



## April

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



Dear Fellow Allotmenters,

Welcome to April's Guide. The Spring season is now upon us and the frosts and snow are now behind us. We can look forward to lighter, warmer days as we tend our allotments. 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](mailto:info@yeovil-allotments-association.co.uk)

Many thanks for reading,

Gareth Richards

Treasurer

Eliz Flats, Plot 14

## April Gardening: Your Monthly Garden Guide

April is the height of spring and there are plenty of jobs to do in the garden. The days are getting longer and warmer, and the garden is full of fresh new life and vibrant colours, but it can also be a fickle month so keep an eye on the weather forecast. Cold nights, frosts and general low temperatures are all possibilities, which can have an impact on what to grow in April, affecting young, new growth, bedding and young vegetable plants. And, of course, there's always the chance of April showers, so plan ahead and make sure you're prepared for every eventuality.

### What to plant in April and other seasonal gardening tips

If you're asking yourself what to plant in April, it's likely through option paralysis rather than a lack of ideas. April is a busy, fun and very rewarding month for gardening. So, whether you want to know what fruit and veg to plant in April or you're looking for some advice on pruning your plants and flowers, simply choose a category below from our essential April gardening guide.

### Grow your own

Whether you have a vegetable patch or you're busy growing lots of fruit and berries for those refreshing fruit salads, April in the garden is going to keep you on your toes. There's a surfeit of fruit and veggies to grow and harvest, while the warmer weather will bring renewed growth and, with it, potential pests, so it's a good idea to give your garden some TLC.

## Vegetables

When it comes to tending your vegetable patch, April is likely the month you've been waiting for. There is a veritable feast of vegetables to plant in April, both inside in the greenhouse or out in the garden. It's also the time of year when a lot of your leafy green vegetables will be coming into season and ripe for the harvest. So, make sure

your tools are all sharpened and cleaned before you jump in because they're going to get a lot of use this month!

### What vegetables to plant in April

Whatever your culinary tastes or skill level, there are plenty of vegetables to plant in April. Try to plant a variety of different types to give your patch the best chance of success over the coming months, as the weather in the UK is rarely predictable.

If you have somewhere indoors to sow vegetables (a greenhouse is ideal, but a conservatory or windowsill will also work well) then you may be surprised by just what you can grow. Any of the following can be planted indoors in April:

- Beans (for example runner beans or French beans)
- Marrow
- Courgette
- Squash

- Sweetcorn
- Cucumbers
- Aubergines
- Celery
- Globe artichokes

Plant seedlings of the following

### **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/m<sup>2</sup> 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

<b>Flowering season(s)</b>	Summer
<b>Foliage season(s)</b>	Spring, Summer, Autumn
<b>Sunlight</b>	Full sun
<b>Soil type</b>	Loamy
<b>Soil pH</b>	Neutral to slightly alkaline
<b>Soil moisture</b>	Moist but well-drained
<b>Ultimate height</b>	30cm (12in)
<b>Ultimate spread</b>	30cm (12in)
<b>Time to ultimate height</b>	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 unrotted garden or kitchen waste. Fill the trench with soil a fortnight before sowing or planting out.

### When to sow peas

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

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

### Choosing your spot and which peas to grow

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

As with most grow your owns, there's a choice of variety from early-maturing to super sweetness, so take a little time to choose which ones

will suit you best. Before you are ready to sow, make sure your dig and prepare the ground, adding plenty of compost or well-rotted manure well in advance.

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

### Sowing peas

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

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

The easiest way to sow is to dig out a flat-bottomed trench 5cm (2in) deep and 20-25cm (8-10in) wide. Lightly fork over the bottom of the trench, water the soil and then sow the seeds evenly, roughly 7.5cm (3in) apart, pressing them lightly into the soil. Fill the trench with soil and lightly firm down.

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

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

### How to care for peas

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

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

### When to harvest peas

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

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

### A few facts about peas

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

## Common pest and disease problems with peas

### Powdery mildew

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

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

### Pea Moth

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

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

### Mice

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

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

### Pigeons

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

- Grow plants under netting

## Key features of peas

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

## How to grow onions

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

### What are the best onion varieties to plant?

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

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

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



### Onion growing equipment list

To grow onions at home, you will need:

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

## When to plant onions

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

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

## How to plant onions

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

1. Before planting in spring, dig over the plot, clearing it of all weeds and stones. Tread down the soil and rake it to produce a level surface with a light, crumbly texture.
2. A couple of weeks before planting, rake in 35g/m<sup>2</sup> of granulated fertiliser or 75g/m<sup>2</sup> 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-borne 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

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

### How to plant, grow and care for courgettes

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

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

### Courgette varieties

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

Different varieties to try include:

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



## What you'll need to start growing courgettes

For indoor sowing:

- 9cm (3.5in) pots
- seed sowing compost**
- Propagator or warm windowsill
- Courgette seeds

For outdoor planting:

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

## Cultivating courgettes

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

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

As courgettes need plenty of water, a top tip is to sink a 15cm (6in) pot alongside them when planting out. Watering into the pot ensures the

water goes down to the roots and doesn't sit around the neck of the plant, which can lead to rotting. It also keeps it off the foliage, which helps reduce problems with powdery mildew.

### How to grow courgettes from seed

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

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

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

### How to care for courgette plants

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

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

## Can you grow courgettes in pots?

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

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

## Harvesting courgettes

Courgettes are best Harvested when they are fairly small, about 10-12.5cm (4-5in) long. Regular picking when they are small not only ensures a longer cropping period over several months, but the fruits have much more flavour when picked early. Courgette fruits can seem to grow large overnight, so keep checking under leaves and behind the plant so you don't miss any.

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

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

## Common pests, diseases and problems of courgette plants

### Powdery mildew

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

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

### Yellow courgette leaves

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

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

### Cucumber mosaic virus

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

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

### Grey mould/botrytis mould

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

- Remove any dead leaves or flowers.
- Remove any affected fruit promptly.

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

### Courgettes rotting when small or not setting

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

### Slugs and snails

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

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

## Key features of courgettes

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

## How to grow and care for runner beans

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

### Best runner beans to plant

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

- Runner bean 'Red Rum' AGM – a heavy cropper that does well in all weather conditions.
- Runner bean 'Celebration' AGM – very attractive, with pink flowers and tender, tasty pods, almost stringless when young.

