pets to eat?

Cavolo Nero is not known to be toxic to dogs, guinea pigs, rabbits, tortoises or bearded dragons. However, it is very rich in iron, so feed sparingly, and if in any doubt, check with your vet first.

Can Cavolo Nero be frozen?

Yes, blanch prepared leaves in boiling water for 1-2 minutes, and then immediately cool in ice cold water. Place in the freezer and add to dishes as needed.

Key features of Cavolo Nero

Botanical Name	<i>Brassica oleracea</i> (Acephala Group) 'Cavolo nero'
Plant Type	Annual
Family	Brassicaceae
Sun Exposure	Sun to partial shade
Soil pH	Neutral to alkaline
Harvesting Time	October – April-May
Flower Colour	Yellow

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 other



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

How to grow chard

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

growing, and will quickly become an essential part of any keen home grower's vegetable patch.

Types of chard to grow

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

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

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

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



What you'll need to grow chard

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

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

1.Create a shallow drill in the soil, no more than 1.5cm (1/2") deep, using the trowel or hoe.

2.Water the drill, and then place a seed every 10cm (4") apart along the length of it.

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

4.Water every day until the seedlings germinate. Thin to 40cm (16") apart as plants grow larger.

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

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

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

Where to plant and place your chard

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

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

Caring and nurturing your chard

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

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

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

Frequently asked questions about chard

Can I eat all of the Chard plant?

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

Can I grow chard in containers?

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

Can chard grow in shade?

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

Does chard come back each year?

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

Common pests and diseases with Chard

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Key features of chard

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

Growing vegetables in July

Alongside planting and harvesting your veg, there's plenty of maintenance to be done in the vegetable patch at this time of year. Make sure you're watering your crops regularly – especially the container-grown plants – and weeding them when they need it. Hoe around the plants carefully to avoid damaging shallow roots, and consider using a naturally derived weed control.

Feed your **tomatoes**, **courgettes**, **peppers** and **cucumbers** weekly with a high potash liquid feed such as **Tomorite**. Cordon your cucumbers and tomatoes to supports and pinch out the side shoots on the latter – there's no need to do this for bush tomatoes.

Pinch out the tips of **aubergine**, **squash** and **courgette** plants to produce bushy plants, and earth up potatoes to improve the yield and prevent those near the surface turning green.

Finally, check for cabbage white eggs under **brassica** leaves and remove any you find.

What vegetables to harvest in July

There's plenty of veg to harvest this month, giving you a chance to enjoy the taste of your own homegrown, fresh-picked produce. These are some of the vegetables ready to harvest in July:

Cucumbers

Peas

Courgettes

Runner Beans

Salad Leaves

Sweetcorn

SweetPea

Spring Onions

Potatoes

Tomatoes

Garlic

French Beans

Cavolo Nero

Rocket

Chard

Recommendation: Harvest your courgettes and runner beans regularly as they taste best when young and tender. It also encourages the plants to produce more.

Fruit

If you're wondering what fruit to plant in July, then a good rule of thumb is that most soft fruits that come into harvest in July can also be sown in July. Speaking of harvests, you'll likely find yourself bringing in quite a large one this month, so make sure you brush up on your cheesecake and crumble recipes!

What to plant this month

The fruit most amenable to being planted in July also happens to be the fruit that is often ripe for the harvest in July. So, anything you plant now,

you can expect to see bear fruit in about a year's time. Throughout July you can plant:

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/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.

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

Frost damage

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

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

Verticillium wilt

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

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

Slugs and snails

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

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

How to grow 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 blueberries

Eaten fresh, baked in muffins or as the star attraction in jams or desserts, blueberries (*Vaccinium corymbosu*) are always delicious. They're also rich in vitamin C and antioxidants, so it's no wonder they've been hailed as a superfood. It's easy to grow your own

blueberry bushes at home in your garden. Read on to find out more about growing blueberries.

What are the best blueberries to grow?

Blueberry bushes can grow to around 1.5m (5ft) tall and wide, but there are also compact varieties reaching just 60cm (2ft) tall that are perfect for growing in containers.

