



February

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

Dear Fellow Allotmenters,

I have produced a slightly different magazine to usual. I am trying to concentrate on a more comprehensive monthly task guide.

This one is February and deals with the Flowers, Fruit, Vegetable and Herbs associated with the month of February.

It is only a general guide and has been composited from the Internet. As usual any questions or queries can be directed to me via our email :

info@yeovil-allotments-association.co.uk

Many thanks for reading,

Gareth Richards
Treasurer
Eliz Flats, Plot 14

February Gardening: Your Monthly Garden Guide

As the last month of winter, and frequently the coldest, you might find yourself wondering what to grow in February. It's the end of the dormant period for many plants, so it's often your last opportunity to plant out some perennials and fruit trees. Timing this can be tricky, as the ground is sometimes too frozen to dig. However, even on days when it's too cold to work the soil, there's still plenty to keep you busy as you can finish pruning plants ready for them to start regrowing in spring.

What to plant in February and other seasonal gardening tips

Hopefully over the winter you've found an opportunity to plan what you want to grow in the coming year but if you're still asking yourself what to do in the garden in February, check the categories below for some ideas. There are plenty of essential February gardening jobs and you can even start sowing some of your seeds.

What vegetables to plant in February

If we're having a particularly mild winter, you may be able to get away with sowing broad beans and cabbages outside, but most vegetable seeds need a degree of warmth to propagate. If you want to get started

on your vegetable garden early, you can sow the following vegetable seeds inside under glass – a heated greenhouse is perfect but, if you don't have access to one, a windowsill in a warm room will do just as well. Some vegetables to consider include:

How to grow peas

Nothing beats home-grown peas for their tenderness and taste. That's because when they are picked, their sugars start to turn to starch and so

they quickly lose their sweetness and flavour. Pick them when small, steam within an hour of picking with a sprig of mint and you won't taste any better.

Pea varieties

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

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

- Early:** Early Onward, Feltham First, Hurst Greenshaft, Little Marvel
- Main crop:** Cavalier, Kelvedon Wonder, Onward
- Mangetout:** Delikata, Oregon Sugar Pod
- Sugar snap:** Sugar Ann, Sugar Snap



Cultivation of peas

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

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

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

When to sow peas

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

The easiest way to sow is to dig out a flat-bottomed trench 5cm (2in) deep and 20-25cm (8-10in) wide. Lightly fork over the bottom of the

trench, water the soil and then sow the seeds evenly, roughly 7.5cm (3in) apart, pressing them lightly into the soil. Fill the trench with soil and lightly firm down. Sow at fortnightly intervals to give a succession of crops throughout summer. By growing different varieties and sowing at different times of year, you can pick fresh peas from June until October.

Choosing your spot and which peas to grow

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

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

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

Sowing peas

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

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

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

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

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

How to care for peas

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

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

When to harvest peas

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

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

A few facts about peas

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

Common pest and disease problems with peas

Powdery mildew

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

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

Pea Moth

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

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

Mice

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

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

Pigeons

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

- Grow plants under netting

Key features of peas

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

How to grow onions

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

What are the best onion varieties to plant?

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

- Onion 'Stuttgarter Giant': produces firm, tasty, slightly flattened bulbs, good for storing.
- Onion 'Red Baron': a late maturing variety with dark red bulbs, stores well.
- Onion 'Jetset': an early maturing variety with yellow-brown bulbs, stores well.
-
- Onion 'Sturon': a reliable variety with good bolt resistance, producing flavourful round bulbs that store well.
- Onion 'Troy': suitable for autumn planting, with good bolt resistance, producing tasty yellow-skinned bulbs.



Onion growing equipment list

To grow onions at home, you will need:

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

When to plant onions

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

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

How to plant onions

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

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

Caring for onions

Follow these tips for a good onion harvest:

- Keep the plot well weeded. Hoeing between rows risks damaging foliage and bulb tips, so weed by hand where possible.
- Water regularly in dry periods.
- Remove any flowerspikes as soon as they appear.
- Stop watering once the leaves start yellowing – this means that the bulbs are starting to swell.