- Runner bean 'Tenderstar' – pretty pink and red bicour flowers and smooth, tender, stringless pods.
- Runner bean 'Scarlet Emperor' – bright red flowers and masses of smooth dark green pods that can reach up to 35cm (14in) in length.
- Runner bean 'Snowstorm' – white flowers and plenty of tasty pods.
- Runner bean 'Hestia' – a dwarf variety growing to 45cm (1.5ft) tall, ideal for containers.

## Essential equipment

To grow runner beans you will need:

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

## When and where to plant runner beans

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

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

## Sowing runner beans indoors

- 1.Fill small pots with multipurpose compost.

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

### Sowing runner beans directly outdoors

1. Dig the area over a few weeks before planting and clear the soil of all weeds and stones. Dig in well-rotted farmyard manure or compost to improve the soil structure and drainage.
2. Rake the soil to create a level surface with a light, crumbly texture.
3. Put in sturdy supports for the bean plants, such as two rows of poles sloping towards each other. Traditionally, the poles are tied together at the tops to create an A-frame but tying them in the middle to create an X-shape makes it easier to pick the beans, as they are not all clustered together at the top of the frame. Space the poles 45-60cm (1.5-2ft) apart. If you are only growing a few plants, a wigwam of poles makes a good support for them to climb up.
4. Sow the bean seeds 5cm (2in) deep, sowing two seeds at the base of each pole.
5. Water regularly.

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

### Tips on how to care for runner beans

- Beans will twine automatically around their supports, but you may need to tie the young seedlings into the poles at first.
- Once the plants reach the tops of the supports, pinch out the growing tips. This will encourage the plants to put out side shoots, producing more beans.
- Water regularly, especially during dry periods and when the flowers are setting (i.e. developing into beans).
  
- Protect young plants from slugs and snails, using crushed eggshells, sawdust, beer traps, copper tape on pots, or wildlife-friendly pellets.
- Colonies of aphids often appear on young shoots. In large quantities they can distort the plant's growth and reduce vigour. Check young plants and wipe off aphids as soon as you see them to stop them becoming a problem. Natural predators like ladybirds will help to control aphid infestations. If using pesticide sprays, always check that they are suitable for use on edible plants. To avoid harming pollinators, don't spray when the plants are in flower.
- In hot, dry weather, flowers sometimes drop off the plant without developing into beans. To ensure you are caring for runner beans, regular watering will help, and the problem usually resolves itself once cooler weather returns.

## Growing runner beans in containers

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

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

## Harvesting runner beans

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



## Common runner bean problems

### Pods failing to set

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

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

### Blackfly

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

runner beans is to check regularly and tackle the problem as soon as it appears.

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

### Slugs and snails

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

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

## Key features of runner beans

<b>Flowering season(s)</b>	Summer, Autumn
<b>Foliage season(s)</b>	Spring, Summer, Autumn
<b>Sunlight</b>	Full sun
<b>Soil type</b>	Chalky, Clay, Loamy, Sandy
<b>Soil pH</b>	Alkaline
<b>Soil moisture</b>	Moist but well-drained
<b>Ultimate height</b>	Up to 1.8m (6ft)
<b>Ultimate spread</b>	Up to 30cm (1ft)
<b>Time to ultimate height</b>	6 months

## How to grow sweetcorn

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

### Sweetcorn varieties

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

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



## What you'll need to start growing sweetcorn

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

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

For indoor sowing:

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

## How to grow sweetcorn

### Cultivation

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

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

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

## How To Plant and Grow Potatoes: The Ultimate Guide

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

## Varieties of potato

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

<b>First Earlies</b>	<b>Second Earlies</b>	<b>Maincrop</b>	<b>Salad</b>
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

<b>Flowering season(s)</b>	Summer
<b>Foliage season(s)</b>	Spring, Summer, Autumn
<b>Sunlight</b>	Full sun

<b>Soil type</b>	Clay, Loamy, Sandy
<b>Soil pH</b>	Neutral
<b>Soil moisture</b>	Moist but well-drained
<b>Ultimate height</b>	Up to 90cm (3ft)
<b>Ultimate spread</b>	Up to 60cm (2ft)
<b>Time to ultimate height</b>	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 garlics. On the downside, the bulbs don't store as well as softnecks do.

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

## Hardneck garlic varieties to grow

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

## Softneck garlic varieties to grow

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

## How to grow garlic



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

## Garlic growing equipment list

To grow garlic in your garden you will need:

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

## How to plant garlic

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

- 1.Before planting garlic, prepare the soil by digging in plenty of compost or well-rotted farmyard manure. If your soil is very heavy clay, add grit, or plant bulbs in containers instead.
- 2.Remove any weeds and stones.
- 3.Apply a general-purpose fertiliser in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions, and rake in.
- 4.Break the garlic bulbs into individual cloves.
- 5.Plant the cloves 15cm (6in) apart and 2.5cm (1in) deep, with tips just below the surface and pointing upwards. Space rows 30cm apart.
- 6.Water after planting, to help settle the soil around the cloves.

7. Cover the area with horticultural fleece or cloches to stop birds pulling up the seedlings as they appear. Once the plants grow larger, they are less attractive to birds and the protection can be removed.

### Growing garlic in containers

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

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

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

3. Plant the cloves 10-15cm (4-6in) apart and 2.5cm (1in) deep, with tips just below the surface and pointing upwards. Don't plant bulbs

right up against the edge of the container – leave space for them to swell as they grow.

4. Water regularly to keep the compost moist.

### Caring for garlic

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

- Keep beds weed-free. Remove weeds by hand to avoid damaging the bulbs with a hoe.
- Water during long dry periods.
- Stop watering once the leaves start turning yellow and the bulbs start to swell.

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

## Harvesting garlic



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

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

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

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

## How to store garlic

- Before storing garlic, lay the bulbs outside in the sun on a rack, or inside in a well-ventilated shed, to allow them to dry out. This will take two to three weeks.

- Once the skins are dry and papery, the bulbs are ready to be stored. Remove any damaged or bruised bulbs.
- Store garlic bulbs in a string bag in a cool, dry, dark place.

## Common garlic diseases

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

### White rot

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

### Leek rust

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

## Key features of garlic

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

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.

### **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

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

Beetroot are pretty easy to grow, as long as you keep them growing well in good or reasonable soil. They are even delicious when eaten raw, boiled and then cooled for salads, and used in soups and stews. Baking them whole is the best way to keep their unique flavour.