All blueberries produce a better harvest if there is at least one blueberry bush of a different variety nearby, to allow cross-pollination. Most are able to self-pollinate to some extent, however. If you only have space for one blueberry bush, choose one listed as being self-pollinating. Here are a few names to look for:

- Blueberry 'Top hat' – a self-pollinating, dwarf variety with good flavour.
- Blueberry 'Bluegold' – a self-pollinating, dwarf variety, good for containers.
- Blueberry 'Northblue' – a self-pollinating, compact variety, good for containers.
- Blueberry 'Patriot' – a vigorous, very hardy variety producing a high yield of tasty berries.
- Blueberry 'Duke' AGM – ready to harvest early, so good for northern areas with short growing seasons.
- Blueberry 'Nelson', a late season, self-pollinating variety, producing large fruits.

Essential blueberry planting equipment list

To plant blueberries in your garden, you will need...

For planting in soil

- 1.Spade

2. Soil pH test kit
3. Leafmould, composted pine needles or other acidic compost

For container planting

1. Container at least 30cm in diameter
2. Hand trowel
3. Ericaceous soil or compost such as **Miracle-Gro Premium Ericaceous compost**

Your guide to planting blueberries

So, when to plant blueberries? The best time to plant blueberry bushes is from late autumn to early spring, in a sheltered position. They produce their best crops in full sun but will cope with some shade.

It's essential to give blueberries the right soil conditions. They will only grow well in acidic soils with a pH of 5.5 or lower. This is a measure of the soil's acidity; soils with a pH below 7 are acidic, and those with a pH above 7 are alkaline.

You can test your soil's pH level with a pH test kit – these are readily available and easy to use. If your soil is only slightly acidic, you can lower the pH by adding sulphur chips. This needs to be done at least a month before planting to allow time for it to take effect. However, the simplest solution to not having the right soil for blueberries is to grow them in a container, where you can control the type of soil used.

How to plant blueberries

1. Before planting blueberries in the ground, dig in lots of acidic organic matter, like leaf mould or composted pine needles, to improve the soil structure and drainage. Don't use farmyard manure or mushroom compost, as these are too alkaline.
2. Space plants 1.5m apart.

3. After planting, mulch around the base of the plants with pine needles or wood chippings.

4. When planting blueberries in containers, choose a container at least 30cm (12in) in diameter, with good drainage holes. Use ericaceous soil or compost.

Caring for blueberries

Feed container-grown blueberries monthly with a liquid feed designed for ericaceous plants. As far as possible, use rainwater when watering, as tap water will make the soil more alkaline, especially if you live in a hard water area.

If using ericaceous compost in containers, repot your plants every year to refresh the compost. Once the roots start growing through the pot's drainage holes, repot into a larger container.

Don't overfeed blueberries grown in the ground, as this will reduce the harvest. Instead, mulch the bushes annually with ericaceous compost, and give them a high nitrogen feed like sulphate of ammonia in late winter.

How to prune blueberries

Make sure you don't prune blueberry bushes until they are at least two years old, then prune annually in late winter or early spring, following these steps:

1. Remove any crossing or damaged stems.
2. Remove any low branches that trail on the ground.
3. Cut one in every four old stems to the base of the plant. This promotes new growth which will bear more fruit.
4. Remove all twiggy growth on the ends of last year's fruit-bearing stems, cutting back to a strong upward-facing bud or shoot lower down the stem.

Harvesting blueberries

Blueberries start to ripen from mid-summer onwards. It's easy to tell when to harvest blueberries, as the fruits turn a dusty blue colour. Leave the berries on the plant for a day or two after ripening to allow them to develop their flavour, and then pick them.

Ripe blueberries should come away easily from the stalks. Fruits ripen at different times on the same bush, so keep checking the bushes and pick the berries as they ripen.



Understanding any potential blueberry problems

Birds

The biggest challenge when growing blueberries is stopping the birds getting to the berries before you do.

- Cover the bushes with horticultural fleece or mesh, but only do this once the berries have started to develop or you'll stop bees and other insects getting to the flowers to pollinate them.