Harvesting onions

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

Storing onions

1. Place the bulbs in a single layer on a drying rack or on a slatted shelf that allows air to circulate around the bulbs.
2. Leave them outside in the sun or in a greenhouse for a couple of weeks to dry.
3. Once the skins are dry and papery, store the bulbs in net bags or plait the foliage to form bundles.

4. Store somewhere light, cool and well-ventilated. Bulbs stored in the dark are more likely to sprout.

Common pests and diseases of onions

Onions bolting

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

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

Onion fly

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

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

Allium leaf miner

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

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

Onion white rot

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

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

Leek rust

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

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

Key features of onions

Flowering season(s)	Spring, Summer
Foliage season(s)	Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter
Sunlight	Full shade, Partial shade, Full

	sun
Soil type	Clay, Loamy, Sandy
Soil pH	Neutral
Soil moisture	Moist but well-drained
Ultimate height	Up to 30cm (1ft)
Ultimate spread	Up to 10cm (4in)
Time to ultimate height	5 months

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

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

Growing chillies at home

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

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

Varieties of chilli pepper to grow

The following are all good reliable varieties of chilli:

- Apache
- Cayenne

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

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

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



Sowing chilli pepper seeds

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

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

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

1. Soak chilli seeds overnight in warm water before planting OR gently sandwich between damp kitchen roll, place in a plastic bag and leave in the airing cupboard for a couple of days to improve germination.
2. Chilli seeds love hot weather so, grow in a greenhouse or even in a pot on the kitchen window sill for a bit of extra heat to your chilli plants.
3. Sow chilli seeds as early as possible (January or February for the hot varieties).
4. Ideally sow chilli seeds at a temperature of between 18-21°C (65-70°F).
5. Sow seeds in small pots and very shallow (about 5mm deep). Transfer to a larger pot when two leaves have developed, try not to touch the forming roots when re-potting to prevent accidental damage.

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

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

8. Feed with a chilli feed or seaweed extract.

How to care for your chilli plants

Plants are ready to put into their permanent cropping position once the roots fill the 9-10cm pots. Pot them up into 20-23cm (8-9in) pots of good compost in late April (if growing in a heated greenhouse), mid-May (unheated greenhouse) or late May/early June if growing outside. They can also be grown in growing-bags, but will need very careful watering.

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

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

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

Looking after a chilli plant

1. Chilli plants like growing in containers where the temperature can be easily regulated.

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

How to harvest your chillies

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

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

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



Common chilli pests

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

Key features of chilli plants

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

Sweet peppers (or capsicum) come in a good range of fruit colours when mature - red, orange, yellow and even purple. This makes them an excellent ornamental vegetable to grow - even in mixed flower borders or in pots on the patio. Although they tend to crop better when grown

under cover - such as in a greenhouse or grow frame - sweet peppers are reliable croppers outside in warm, sunny summers.

How to grow peppers

Cultivating sweet bell peppers

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

Pepper varieties

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



Sowing peppers

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

Sow seeds at 18-21°C (65-70°F) in pots of **good seed sowing compost**. Transplant the seedlings individually into 9-10cm (3-4in) pots when two true leaves have formed, and grow them on at around 16-18°C (60-65°F). Gradually harden off the sweet pepper plants for 10-14 days before planting outside.

How to care for peppers

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

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

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

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

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

Harvesting peppers

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

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

Broad beans are a delicious vegetable that's easy to grow and well worth the space in the garden. The flowers are highly perfumed, the roots trap nitrogen for the next crop, so broad beans are beneficial in many other ways apart from their eating qualities. You should expect to be picking your own crop between June and August.

How to grow broad beans

Cultivation

For best results, grow broad beans in a warm, sunny site. Protection from cold and strong winds will ensure good flower pollination by pollinating insects.

Most soils will give a good crop of beans, but if yours is heavy clay or light sand, then you should dig in some organic matter such as well-rotted garden compost or soil conditioner. Then improve the nutrient level of the soil with a light dressing of **[a general granular plant food](#)**.

Broad bean varieties

Most varieties are called longpods, which should contain 8 or more beans per pod. Masterpiece, Aquadulce and Exhibition Longpod are

good, traditional varieties; Witkiem is a more recent introduction. In exposed sites choose a dwarf variety, such as The Sutton.