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

## How to grow beetroot

### Cultivation

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

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

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

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

### Beetroot varieties

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

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

The most popular variety is Boltardy, but the following are all good to grow: Albinia Vereduna, Babieto di Chioggia, Bikores, Bonel, Burpees

Golden, Cheltenham Green Top, Cylindra, Detroit 2 Crimson Globe, Pablo, Red Ace and Wodan.



## Sowing Beetroot

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

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

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

## How to care for beetroot

Always try to avoid the soil drying out or the roots will turn woody, tough and lose their flavour. On the other hand, a widely fluctuating water supply causes splitting, so aim to keep the soil evenly moist, watering every 10-14 days during prolonged dry spells. You can help preserve soil moisture by adding a mulch along the row of plants.

## Harvesting

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

## Problems

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

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

When Brussels sprouts are grown well and, more importantly, cooked well, they taste delicious. They are certainly a crop well worth having as they provide valuable winter vegetables when

little else may be available. By choosing different varieties it's possible to have sprouts from early autumn well into spring.

The key to success to producing great Brussels sprouts – sometimes referred to as 'buttons' – is to plant in a soil that has been enriched with organic matter and has been firmed well.

## **How to grow Brussels sprouts**

### **Cultivation**

Brussels sprouts prefer to be grown in an open, sunny position, but will tolerate light shade. Protection from strong winds is desirable, as large, heavy-cropping plants may otherwise get blown over.

They need a soil with lots of added organic matter that is preferably alkaline. If your soil is acidic, add garden lime before sowing or planting out. Rake a good dressing of **a general granular feed** into the soil before planting out, and then firm the soil by shuffling your feet back and fore over the surface.

### **Brussels sprouts varieties**

Standard varieties, such as Bedford Fillbasket (early cropping) will produce a bumper crop of large sprouts that can be picked over many weeks. More modern F1 hybrid varieties tend to mature all at one time, meaning you have to pick them more-or-less in 1 go.

For an early crop before Christmas, try Maximus or Breeze. For a late maturing variety, try Wellington. Trafalgar is said to be great for a child-friendly taste as the sprouts are sweeter and less bitter.

For something a bit different, try Red Bull or Rubine, which produce attractive purple-red buttons that retain their colour when steamed and also have a mild flavour.



### **Sowing Brussels sprouts**

The main sowing period is March and April. You can sow earlier in mild regions under cloches. For a very early crop in late summer or early autumn, sow indoors in cell trays in a heated propagator or on a windowsill in February.

For best results, sow seeds very thinly in a separate seed bed in a shallow drill about 13mm (½in) deep. Cover with soil and water in well.

## How to care for Brussels sprouts

When the young plants have 5 or 6 leaves, carefully lift and transplant them to their final growing position, spacing them 75cm (30in) apart. Improve the soil first with [a general granular plant feed](#). Firm the soil around each plant afterwards and water in well.

Water plants well in dry weather and cover the soil with a mulch to conserve soil moisture. Occasional feeds with [a liquid feed](#) through summer will improve the crop. Tall, heavy-cropping plants may need supporting with strong stakes in windy situations.

## Harvesting

Pick Brussels sprouts for immediate use when they are large enough for cooking, and still firm and tightly closed. Start picking the lowest sprouts and work your way up the stem. Carefully break them off with a sharp downward tug.

Sprouts don't store well, but they can be blanched and frozen, so leave them on the plant and pick as you need them.

The flavour is usually better when they have had a touch of frost.

## Pests

Brussels sprouts may be susceptible to the following pests and diseases: pigeons, clubroot.

<b>Foliage season(s)</b>	Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter
<b>Sunlight</b>	Full sun
<b>Soil type</b>	Chalky, Clay, Loamy, Sandy
<b>Soil pH</b>	Alkaline
<b>Soil moisture</b>	Moist but well-drained
<b>Ultimate height</b>	Up to 90cm (3ft)
<b>Ultimate spread</b>	Up to 45cm (18in)
<b>Time to ultimate height</b>	6 months

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

## How to grow carrots

### Cultivation

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

### Carrot varieties

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

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

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

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



### Sowing carrots

The seeds need to be sown where they are going to mature. Follow our [how to grow carrots](#) guide for full details.

### How to care for carrots

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

### Harvesting

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

Read our [how to grow carrots](#) guide for further advice and information.

## Pests

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

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

When it comes to planting vegetables outside in April, you're going to find yourself spoilt for choice. The following veg can all be sown outside directly into well-prepared soil (containers, beds and borders will all work, whether in a garden or on a balcony). Remember to use a mix of soil and an organic, peat-free compost to help control water availability and encourage strong root growth.

- Beetroot
- Brussels Sprouts
- Cabbage
- Carrots
- Leeks
- Lettuce

- Onions
- Garlic
- Parsnips
- Potatoes
- Radishes
- Spinach
- Swiss chard
- Summer cauliflower
- Peas

You should also **chit and plant out second early potatoes** at the beginning-middle of the month whilst doing the same for maincrop potatoes from mid-April onwards.

### Growing vegetables in April

With plenty of cold spells, the weather is still a little unpredictable during April, so make sure you protect any early outdoor sowings with horticultural fleece or polythene. Continue to do this until you're sure there's no risk of a frost. Try to thin out rows of seedlings where possible and as soon as they are large enough to be handled.

Pea plants will be growing rapidly at this time of year, so make sure you support them with stakes, mesh, green support or wire netting.

It's also the time of year to be on the lookout for pests. Keep the edges of your carrots buried to help prevent **carrot root fly** and be on the lookout for **slugs and snails**. Treat them if you're already seeing the damage and

put preventative measures in place or they'll make a meal out of your vegetables before you have a chance to harvest them.

After all of that, if you still have the energy, it's time to start looking forward to Summer and preparing your runner beans for planting.

### **Slugs and snails - treatment and control**

**Slugs and snails are the most common garden plant pests. They are present in large numbers and can quickly eat and destroy a wide range of plants. Garden snails and slugs eat vegetables and ornamental plants, especially seedlings and those with young and soft leaves.**

There's probably no need to tell you what they look like. Their silvery trails will tell you where they came from – and where they went to – after lurching on seedlings and leaves of numerous garden plants. They especially like vegetables and hostas. Here are a few interesting, even amazing, slug and snail facts that will give you some clues as to just what you're up against!

### **Slug and snail symptoms and damage**

Slugs and snails feed with a rasping tongue which causes irregular holes in leaves and sometimes in stems and flowers. Silvery slime trails are often present. Some underground-dwelling slugs make small, round holes in the skin of potato tubers, root crops such as carrots or tulip bulbs.