Powdery mildew

Blueberries can be affected by **powdery mildew**, a fungal disease that looks like a white powdery deposit on leaves that can reduce the plant's vigour. It is often a sign of drought stress, so to reduce the risk:

- water regularly.
- Powdery mildew is less of a problem for plants grown in cooler areas.

Frost

In very cold areas, blueberries may need winter protection.

- Cover the bushes with fleece to protect the buds from late frosts in spring or move pot-grown plants indoors.

Key features of blueberries

Flowering season(s)	Spring
Foliage season(s)	Spring, Summer, Autumn
Sunlight	Partial shade, Full sun
Soil type	Clay, Loamy, Sandy
Soil pH	Acid loving/ericaceous
Soil moisture	Moist but well-drained
Ultimate height	Up to 1.8m (6ft)
Ultimate spread	Up to 1.5m (5ft)
Time to ultimate height	5-7 years

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 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 mango trees

Everyone loves mangoes, but did you know that you can grow a mango tree from a seed? The mango tree (*Mangifera indica*) comes from Southern Asia and although it's unlikely to produce fruit in our cooler climate, it makes a lovely foliage plant for a conservatory or greenhouse. Why not try growing your own mango tree?

Types of mango tree to grow

There are many different varieties of mango tree, each bearing fruit with a unique flavour and texture. Here are some of the most common mango varieties:

- Mango 'Alphonso' is an exceptionally popular Indian mango variety with golden-green fruits and a superb mild, sweet flavour.
- Mango 'Kesar' is said to be one of the sweetest mango varieties available, with delicious smooth fibre-free orange flesh.
- Mango 'Honey' (previously called Mango 'Ataulfo') produces fruits with a distinctive sweet and sour flavour. The skins are bright yellow, turning golden yellow when ripe. The yellow flesh is firm with no fibres, and the seed is very small.
- Mango 'Francis' produces green-tinged yellow fruits that turn golden-yellow when ripe. The fibrous flesh is soft and juicy with a sweet, fruity flavour.
- Mango 'Haden' is a popular variety with firm, fine-fibred flesh. The flavour is sweet and sour with a faintly bitter aftertaste of tropical fruit. 'Haden' mangoes have red skins with green and yellow overtones, turning yellower when ripe.
- Mango 'Kent' produces juicy fruit with few fibres and a sweet flavour with hints of sour. This variety is great for juicing and drying. The fruits have dark green skins with a red blush, developing yellow overtones as they ripen.

What you'll need to grow a mango tree

Mango trees can be grown successfully in the UK in a conservatory or greenhouse, provided they're given plenty of warmth, sunshine and protection from frosts. Here's what you will need to grow a mango tree in the UK:

- Mango trees are best grown in pots, so that they can be moved indoors in winter, using a very free-draining compost such as **cactus compost**.
- Mango trees need a warm environment with a temperature ideally above 21°C (70°F) and a minimum temperature of 4°C (40°F).
- Mango trees ideally need 8 hours of sunlight per day to produce flowers and fruit. Place pot-grown mango trees outside in summer if possible, to give them sufficient sunlight.
- Mango trees like a humid environment, so when growing a mango tree indoors, mist the tree regularly to raise the humidity level around the plant. Surrounding your mango tree with other indoor plants will help to create a microclimate with raised humidity.

Where to plant and place your mango tree

Mango trees are native to tropical southern Asia, so in the UK they are best grown in a conservatory or greenhouse. They can be germinated from seed and grown in pots. Mango trees have long tap roots, so choose a pot at least 45cm (18") deep to accommodate the roots.

How to grow a mango tree from a seed

You will need:

- A ripe mango
- A sharp knife
- A deep, narrow container with drainage holes, filled with **a specialist cacti/succulent compost**

1.Remove the mango flesh to expose the pit (seed) at the centre of the fruit. Leave this pit out to dry for 3-4 days.

2.Look for an indentation at the top of the pit, and insert the point of the knife into this, peeling back the outer rind to expose the seed inside.

3. Place the large seed approximately 2cm (1in) deep in the container filled with cactus compost.
4. Water the pot and place it in a warm spot at a temperature of around 21°C (70°F). It should take 1-2 weeks to germinate.