Although most varieties are sown in spring, you can produce an earlier crop by sowing a winter-hardy variety in late autumn, such as Aquadulce Claudia or The Sutton.

Sowing broad beans

Indoors For a really early crop, sow seeds in individual cells or pots of seed and sowing compost in February. Seedlings will be ready for planting out in March.

Outdoors Sow seeds 5cm (2in) deep in March in a shallow drill with a gap of 20cm (8in) between each seed and cover with fine soil. For maximum use of space, a double row with rows 20cm (8in) apart is normal. Separate each double row by a 60cm (2ft) gap. Then water in well.

Further sowings can be made during April and May for successional crops into early autumn.



How to care for broad beans

Ensure the soil is kept constantly moist - especially when the flowers are setting - and mulch the soil in June and July to conserve soil moisture. **A liquid feed** applied over the foliage and around the roots every couple of weeks will ensure the plants are fed and watered at the same time and help improve cropping further.

Keep weeds under control with a hoe.

After flowering and when the pods have started to set, nip out the growing tip of each plant. This will direct all energy to producing beans and take away the favourite resting spot for **blackfly**.

When the crop has finished, don't pull up the roots, but simply cut off the stems at soil level and compost in the normal way. This will ensure the nitrogen-containing swollen roots are left below ground level to feed the next crop.

Harvesting

You can start to pick the pods when they are around 5-10cm (2-4in) long and cooking them whole.

To harvest them for shelling, pick when the beans begin to show through the sides of the pod and before they get too big. The scar on the picked bean should still be white or green and not become discoloured/brown. Pick them by giving the pod a sharp, downward twist.

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

Cabbages are an important vegetable to grow at home, especially for winter and spring when few other fresh greens are available. By choosing different varieties you can be cutting cabbages all year round. Lightly steamed they are delicious and can even be eaten raw in coleslaw and salads.

How to grow cabbages

Cultivation

Cabbages prefer to be grown in an open, sunny position, but they will also crop well in a semi-shaded position. They need a fertile, deep soil, that is preferably alkaline, with lots of added bulky organic matter. If your soil is acidic, add [garden lime](#) before sowing or planting out. Savoys are a type of winter cabbage.

Cabbage varieties

Although the majority of cabbages are green, there are also red/purple varieties, such as Kalibos, Red Drumhead and Ruby perfection. They also come in shapes other than round – pointed and open and flat.

Cabbages are divided into when they are ready for cropping. The following are all good varieties:

- **Spring:** Duncan, Offenham 1 – Myatt’s Offenham Compacta, Pixie
- **Summer/Autumn:** Derby Day, Greyhound, Hispi, Spitfire
- **Autumn/Winter:** Celtic, Huzaro, January King 3, Kilaton
- **Savoy:** Endeavour, Tundra, Wintessa



Sowing cabbages

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. Actual sowing times depend on which types you are growing:

- Spring cabbage:** Sow in July/August. Transplant into cropping positions from September to November.
- Summer cabbage:** Sow from late February/early March (under cloches or similar covers, or indoors with gentle heat) until early
•
•
•May. Transplant in May/June. The later sowings will crop into autumn.
- Winter cabbages:** Sow from April to early June. Transplant in late June/July. The earliest sowings will start crop

How to care for cabbages

When the young plants have 5 or 6 leaves, carefully lift and transplant them to their final growing position. Improve the soil first with **a general granular plant feed**. Firm the soil around each plant afterwards and water in well.

Space compact varieties 30cm (1ft) apart, larger varieties up to 45cm (18in) apart. Plant spring cabbages just 10cm (4in) apart in rows 30cm (1ft) apart, then thin out to 30cm (1ft) apart in late February/March and use the thinnings as delicious, tasty spring greens.

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.

Harvesting

Cabbages are harvested by cutting through the stem with a sharp knife just above ground level once they've developed a good sized head as and when they're needed.

For an extra bonus crop of spring and summer cabbages, don't dig up the roots after harvesting, but cut a 13mm (½in) deep cross in the stump. Feed with [a liquid plant food](#) and you'll be rewarded with several small cabbages in about 5 weeks.