## Where do slugs live?

Many of the most damaging slugs spend most of their time living in the soil. On average, 200 slugs live in a cubic metre of soil. That means in an average-sized garden there can be up to 15,000 slugs! Slugs and snails love mild and damp weather, but slugs will still be active in the winter if the temperature stays above 5°C (40°F).

## How long do slugs live?

It takes about a year for slugs to mature into adult garden slugs which live for about two years.

## How long do garden snails live?

Newly-hatched snails have fragile shells and take about two years to mature and generally live for up to five years.

Although there are numerous types of slugs, they don't all eat and damage plants. Some are carnivorous and even eat other slugs! As for snails, the most damaging species is the brown garden snail (*Helix aspersa*). The smaller banded species (*Cepaea*) are less voracious.

## Slug and snail control

So, how to get rid of slugs and snails? And how can you stop slugs eating plants? Every gardener has their own favourite slug and snail control or deterrent. Here are some to try, ranging from cultural and biological controls to chemical treatment.



**Grit, coffee grounds, coal fire ash or crushed eggshells.** Slugs and snails don't like clambering over sharp or rough surfaces so create a slug and snail barrier by laying a thick layer of these substances around susceptible plants. If you're using eggshells, bake them on a low heat in the oven first as this will make them sharper and the slugs and snails won't want to crawl over them.

•**Hand removal.** Pick up slugs and snails whenever you see them. It's a good idea to check underneath favourite hiding places like loose slabs or bricks or under flower pots.

•**Beer traps.** Half fill a jam jar with beer. Sink it into the soil, with its rim approximately 1cm (0.5in) above the soil surface (to prevent predators of slugs, like beetles, from falling in). The aroma never fails to attract slugs and in seeking its source the pests simply fall in and drown.

•**Biological snail or slug control.** Slug species which live underground can be treated with minute parasitic worms called

•nematodes (*Phasmarhabditis hermaphrodita*). In spring and autumn, when the temperature is above 5°C (40°F), water them onto moist, well-drained soil. The nematode penetrates the slug and releases bacteria which kills the slug. They are available from many mail order biological control suppliers and are effective in getting rid of slugs for at least six weeks.

•**Slug pellets.** An effective way to protect your plants from slug and snail damage is to use [slug pellets](#) containing ferric phosphate. During mild, damp weather, scatter the slug pellets thinly on the soil around vulnerable plants. If you are a parent or pet owner, we recommend that you keep slug pellets out of the reach of children

and pets: both when you store them and when you use them. Do not pile up the pellets under bricks or half grapefruit skins.

## How to prevent slugs and snails?

No garden will ever be free of slugs and snails and the best approach is to protect vulnerable plants as far as possible. If you come across a slug or a snail pick it up and dispose of it but don't throw it over the fence – they have a 'homing' instinct and will come back! Some gardeners pop slugs into the **compost heap** – because they feed on decaying plant material they can be used as part of the composting process.

Here are a few ideas to try to prevent slugs and snails on plants:

1. **Dead and rotting plant material.** By clearing this up you remove food and shelter for slugs and snails.
2. **Do not dig.** Adopt a 'no dig' policy. By digging in the autumn you leave the soil rough and cloddy while the slugs are still active which allows those species that hibernate to move deep into the soil. If you have to dig, dig in the winter while the soil is cold and the slugs are less active. This helps to kill some slugs, and exposes them to predators such as birds.
3. **Beneficial creatures.** Several animals and birds eat slugs and snails, so encourage these creatures into your garden. Frogs, toads and newts are all partial to slugs and snails and can be attracted to

your garden by building a wildlife pond. Birds like song thrushes are particularly fond of garden snails and like to nest in tall hedges. Blackbirds also feed on snails – by putting bird food containing sunflower seeds and mealworms on a ground feeder tray you will find that blackbirds will start to visit your garden and eat any snails they can find. Hedgehogs, slow-worms and ground beetles also feed on slugs and snails.

4. **Natural slug bait.** Be prepared to sacrifice a crop of something that slugs and snails love to eat, such as brassica or lettuce. Hoe some of this off while the plants are small, leave the hoeings on the soil and get ready to collect and dispose of them.

5. **Potatoes.** As soon as the tubers have matured, lift and store them and don't leave them in the ground. Avoid growing cultivars like 'Maris Piper' and 'Cara' which are susceptible to underground slugs, and grow 'Pentland Ivory' or 'Charlotte' instead.
6. **Hostas and dahlias.** Grow ornamental plants like these in containers such as rough wooden tubs or terracotta pots, out of the reach of slugs.
7. **Grow plants that slugs don't like.** Slugs tend to avoid herbaceous plants with tough, hairy leaves or spiny leaves or flowerheads. Examples include spurges (*Euphorbia species*), bear's breeches (*Acanthus mollis*), elephant's ears (*Bergenia*) and mullein (*Verbascum species*).
8. **Stop slugs coming into the house** by sealing any potential entrance points and placing a strip of copper tape on the floor by the door as a barrier.

### What Vegetables to harvest in April

If you already have crops growing, or if you're just interested to know what's in season, the vegetables usually ready to harvest in April are:

- Purple sprouting broccoli
- Asparagus (when the spears are no more than 18cm tall)
- Rhubarb
- Radishes
- Spring onion
- Chard
- Leeks

- Kale
- Spring cauliflowers & cabbages
- Lettuce & rocket

## 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, chopsuey greens, Japanese mustard spinach (komatsuna), mibuna and mizuna and texel greens.



### What you'll need to start growing salad leaves

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

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

For container sowing:

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

## How to grow salad leaves

### Cultivation

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

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

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

### Sowing salad leaves

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

### How to care for salad leaves

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

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

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

## Harvesting salad leaves

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

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

## Common salad pests and diseases

### Grey mould/botrytis mould

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

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

### Slugs and snails

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

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

### Lettuce root aphid

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

- Water regularly especially during dry periods.

- Grow lettuce under insect-proof mesh.
- Pull up and destroy affected plants.

### Key features of salad leaves

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

### How to plant, grow and care for spring onions

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

### Spring onions varieties

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

- Spring onion 'White Lisbon' – quick to mature and ideal for successional sowing through summer. September sowings will last through winter.

- Spring onion 'Apache' – a purple-skinned variety with a mild flavour and crisp texture.
- Spring onion 'Feast' – a good performer, with excellent tolerance to heat and downy mildew. Good for successional sowing, giving harvests through summer.