Nurturing and caring for your mango tree

As your mango seedling grows, pot it on into larger pots filled with a free-draining compost such as **cactus compost**.

Keep the temperature around your mango tree at 21°C (70°F), with a minimum temperature of 4°C (40°F). Mist indoor trees regularly. Feed pot-grown mango trees once a month with **a liquid feed** in the growing season and water when the top few inches of compost in the pot has dried out.

Repot your mango tree every few years if it becomes root-bound. Remove it from its pot and place it in a larger pot, making sure the trunk of the tree is at the same depth in the new pot. Fill around the rootball with fresh potting compost and water well.

How to prune a mango tree

You should prune mature mango trees in late summer. Remove any dead or crossing branches, and thin the canopy as necessary to allow air and sunlight to reach the remaining branches.

How to take mango cuttings

You can propagate a mango tree from cuttings taken in summer.

1. Cut a 15-20cm (6-8in) length from a young, healthy stem. Remove all leaves from the lower half of the cutting.
2. Dip the cut end into rooting hormone powder.
3. Fill a small container with **cactus compost**.

4. Insert the cut end of the cutting into the compost mix.
5. Water the compost and place the pot in a warm, humid environment in bright but indirect light. If possible, place the pot on a heat mat at a temperature of 24-29°C (75-85°F) to encourage root growth.
6. Keep the compost moist. It can take 7-8 weeks for roots to develop.
7. Once the roots are sufficiently developed, repot the plant into a larger container.

Common pests and diseases with mango trees

How do I get rid of aphids on my mango tree?

Aphids are small green or black insects that suck the sap of young shoots. Blast them off with a strong water jet or use an insecticide spray.

How do I get rid of mealybugs on my mango tree?

Mealybugs are small white fluffy-looking insects that suck sap and over time can weaken a plant. To get rid of them, use an insecticide spray such as **BugClear Ultra 2**.

How do I control anthracnose?

Anthracnose is a fungal disease that causes black blotches on leaves. Remove any infected leaves promptly and ensure the plant has sufficient sunlight and water, as stressed plants are less likely to recover.

Frequently asked questions about mango trees

Can you grow a mango tree in the UK?

Yes, although they are unlikely to produce fruit. In the UK mango trees are best grown in a conservatory or greenhouse.

How long does it take to grow a mango tree?

It takes between 5-8 years to grow a mango tree from seed.

Can you grow a mango in a pot?

Yes, mango trees grow well in pots and can be pruned to keep them to the required size.

Do you need two mango trees to produce fruit?

Mangoes are self-fertile so you don't need two mango trees to produce fruit.

Key features of mango tree

Botanical Name	Mangifera indica
Family Name	Anacardiaceae
Plant Type	Tree
Size	Up to 30m (100ft) x 10m (35ft)
Light Exposure	Full sun
Soil Type	Free-draining
Soil pH	Acid, alkaline or neutral
Flowering Time	Winter
Toxicity	Stems, leaves and fruit skins contain sap that can cause skin irritation and blisters. Mango wood smoke is highly irritant.

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

How to grow and care for fig trees

Fig trees (*Ficus carica*) are Mediterranean natives that thrive in climates with hot, dry summers and cool winters, making them well-suited to many areas in the UK. These versatile trees can be grown in gardens or large containers, offering delicious fruit and lush, green foliage.

Figs grow into medium to large trees, but they can be pruned to a manageable size or trained in pots.

Top six fig tree care tips

1. Choose a position in full sun, sheltered from strong winds. For the best results, train your fig tree against a sunny south- or south-west facing wall.
2. Prepare the soil by enriching it with compost or a soil improver before planting.
3. Feed fig trees grown in the ground with a high potash feed in spring, and feed container-grown fig trees every 2-3 weeks during the growing season with a high potash liquid feed.
4. Prune fig trees twice a year, first in spring after the last hard frost and again in early summer.
5. Propagate fig trees using cuttings taken in autumn.
6. In long hot summers, some fig trees may produce two harvests; the first in early summer from fruit set the previous autumn, and the second in late summer from fruit produced on the current year's growth. Fig trees grown indoors in greenhouses are more likely to produce two crops in a year as they get enough reliable warmth.