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

How to grow aubergines

Cultivation

Aubergines have to have a warm, sunny, sheltered position to produce a good, reliable crop. They will crop more reliably if grown under cover, in a greenhouse or growing frame, especially in cooler climates.

Outside, they need a rich soil improved with lots of organic matter and good dressing of **a general granular plant food**. Or, better still, you can grow aubergines individually in 23-25cm (9-10in) pot filled with **a good potting compost**.

Aubergine varieties

Although deep purple is the standard colour, there are white and green varieties, and both long or round in shape.

Good varieties include Black Beauty, Long Purple, Mohican and Moneymaker.

Grafted plants are available from mail order suppliers and garden centres. The variety is grafted onto a rootstock, which provides much more reliable, bigger, better and earlier crops.



Sowing aubergines

Sow seeds at 18-25°C (64-77°F) in individual cells or pots of a good seed sowing compost in March and April. Pot up the seedlings when 2 true leaves have formed, one plant to a 7.5-10cm (3-4in) pot of **a good potting compost**. Grow on in warmth and good light.

Alternatively, wait until May and buy ready grown young plants from your local garden centre.

Plant outside in early June, or the end of May if night temperatures are warm, in pots, planters or in the ground, spacing them 60cm (2ft) apart.

How to care for aubergines

Stake plants with sturdy bamboo canes and tie them in as they grow.

Remove the main tip/growing point when plants are 30cm (12in) high to produce bushier plants that will produce more fruit.

Water regularly, especially plants in containers, and feed with **a high potash liquid plant food** once the first fruit has set and repeat at 14 day intervals.

Under cover, mist the foliage regularly with tepid water to discourage **red spider mite** and to help flower set.

Harvesting

Cut the fruit when they've reached a good size for the variety being grown, and the skin surface has developed a good colour and is still shiny.

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

Sunlight	Full sun
Soil type	Chalky, Clay, Loamy, Sandy
Soil pH	Neutral
Soil moisture	Moist but well-drained
Ultimate height	Up to 90cm (3ft)
Ultimate spread	Up to 60cm (2ft)
Time to ultimate height	5 months

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

The globe artichoke is a variety of thistle, a large, architectural perennial that looks great when grown in flower beds and borders. The edible parts are the fleshy lower portions of the bracts of the unopened flower buds and their base, known as the ‘heart’. Once the flower buds open, the flowers look beautiful and very attractive, but are inedible.

The plants have very ornamental, large, silvery-green/glaucous-green leaves. The Jerusalem artichoke is a species of **sunflower**, grown for its edible tubers. These are a real winter treat, although an acquired taste for some. You can roast them, make them into chips and fry them, and they make a hearty soup. They are easy to grow, even in poor soils. In the summer, they produce lots of reasonably small sunflower-like flowers. As the plants grow tall (up to 3m/10ft), they can be used as a living screen.

How to grow artichokes

Cultivating artichokes

Globe artichokes

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

Jerusalem artichokes

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

Varieties of artichokes

Globe artichokes

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

Jerusalem artichokes

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



Sowing globe artichokes

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

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

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

Planting artichokes

Globe artichokes

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

Dig over the planting area, incorporating lots of organic matter – such as compost or planting compost, especially if the soil is heavy clay or light,

well-drained sandy soil. Dig a good sized hole big enough to easily accommodate the rootball.

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

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

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

Jerusalem artichokes

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

Tubers can also be grown in large pots filled with [a good potting compost](#).

How to care for artichokes

Globe artichokes

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

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

Keep plants weed-free and mulch with well-rotted manure or compost in spring. In cold areas, you may need to cover plants

with a mulch of straw, compost or similar in late autumn to protect them from cold winter weather.

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

Jerusalem artichokes

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

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

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

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

Harvesting artichokes

Globe artichokes

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

Jerusalem artichokes

Harvest as needed from October/November to February, carefully lifting the tubers with a garden fork. They will survive

all but the harshest winters, so can be left in the ground, although slugs and waterlogging can be a problem.