### What you'll need to grow spring onions

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

For growing spring onions in pots:

Container with drainage holes

- Compost**

### Sowing spring onions

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

- 1.Prepare the soil in autumn for spring sowing by clearing any weeds and stones, and dig in soil conditioner or well-rotted farmyard manure to improve drainage.

2. A couple of weeks before sowing, rake in some granulated fertilizer. Tread the soil down and rake it smooth, so that the surface has a fine, crumbly texture.

3. Using a stick, the tip of a trowel or the corner of a rake head, draw shallow channels (known as drills) in the ground, 0.5cm (1/4in) deep and 15cm (6in) apart.

4. Sow the spring onion seeds thinly in the drills and cover over with soil. Cover the ground with fleece to stop birds pulling up the young seedlings as they appear.

5. Sow new seeds every three weeks for a continual supply through summer.

### Growing spring onions in pots

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

### Growing spring onions in water



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

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

### **How to care for spring onions**

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

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

### **How and when to harvest spring onions**

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

### **Storing spring onions**

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

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

### **Common spring onion diseases**

#### **Onion white rot**

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

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

#### **Onion downy mildew**

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

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

### **How to grow Snapdragons**

**Snapdragons, so called because of the dragon-like face shape of their flower and the way in which they can be pressed and then snap together, are also known as Antirrhinum majus. In fact, Antirrhinum comes from the latin for 'like a snout'. They are reminiscent of vintage cottage gardens and have seen a resurgence as popular cut-and-come-again flowers.**

Coming in a range of colours and sizes, Snapdragons bloom from June through to October on tall spire stems. The flowers run along the stem and open at the bottom first working their way up to the top. The flowers work really well in all sorts of gardening styles from informal cottage gardens through to more formal container gardening.

Snapdragons can be both annuals and perennials. We generally think of Snapdragons as shrubby half-hardy annuals, but they can also be tender perennials. This is because, if left to their own devices, they will self-seed for next year and are also able to manage some cold weather over the winter and possibly continue flowering into winter.

You can grow Snapdragons from seed at home or buy garden-ready plants when all risk of frost has passed.

### Types of Snapdragons to grow

Snapdragons originated in southern Europe, more notably Spain and Italy. They have a light fragrance, with the real show coming from their spires of repeat flowers over several months.

Snapdragons are generally known as a mid-height plant, grown in the middle of the border. However, with around 40 species to choose from, Snapdragon plants do come in a range of heights from dwarf, intermediate and tall varieties:

1. Dwarf - around 15cm tall - for example, 'Tom Thumb'.
2. Intermediate - around 30-40cm tall - for example, 'Liberty'.
3. Tall - up to 1m tall - for example, 'Rocket'.

If you choose the tall Snapdragon varieties, you will need to stake, helping to keep them from toppling over.

Snapdragon hybrid varieties have continually evolved, for example, fused flowers, stronger scents, double blossom and trailing.

### What you'll need to grow Snapdragons

If you're looking to grow Snapdragons from seed, here is what you need:

1. Covered seed tray.
2. A sunny and warm windowsill for best germination or a heated propagator.
3. Peat-free seed compost.
4. Watering can for light watering.
5. A selection of 9cm pots for potting on the seedlings.
6. **Liquid feed** for once the plants are in their final position.
7. Stakes and twine for propping up tall varieties.

Snapdragons take around 21 days to grow from a seed to a seedling. They prefer a temperature of 16-18°C, so if you are potting seeds in a greenhouse, make sure it's warm enough and keep the seed trays slightly on the dry side.

Snapdragon indoor planting season is usually February/March, but they can also be grown in late autumn for earlier flowering, protected in a greenhouse for example.

Snapdragon seeds are almost like dust so handle carefully and don't sneeze!



### Where to plant and place your Snapdragons

1. In February/March, scatter thinly in a seed tray filled with good quality **peat-free seed compost**. Carefully handle the dust-like seeds.
2. Cover with a light layer (approx 3mm) of compost and put on a warm windowsill or in a propagator/heated greenhouse to germinate. Water sparingly.
3. Once germinated and big enough to handle carefully, pot on. Pot on Snapdragon seedlings into your 9cm pots once they are fuller and big enough to handle (approx 8 - 10 cm tall). Use **potting on compost**.
4. When the risk of frosts has finished, around late May, plant out your Snapdragons.

Snapdragons prefer a sunny position, with good quality soil.

Snapdragons won't flower well in shade, and will flower best in a sunny spot.

When planting out, be mindful of leaving enough space between the plants, and not planting them too tightly together, so ideally around 30cm apart. Dense planting can encourage mildew and other fungal growth due to a lack of airflow.

Depending on which size of Snapdragon plant you choose, place them in your bed accordingly with the taller varieties at the back through to dwarf at the front.

Snapdragons will also grow happily in pots in a sunny space but keep well watered and fed in the growing season with a liquid feed.

### Caring and nurturing your Snapdragons

Snapdragon plants will grow best in full sun with good well-drained soil. Feed every couple of weeks in the growing season with a general multipurpose plant feed or a liquid seaweed feed. While establishing over the first couple of weeks, keep the soil moist. Thereafter Snapdragons like to be watered around their crown, with the soil being drier on the top 5cm or so.



## **How to deadhead Snapdragons**

Once the Snapdragon plants are established, you can carry out some light clipping to create a bushier plant, as well as regular deadheading or cutting for filling indoor displays. Deadheading Snapdragons encourages more flowers to be produced. If you are using Snapdragons for cut flowers, there is no need for other deadheading.

## **How to propagate Snapdragons**

If you want to try propagating Snapdragons, try one or all of the methods below:

### **1. Collecting Snapdragon seeds**

Stop deadheading to allow the seedheads to form. Before the frosts come, collect the seed heads and either save to plant in the following February or scatter over the soil and leave to over winter in-situ.

### **2. From a cutting**

About a month or so before autumn/frosts set in, take a cutting from your plant, dip in a rooting hormone powder and gently place in warm, damp soil. To take the Snapdragon cutting, snip off approx 2-5cm of the stem, just above a leaf node.

If your Snapdragons plants have started to die down at the end of the summer, cut them back by about a third and they may flower again. If you don't want them to have the option of self-seeding, pull out the whole plant before the seed heads appear.