Essential shopping list

- A potted fig tree
- [Compost](#) or soil improver for planting
- [Fertiliser](#)
- [Mulch](#) to retain moisture and suppress weeds
- A sturdy stake for support
- Wildlife-safe crop protection netting
- Secateurs for pruning

How to plant fig trees

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

1. Soil preparation: Dig a square hole wider than the rootball and around 60cm deep. Fig trees fruit best with their roots restricted, so line the sides of the hole with paving slabs and place a 10-20cm layer of rocks and crushed rubble at the bottom to stop the roots growing through.
2. Planting: Place the fig tree at the same depth as it was in the pot. Add a mound of compost under the root ball if necessary to position it correctly. Add [Levington® Fish, Blood & Bone Multi Purpose Plant Food](#), backfill the hole with soil, firm the soil gently around the roots and water thoroughly.
3. Mulching: Spread [mulch](#) around the base, avoiding direct contact with the trunk, to retain soil moisture and prevent weeds.

Growing fig trees in containers

1. Fig trees grow well in containers, which restrict their roots and promote good fruit production. Growing figs in containers in cold areas allows the trees to be moved indoors in winter to protect the developing fruits from frost.
2. Choosing the right container: Select a pot or container with good drainage, slightly larger than your plant's rootball.
3. Compost: Use a free-draining, peat-free soil-based compost like [John Innes No. 3](#).
4. Planting: Fill the container halfway with potting mix, place the fig tree centrally, and backfill until the root ball is covered. Firm the soil gently and water thoroughly to settle the roots.

Container-grown figs require consistent watering, especially during warmer months, as pots dry out quickly. Keep the soil moist but not waterlogged, and ensure excess water drains freely. Feed every 2-3 weeks during the growing season with a [liquid high-potash feed](#).

Container-grown fig trees will need to be repotted every 2-3 years.

Growing fig trees indoors

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

Caring for fig trees



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

Pruning fan-trained fig trees:

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

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

Pruning free-standing fig trees:

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

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

Feeding fig trees:

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

Fig tree problems:

- Birds and wildlife: Protect ripening fruit with tightly secured wildlife-safe netting.
- General pests: While uncommon, occasional issues like aphids or scale can be treated with **organic sprays** if needed.

Harvesting figs



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

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

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

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

Propagating fig trees

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

1. **Take hardwood cuttings** from healthy branches in autumn. Cut off side stems around 20-30cm long, cutting just below a node (nodes are the bumps on the stem).
2. Remove the leaves.
3. Plant the cuttings into pots filled with **multipurpose compost** mixed with perlite for good drainage, and keep them moist.
4. Position in a sheltered, bright location and wait for roots to establish. When new leaves start to appear, the plants can be potted on.

Growing a fig tree from a fig seed is possible but can be tricky as the **germination** success rate is low. To find out whether your fig seeds

are viable (i.e. likely to germinate), cut the fig in half, scoop out the flesh containing the seeds and place them in a jar of water for a couple of days. Viable seeds will sink to the bottom of the jar, while non-viable seeds will float.

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

FAQs

When do fig trees produce fruit?

Fig trees produce two crops of fruit in a year, one on the previous year's wood and the second on the current year's growth. In the UK only the first crop is likely to ripen, in early summer. In very long hot summers or on greenhouse-grown figs, the second crop may ripen in late summer.

How long does a fig tree take to grow?

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

Can I grow a fig tree indoors?

Fig trees do not grow well indoors, as they can't get enough direct

sunlight. However, container-grown fig trees can be grown indoors in greenhouses all year round.

Can fig trees grow in shade?

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

Growing fruit in July

July tends to be a relatively warm, dry month, so you may find that your plants and trees need a little extra care.

Thin out the fruit of **apple**, **plum**, **pear** and **peach** trees by removing some of the fruit from each cluster. This helps to concentrate the plants' energies into growing the remaining fruits. Once you've done that, it's a good idea to prune any stone fruit trees (including **plum** and **peach**, but also **cherry** and **apricot**) to reduce the risk of silver leaf disease. There's less chance of infection if the trees are pruned in summer. You can also prune any espalier, fan and cordon trained fruit trees.