## **Common pests and diseases with Snapdragons**

### **What are the yellow spots on the leaves of my Snapdragon plants?**

One of the most common diseases associated with Snapdragons is Antirrhinum Rust. Generally appearing from late spring and into autumn and more often when the weather is wetter. It is caused by airborne fungus spores that cause pale yellow spots on the upper surface of the leaf, which then turn brown. The affected leaves will shrivel and the plant

will look less vigorous. Snapdragon Rust can also affect the stems, causing bumps and blemishes.

To get rid of Snapdragon rust, there are two options:

1. Remove the leaves and affected plants and dispose of them, trying to make sure all the infected parts are off the soil.
2. Use a fungicide such as [FungusClear](#).

### **What insects feed on Snapdragon plants?**

Like most flowering plants in the UK, there are several insects that feed on Snapdragons. These insects are generally a type of aphid, whitefly or mealybug and they cause shrivelled leaves and flowers.

Check on the underside of the leaves and, if you spot unwanted insects on the back, give the leaves a blast from your hosepipe over the following few days.

### **Frequently asked questions about Snapdragons**

#### **Can Snapdragons survive winter?**

Snapdragons can sometimes survive the winter as long as the weather is not too harsh. The plants manage with cold weather, but may struggle in frosts and snow. If you have grown Snapdragons in pots, move them into a greenhouse or more sheltered spot to give them the best chance of surviving the winter.

#### **Are Snapdragons cut-and-come-again flowers?**

Snapdragons are great cut-and-come-again flowers. They are a popular choice for cut flower gardens due to the length of time they flower, range of sizes and huge selection of colours. Cutting the flowers encourages new flowers to grow.

#### **Do Snapdragons come back every year?**

Plants that come back every year are called Perennials and those that last only a year are known as Annuals. Snapdragons fall into both categories. Snapdragons are generally sown around January/February and flower in June through to October.

If you leave the seed heads on they will self-seed for flowering the next year. They are also able to manage in cold weather. Cutting back the Snapdragon plants in the autumn and leaving in situ can also be a way to encourage Snapdragons to flower the following year.

A Snapdragon plant generally lasts about two years before it fully dies back.

### **Do Snapdragons do well in pots?**

Yes, Snapdragons grow equally well in containers and pots as in beds. Make sure your pots are big enough to support the size of the Snapdragon you choose, and use a good **peat-free compost**.

### **Key features of Snapdragons**

<b>Botanical Name</b>	Antirrhinum majus
<b>Plant Type</b>	Bushy annuals or perennials
<b>Family</b>	Plantaginaceae
<b>Light Exposure</b>	Full sun
<b>Soil pH</b>	Neutral
<b>Flowering Time</b>	June to October
<b>Flower Colour</b>	All colour ranges apart from blue

### **How to grow Cavolo Nero**

‘Cavolo Nero’ is a variety of kale, closely related to broccoli, cauliflower and cabbage. It has the same characteristic fleshy thick green leaves and health benefits as other plants in the Brassica family, such as being a great source of Vitamin C and iron. Cavolo Nero kale has a long growing season, and has different needs as it matures - read on for our top tips on how to grow Cavolo Nero.

## 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

<b>Botanical Name</b>	<i>Brassica oleracea</i> (Acephala Group) 'Cavolo nero'
<b>Plant Type</b>	Annual
<b>Family</b>	Brassicaceae
<b>Sun Exposure</b>	Sun to partial shade
<b>Soil pH</b>	Neutral to alkaline
<b>Harvesting Time</b>	October - April
<b>Flower Colour</b>	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 others
- ‘Esmee’ - very attractive lobed leaves, looks lovely in pots
- ‘Wasabi’ - a wild rocket variety with a particularly peppery flavour



**What you'll need to grow salad rocket**

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

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

To grow rocket directly in the soil you will need:

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

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

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

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

4.Water every day until seedlings germinate.

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

### When to plant salad rocket

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

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

### Where to plant and place your salad rocket

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

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

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

### Caring and nurturing your salad rocket

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

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

### Frequently asked questions about salad rocket

#### Is rocket safe to eat?

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

#### Is rocket easy to grow from seed?

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

## Can rocket be grown as a perennial?

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

## Common pests and diseases of salad rocket

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

### Why are my rocket leaves covered in tiny holes?

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

## Key features of salad rocket

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

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

## How to grow ornamental quince

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

### Types of quince to grow

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

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

The main species of *Chaenomeles* to grow are:

- *Chaenomeles speciosa*. Also known as Chinese quince. This species has red, white or pink flowers, and can grow to 2m (7') high. Notable cultivars include 'Moerloosei', which has a particularly long flowering period, and 'Geisha Girl', which has salmon-pink flowers.
- *Chaenomeles japonica*. Also known as Japanese quince, or Maule's quince. The smallest of Quince species, this variety only grows to 1m high (3'), but can grow to double this in width. Expect red, white or pink flowers with small fruits up to 7cm across (3"). Attractive cultivars include 'Pink Lady' and 'Texas Scarlet'.
- *Chaenomeles cathayensis*. A much larger variety of Ornamental quince, growing up to 6m (18') tall. Flowers are white or pink with fruits up to 15cm (6") across.



## What you'll need to grow ornamental quince

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

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

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

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

- A spade
- A garden fork
- Gloves
- Well rotted compost
- Fertiliser

1. Using the spade to dig a hole in the ground that is twice the width of the rootball of the Ornamental quince. The hole should be slightly deeper than the rootball.
2. Disturb the soil in the bottom of the hole, using the fork.
3. Wearing gloves, dig in plenty of **Levington® Multi Purpose Compost** to ensure good drainage. **Add Miracle-Gro® Premium**
- 4.

5. **All Purpose Continuous Release Plant Food** to provide a long-lasting nutrient boost to the newly planted Ornamental quince.
6. Place the plant in the middle of the hole, backfill with soil and gently firm in so that there is good contact between the roots and the soil.
7. Water well and leave to establish.

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

### **Where to plant and place your ornamental quince**

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

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

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

### **Caring and nurturing your ornamental quince**

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

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

### **Common pests and diseases with ornamental quince**

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

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

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

**Scale insects** can attack Ornamental quince, clinging on to the underside of leaves as they suck sap from the plant. Mature plants will be able to withstand a small number of scale insects, and the population will be controlled by natural predators, such as ladybirds and birds. Encourage these into your garden. Larger infestations of scale insects can be treated with **BugClear™ Fruit & Veg Ultra**.

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

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

### **Frequently asked questions about ornamental quince**

#### **Are Ornamental quince fruits edible?**

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

## How easy are ornamental quinces to grow?

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

## Can ornamental quince be grown in pots?

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

## Is ornamental quince evergreen?

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

## Key features of ornamental quince

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

## 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

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

## Fruit

There are very few fruits that are in season in April so you're unlikely to find yourself gathering much of a harvest this month. It is a good opportunity, however, to get on top of lots of maintenance, and there are even a few berries and other fruits to plant in April.

### What fruits to plant in April

A lot of fruit tends to ripen near the autumn, but April is a great time of year to plant young fruit trees and bushes in time for the next harvesting season. The following can all be planted outside in April:

- Raspberry canes
- Blackberry canes
- Strawberries

If you have a greenhouse or a suitable space to grow fruit inside, you can also plant the following during April:

- Tomatoes
- Melon seeds
- Strawberry seeds

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

## 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.



1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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

4. 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.

5. 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.

6. 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.

7. Backfill the trench with soil mixed with organic matter. Gently firm in around the roots and water in well.

8. 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

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

### Growing fruit in April

Typically, there's not a huge amount going on when it comes to fruit in season for April, so it's a good opportunity to carry out some maintenance and give your plants some much needed love after the winter.

Any fruit trees growing in pots will need to be liquid fed. Use a balanced feed every two weeks and mulch any fruit trees in the garden with a peat-free compost or farmyard manure.

If you planted strawberries in September and they are in their first year, make sure that you de-blossom them to help with their initial establishment. If the weather allows, give any covered strawberries sometime in the sun, which will help with ventilation.

If you're growing any citrus plants in the greenhouse, mist or dampen them down when the flowering begins. You should try to maintain a minimum temperature of 14°.

Once you've done that, it's worth doing a spot check on all of your fruit plants and trees for potential diseases and pests. Some things to look out for are apple and pear scab, which can be treated through pruning to prevent the spread of disease. Powdery mildew on grapes, peaches and gooseberries can also be a problem at this time of year – again, remove infected parts of the plants and be careful not to let the spores spread. If you have a greenhouse, be on the lookout for red spider mite and aphids on your strawberries. If you have a particularly bad infestation, you should remove the affected plants immediately – otherwise you can control the problem using a pest control.

Finally, towards the end of the month, thin peach and apricot fruitlets (small or immature fruits) – the trees will likely grow more than they can handle.

## 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

## 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

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

## 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'.

## Powdery Mildew Treatment

### What is powdery mildew?

Powdery mildew disease is a fungal disease common on a wide range of plants. There are numerous forms of powdery mildew and it tends to occur in dry springs as well as during summer and autumn.

So, what causes powdery mildew? Powdery mildew is the fungal growth of various types of fungus.

### Can powdery mildew spread to other plants?

No: the fungi are specific to one plant or a group of plants, and won't spread to other plants. For instance, powdery mildew on roses will not spread to clematis and vice versa.

### What causes powdery mildew on plants?

Rust spores prosper in a moist environment. The ideal conditions for powdery mildew are where the soil is dry but the overhead conditions are somewhat humid or damp. Here we run through a few suggestions on how to deal with and treat powdery mildew on plants.

### What does powdery mildew look like?

Upper plant leaves are usually the most badly affected and are covered with a dusty coating. Occasionally the mildew spreads to the underside of leaves and other parts of the plant.

Powdery mildew is usually white, but it can be pale brown such as on the underside of rhododendron leaves and on gooseberry and laurel leaves. The white covering produced by powdery mildew can also occur on the fruits of grapes, peaches and gooseberries.



### Powdery mildew symptoms and damage

Powdery mildew symptoms start with a white dusty deposit on a plant's leaves. Sometimes the leaves turn yellow and in the case of roses, young leaves may become distorted.

Occasionally the mildew kills off leaf tissue which falls away and creates a shot hole effect. The growth of the plant slows down and infected leaves gradually die back and drop off.

### Powdery mildew treatment and control

#### How to get rid of powdery mildew?

- In the spring, as soon as you see signs of powdery mildew, remove all infected parts of the plant.
- Try not to shake the mildew spores onto healthy leaves.
- Compost infected foliage in a hot compost system.
- Use a powdery mildew treatment like a powdery mildew spray **fungicide**, repeating as recommended. **There are no chemicals approved for control of diseases on edible plants.**
- Treat powdery mildew on roses by pruning out infected stems and, if the rose is also infested with bugs such as aphids, spray with a rose mildew treatment such as 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 powdery mildew?

Powdery mildew prevention involves good garden hygiene and a bit of research before you buy new plants:

- Keep plants adequately watered and maintain moisture around the root system by mulching plants well early in the year to help water retention – powdery mildews thrive when the plant is not receiving enough water.
- Powdery mildew fungus spores spread by water or rain splashes. It's a good idea not to water from above, but to direct the hose or watering can onto the soil at the base of the plant.
- Avoid buying powdery mildew susceptible **apple trees**. Choose a variety which is described as showing powdery mildew resistance, such as 'Discovery', 'Greensleeves' and 'Worcester Pearmain'.
- Choose disease resistant **rose varieties** - the hollyhock species *Althaea rosea* is said to be less prone to powdery mildew.
- To control powdery mildew on courgettes, cucumbers, squash and pumpkins, leave enough space between plants when planting these crops. You should also do this with **strawberries** which are prone to powdery mildew.

## **How to Identify, Treat & Control Aphid Infestations**

### **What are aphids?**

Aphids are small insects which feed on plant sap using their needle-like mouthparts. They are sometimes called greenfly (green aphids) or blackfly (black aphids). There are more than 500 aphid species in Britain. Some aphids feed on only one or two species of plant, but others can be found on a wide range of plants. Most types of plant can be affected. In the aphid life cycle the insect looks similar at each stage, just getting larger as it reaches maturity. For most of the year aphids give birth to live young (aphid larvae) which during warmer weather develop into adult insects in as little as seven days. Although a small colony of aphids isn't a threat to a healthy plant, when they multiply very rapidly a heavy aphid infestation can weaken a plant. Aphids lay overwintering eggs in the autumn so as to survive the colder months of the year.

Aphid's eggs are often laid in a woody tree or shrub and when the eggs hatch in the spring, the aphids feed on the soft young leaves. When the leaves become older and tougher, the aphid grows wings and moves to another plant for the summer, usually a non-woody plant with soft foliage.

### **How to identify aphids**

Aphids are little bugs about 2mm long. They are usually green or black but some types of aphid are yellow, pink, white or mottled. Flightless when young, aphids develop wings in the later stages of their life cycle. You often see clusters of aphids feeding at the growing tip of young plants.