Peg down runners from **strawberry** plants to produce new plants for next year. If you don't need new strawberry plants, cut the runners off. When summer-fruiting **raspberries** have finished cropping, cut out the old fruiting canes to ground level.

Finally, you should treat any apple scab by cutting off and disposing of infected twigs, leaves or fruit.

Scab

What is apple and pear scab?

Apple scab attacks apples causing dark, 'scabby' marks on the fruit and leaves. It is caused by the fungus *Venturia inaequalis*. Pear scab is very similar and is caused by *Venturia pyrina*.

Scab can also occur on ornamental species such as crab apples, *Pyracantha*, *Cotoneaster* and *Sorbus*. The disease tends to be more common during damp seasons and where the branches of the tree or shrub are crowded.

How to identify scab?

From spring onwards greenish-grey scab marks begin to appear on the leaves. Twigs may appear scarred or, in the case of older twigs, blistered. Blackish-brown scabby spots develop on the fruits.



Scab symptoms and damage

The spots or blotches on the leaves darken as they age. Leaves turn yellow and badly affected leaves fall early. The leaf stalks may also show signs of infection.

As the fruits grow, they may be small and misshapen while a serious scab attack causes splits and cracks, which are prone to other rotting diseases. The fruits cannot be stored when they are damaged in this way. Light attacks just make the skin of the fruit look unsightly, but the fruit can still be eaten. Infections on young twigs can provide an entry site for other diseases, such as apple canker.

Scab treatment and control

How do you treat scab? Try these suggestions.

- As soon as affected leaves or fruits fall, rake them up and dispose of them to reduce the presence of disease.
- Prune out young stems infected with scab to restrict and control infection.
- High potash plant feeds may help to strengthen the leaves and reduce the risk of the disease taking hold.
- **There are no fungicides approved for control of scab diseases on edible plants**, but if the ornamental plant or non-edible crab apple (*Malus*) or pear (*Pyrus*) tree is also infested with bugs such as aphids, spray with a **combined insecticide and fungicide**. **To protect bees and pollinating insects do not apply to plants when in flower. Do not use where bees are actively foraging. Do not apply when flowering weeds are present.**

How to prevent apple scab?

How do you stop apple and pear scab? It's a good excuse to tidy up the branches of your apple and pear trees and perhaps do some plant shopping.

- Prune the tree to create an open canopy with few branches crowding the middle of the tree, because good airflow helps to reduce infection.
- Some *Pyracantha* cultivars also show some resistance to *Pyracantha* scab including: 'Orange Charmer', 'Shawnee' and 'Golden Charmer'.
- When you buy a new apple or pear tree, choose a variety which shows resistance to scab infection. Here are some examples: **Apples:** 'Discovery', 'Lane's Prince Albert' or 'Sunset'. **Pears:** 'Jargonelle' or 'Catillac'.

What fruit to harvest in July

There's an abundance of fruit to harvest in July, especially soft fruit like currants, summer-fruited raspberries, gooseberries and the last of the strawberries. Use them fresh in delicious puddings and tarts or freeze them to keep you well stocked with fruit for the winter. The following fruits should all be ready for the harvest in July:

Strawberries

Raspberries

Blueberries

Tomatoes

Peach

Mango

Cherry

Fig

Herbs and spices

Wondering what herbs can be planted in July? There are a few options but, overall, July is when your existing plants really start to flourish so you may be better off focusing your efforts on harvesting your herbs and making sure they have the care they need to flourish through the hot summer months.

What herbs and spices to plant in July

Herb gardens really come into their own in summer, bursting with growth, all ready for harvesting and using in the kitchen. You can sow the following herbs in July for a constant supply of fresh leaves:

How to grow basil

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

Types of basil to grow

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

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

Essential equipment to grow basil

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

- 1.Basil seeds

2.Pots

3.**Multipurpose compost**

4.Propagator or clear plastic bags

Where to grow basil

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

How to sow basil

You can sow basil indoors from late February onwards.