## Aphid damage and symptoms

Aphids feed by sucking the sap of plants, weakening them and reducing their growth. They can also transmit **virus diseases** to the plant. Affected plant leaves or stems can become curled or distorted in shape.

Aphid colonies usually gather underneath leaves, on flowers or at growth points. As they suck the sap, they excrete a sugary honeydew onto the leaves below, which develop a shiny glaze. Although ants do not eat aphids they sometimes collect the honeydew they secrete. In damp conditions, sooty moulds grow on the honeydew, forming a black or greyish green deposit on the leaves. This is not only unsightly, but will gradually deprive the leaf of light and might eventually kill the plant.

Aphids shed their skins as they grow larger. The skins gather on the leaf surfaces below where they are feeding and form a whitish dust, often the first sign of an aphid infestation.

## Aphid control & treatment

How can you get rid of aphids? There are many methods of aphid control. Here we've listed a few different aphid pest controls, ranging from cultural and biological to chemical.

- Tackle individual aphids on plants and small colonies by simply squashing them or wiping them off the plant with a damp cloth or small watercolour paint brush.
- In the greenhouse, you can introduce a **biological treatment** to combat aphids such as a midge whose larvae eat aphids (*Aphidoletes aphidomyza*) or a type of parasitic wasp whose larvae develop inside the aphids' bodies (*Aphidius*).
- **Ladybirds and their larvae eat aphids.** You can attract them into your garden by planting **English marigolds**.
- Where these natural and biological controls are not practical, you can control aphids by using an **aphid spray** on affected plants such as a **contact insecticide** which will control most aphids. As its name suggests, a contact insecticide kills only the insect pests it comes into contact with.
- Some aphids, such as woolly aphid, have a protective covering that contact insecticides cannot penetrate. This means they need to be sprayed with a systemic insecticide. Systemic insecticides are absorbed into the plant, and protects against further aphid symptoms for up to three weeks.

**Before you treat aphids on fruit and vegetables, always check that the insecticide is approved for use on edible crops. 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.**

### **Some plants require different aphid treatments**

- **Aphids on roses:** try growing **thyme** near your roses because its strong scent deters black aphids, known as blackfly – one of the types of aphids that feed on roses. You can also get rid of aphids on roses with an **insecticide** designed for roses.
- **Aphids on chilli plants and tomato plants:** these plants often attract aphids if they are grown indoors or in a greenhouse. As soon as you see them, wipe them off with a damp cloth or small paint brush.
- **Aphids on trees:** aphids sometimes lay their eggs on fruit trees such as cherry trees over the winter. Aphid eggs can be destroyed
-

- by using a plant oil winter wash on a dry mild day from November until early February.
- **Aphids on runner beans and French beans:** lure aphids away from your beans by planting nasturtiums nearby.
- **Aphids treatment for indoor plants:** keep an eye out for signs of aphids on your indoor plants such as your basil plants and squash them between your finger and thumb or wipe them off as described before.

### How to prevent Aphids

One way to prevent aphids damaging precious plants in your garden is to plant ‘companion’ plants which either put the aphids off completely or attract aphid predators which can keep down an aphid infestation. Here are some examples to try:

- **Lavender:** the strong scent can deter aphids.
- **Wormwood (*Artemisia absinthium*):** aphids appear to dislike the scent of this strongly smelling herb.
- **Fennel or herb fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*):** its attractive yellow blooms attract hoverflies, which prey on aphids.

### Red spider mites

**The red spider mite is a very damaging plant pest. They are tiny and very difficult to see until they build up in large numbers and start producing their characteristic webbing. And, confusingly, they are rarely red!**

Belonging to the same group of creatures as spiders, red spider mites have eight legs and their full name is ‘glasshouse red spider mite’ or GRSM (*Tetranychus urticae*). Red spider mites, like many insect plant pests, eat plant sap.

#### How to identify red spider mites

Red spider mites are perhaps the smallest of the common sap-feeding insects, being less than 1mm in size. They are so small you need a

magnifying glass to identify them accurately and they are often easier to identify by examining the damage done to plants (see below). Despite their size, red spider mite damage can be extensive.

They like it warm and dry, which is why they can commonly be found indoors, on **house plants** or in conservatories or greenhouses. If the summer is dry and warm red spider mites in the UK can also be found outside from March to September where they can become a pest on beans, strawberries, raspberries, currants, roses and other ornamental plants.

For most of the year, red spider mites are not red at all – they are yellowish-green with two dark blotches towards the head. They turn red in the autumn and winter resting period. The larger, fast moving, bright red mites you sometimes see in the garden are actually red velvet mites and are not harmful to plants at all.



## Red spider mite symptoms and damage

Leaves first develop a fine, pale mottling and become dull green. As the infestation progresses leaves turn yellowish white which can be mistaken for a mineral deficiency but look underneath the leaf with a magnifying glass and you will see the tiny red spider mites and their round eggs. Large colonies produce a characteristic fine silk webbing between leaves and stems. Plants shed their leaves, leaving just young leaves at the shoot tips.

## How to get rid of red spider mites

You'll find there are many methods of red spider mite control. Here we've listed a few different options, ranging from cultural and biological to chemical.

- If you find plants on the windowsill or in the greenhouse badly infested with red spider mites, remove the plants immediately. This is especially important in late summer before the females start to look for sheltered places to spend the winter once the temperature drops.
- In the greenhouse, use a biological treatment to combat red spider mite in the form of another species of mite which eats red spider mite. *Phytoseiulus persimilis* works best before the infestation becomes too big and needs a high daytime temperature to be effective. You can also try using it on outdoor plants in high summer. Avoid using an insecticide as it will also kill the biological control.
- Spray affected plants with a **broad spectrum insecticide**. You will need to apply it several times to break the red spider mite's life cycle.

Before you treat red spider mite on fruit and vegetables, always check that the insecticide is approved for use on edible crops. 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 red spider mites

- Check susceptible plants frequently from March onwards so you can act before a red spider mite infestation takes hold.
- In the greenhouse maintain high humidity because plants grown at high temperatures in dry, overcrowded conditions are more liable to develop severe infestations of red spider mite.
- Clear out plant debris, old canes, stakes and plant-ties from the greenhouse before the spring and **clean the empty greenhouse.**
- Remove any weeds growing in or around the greenhouse because they may act as hosts for the mite.





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