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

something similar to help. Repot each seedling into its own individual pot.

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

Caring for basil

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

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

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

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

Harvesting basil

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

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

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

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

Storing basil leaves

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

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

Common pest or disease problems of basil plants

Black spots on basil leaves

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

- Avoid splashing the leaves when watering.

Powdery mildew

Powdery mildew is a fungal disease that appears as a white powdery deposit or white spots on basil leaves, stunting growth and causing

leaves to shrivel. Drought-stressed plants are more susceptible to this disease.

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

Fusarium wilt

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

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

Slugs and snails

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

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

Glasshouse whitefly

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

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

Glasshouse red spider mite

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

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

Key features of basil

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

How to grow and care for coriander

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

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

Coriander varieties

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



What you'll need to start growing coriander

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

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

Cultivating coriander

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

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

Sowing coriander

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

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

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

How to care for coriander

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

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

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

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

Harvesting coriander

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

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

Common problems, pests and diseases in coriander

Slugs and snails

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

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

Aphids

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

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

Bolting

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

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

Key features of coriander

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

How to grow 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

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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

How to Grow and Care for Bay Trees

The bay tree is a versatile evergreen shrub or small tree with dark green, aromatic leaves. (*Laurus nobilis*) originates from the Mediterranean and is widely grown in the ground, or in containers, clipped into attractive shapes. A slow-growing and easy-to-care-for plant, the bay tree is extremely popular. The aromatic leaves are widely used in all types of cookery, fresh from the garden or dried. Here's everything you need to know about growing bay trees.

Types of bay tree to grow

Laurus nobilis is commonly known as 'bay tree' or 'laurel'. Be aware that other species of plant are called laurel, and some of them are poisonous - cherry laurel and Portuguese laurel for example. Check that the plant is a true *Laurus nobilis* when using the leaves for culinary purposes.

There are very few types of bay tree to choose from:

- *Laurus nobilis*. This is the most common variety, with dark, glossy green leaves.
- *Laurus nobilis* 'Aurea'. A more unusual cultivar of bay tree, this one has golden yellow leaves.
- *Laurus nobilis* f. *angustifolia* (also known as 'willow leaved bay tree'). It has light green leaves which are narrower than other varieties, with undulating edges.

Bay trees have small and unremarkable flowers, followed by insignificant berries. The fragrant leaves and overall shape of the tree are the most impactful features of this popular plant.



What you'll need to grow bay trees

Bay trees can be grown in a container or in the ground, and are easy to prune to elegant and interesting shapes. They are most often grown outside, but indoor bay trees can succeed with the right levels of light and moisture.

They can be grown from seed or cuttings, but take a long time. It is much quicker to buy a bay tree from the garden centre or an online retailer.

Aim to plant it out from April to June, and then:

1. Dig a hole slightly bigger than the rootball, or if growing in a pot, add plenty of **compost** to a large container.
2. Add plenty of water to the hole or pot, and allow to drain away.
3. Place the plant in the hole, making sure that the stem is vertical.
4. 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.
5. For bay trees planted in the ground, water and then add a mulch of **Levington® Composted Bark**.

Water newly planted bay trees well for the first year, and regularly for all container grown plants.

Where to plant and place your bay trees

Bay trees can be used as hedging, to divide a large space, and as standalone shrubs. Alternatively they can look very impressive as carefully shaped container-grown plants. They can grow to 8 metres high (20'), but are a slow grower, so they're easy to keep to a manageable size. Pot grown plants will be smaller in height as a container will limit the space available for roots to spread into.

Bay tree soil needs to be, well-drained, but they are tolerant of most conditions, including slightly **acidic and alkaline soils**.

Bay trees should be positioned in full sun and sheltered from wind. They are sensitive to long periods of frost, so in cooler parts of the UK ensure that trees are planted in a sheltered location. Alternatively prepare to wrap with horticultural fleece, or move container grown bay trees inside if temperatures are expected to drop below -5C (23F).

Caring and nurturing your bay trees

Bay trees like lots of natural light and warmth. Those growing in the ground should not need to be watered once established. Water container grown plants throughout the year, and feed them monthly in the spring and summer with **Miracle-Gro® Performance Organics All Purpose Concentrated Liquid Plant Food**.

Prune from April through to August to maintain shape. Look out for suckers appearing on the stem and remove them if they are not in keeping with the desired shape of plant. Use secateurs rather than shears, so that entire leaves are removed - part sliced leaves will die back and make the plant look unsightly.



Common pests and diseases with bay trees

Bay trees are largely unaffected by pests and diseases, but it is worth looking out for a few minor problems.

What are the white-grey blobs on the under-side of my bay tree leaves?

Bay suckers draw sap from the bay tree, causing leaves to distort and change colour. Encourage ladybirds and birds to the garden, which will eat the bay suckers. Remove and dispose of any affected leaves.

Why are the leaves on my bay tree folding and sticking together?

Tortix moth caterpillars can bind bay leaf trees together, damaging and spoiling the appearance of the plant. Tolerate small numbers, but be aware that this pest can easily spread to other nearby plants, so for larger infestations act quickly by spraying with **BugClear™ Fruit & Veg Ultra**.

Why are there white patches on parts of my bay tree?

Powdery mildew presents as a coating of white over the leaves and branches of a bay tree. Encourage air flow around plants to reduce humidity, and remove affected growth from the plant. Apply a fungicide such as **FungusClear® Ultra 2**.

What are the raised brown lumps on the leaves of my bay tree, and why are my bay tree leaves turning brown?

Scale insects are difficult to eradicate, lying low on the underside of a leaf and slowly feeding on the bay tree. Wipe or lift away, checking and repeating frequently until the population is reduced or removed.

Frequently asked questions about bay trees

Can I grow bay trees in a container?

Yes, bay trees grow really well in a container, looking impactful when pruned tidily. Just make sure to keep well-watered and fed.

Can I cook with fresh bay leaves?

Bay leaves make a wonderful aromatic addition to many dishes including casseroles and soups. You can use either dried, fresh or frozen whole leaves. Some people find them hard to digest, so remove them before serving the dish. They can be harvested all year round.

Can bay trees stay outside in winter?

Yes, bay trees can be kept outside when the weather is mild, but they do not like sustained periods of cold weather. Protect from lengthy cold spells by moving the plant indoors or wrapping it with horticultural fleece.

Key features of bay trees

Botanical Name	Lauris nobilius
Plant Type	Evergreen woody perennial
Family	Lauraceae
Light Exposure	Full sun to partial shade
Soil pH	Any
Flowering Time	March-May
Flower Colour	Yellow

These can all be sown outdoors in pots or in well-prepared soil. Remember to keep sowing annual herbs like coriander every few weeks, so that your supplies don't run out over summer.

Growing herbs and spices in July

July is mainly about ensuring your herbs have the moisture they need to continue growing through the warmer spells. If you focus on that, you can't go too far wrong so continue watering your container-grown herbs regularly throughout July – especially if the weather is hot. You can also use a naturally derived plant food specifically designed for produce to keep your herbs both healthy and tasty.

Once you've achieved a regular watering routine, all you need to do is pinch off any developing flowers from annual and biennial herbs like basil, coriander and parsley. The flavour of the leaves deteriorates once the plants have flowered so make sure you catch them early (although this isn't the case for shrubby herbs like rosemary and lavender, so don't get too pinch happy).

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

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

How to grow parsley

Cultivating parsley

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

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

Parsley varieties

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

Common parsley: Bravour, Champion Moss Curled, Envy

French parsley: Festival 68, Italian

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



Sowing parsley

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

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

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

Planting parsley

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

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

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

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

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

How to care for parsley

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

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

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

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

or horticultural fleece to protect plants against the female laying eggs in the soil.

Harvesting parsley

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

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

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

Parsley growing conditions

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

What herbs and spices to harvest in July

All herbs can be harvested in July and many actually benefit from regular harvesting, simply putting on more growth, ready to be harvested again. Here are some to focus on:

Basil

Coriander

Rocket

Bay

Recommendation: When harvesting herbs for drying, pick them early in the morning as soon as they're dry, so that they're still filled with their essential oils.



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