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

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

Flowering season(s)	Summer
Foliage season(s)	Spring, Summer, Autumn
Sunlight	Full sun
Soil type	Chalky, Clay, Loamy, Sandy
Soil pH	Neutral
Soil moisture	Moist but well-drained, Poorly drained
Ultimate height	Globe artichoke: up to 1.5m (5ft); Jerusalem artichoke: up to 3m (10ft)
Ultimate spread	Globe artichoke: up to 1.2m (4ft); Jerusalem artichoke: up to 60cm (2ft)
Time to ultimate height	5-6 months

Growing vegetables in February

Now is a good time to check the netting on your brassicas to make sure it's still secure. Birds – pigeons in particular – can shred unprotected greens very quickly. Stop them getting access by weighing or pinning down the netting edges so that there are no entry points. Once you've

done that, it's time to start preparing for the spring. February is the ideal time of year to start chitting your potatoes (placing seed potatoes in a light, warm space such as a hallway or windowsill). This helps them to sprout before they are planted outside, giving them a head start before you start to plant them out for March. Just make sure you use certified, virus-free seed potatoes which will avoid issues later in the season .

If you have asparagus, now is a good time to add an organic, peat-free compost to the soil above each plant before it starts to produce spears.

How To Plant and Grow Potatoes: The Ultimate Guide

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

Varieties of potato

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

First Earlies	Second Earlies	Maincrop	Salad
Rocket	Estima	Desiree	Lady Christl

Foremost	Wilja	Romano	Pink Fir Apple
Epicure	Kestrel	Maris Piper	Ratte

When to plant potatoes

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

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

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

Potato growing equipment list

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

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

How to plant potatoes

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

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

Planting potatoes in the ground

- 1.Potatoes grow in most soil types, but crop best in loose, fertile soil in full sun.
- 2.You can prepare your soil by adding well-rotted manure the a
- 3.utumn before planting, or potato fertilisers prior to planting.

4. 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.

5. Backfill and cover the seed potatoes with soil before watering. Try not to water too frequently before you see shoots, as seed potatoes can rot in waterlogged soil.

Planting potatoes in containers

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

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

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

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

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

How to grow potatoes

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

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

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

How to grow potatoes in your garden

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

How to grow potatoes in grow bags

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

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

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

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

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

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

Growing seed potatoes

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

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

Chitting potatoes



To get them growing when you buy them, place them in egg boxes or a seed tray, with the end with most eyes or buds facing upwards. Stand them somewhere that is cool, but frost-free, and in good light. The aim is

to produce small, sturdy, green shoots. To get the biggest crops it's important to 'chit' your seed before planting. Chitting is said to improve yields, but probably is used only to gain a few weeks in the time needed for growing earlies in the ground and to provide the right conditions for storage.

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

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

Planting seed potatoes

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

Caring for potatoes

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

How to harvest potatoes

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

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

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

Common potato pests and diseases

Potato blight

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

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

Potato blackleg

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

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

Potato scab

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

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

Potato rot

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

- Use good quality sees tubers that are resistant certified
- Harvest at a time when the soil is not wet nor dry.

- Store your potatoes in cool and dry conditions.

Slugs

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

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

Key features of potatoes

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

Asparagus is a long-term crop, usually providing up to 20 years of delicious spears if you plant well and care for the plants while they're growing. Asparagus is a great vegetable plot luxury - just steam and serve with melting butter.

How to grow asparagus

Cultivation

Asparagus grows best in a warm, sunny position. although it will tolerate light, dappled shade. It needs a well-drained soil improved with lots of bulky organic matter, such as compost or well-rotted manure.

Asparagus varieties

The best asparagus varieties are all-male F1 varieties. They are more vigorous than the older, open-pollinated varieties.

- Backlim (F1)
- Connover's Colossal
- Gijnlim (F1)
- Jersey Knight (F1)
- Lucullus (F1)
- Pacific Purple (F1)

Planting asparagus

As this is a long-term crop, prepare the soil well before planting in March or April. Dig and fork over the soil, removing stones and all perennial weed roots, and add lots of organic matter - such as well-rotted manure or compost for example. For best results, and especially on heavy soils, dig a trench 30cm (12in) wide and 20cm (8in) deep. Work in some well-rotted manure into the soil at the bottom of the trench, then add some of the excavated soil to make a 7.5-10cm (3-4in) high ridge down the centre of the trench.



Place the crowns on top, carefully spreading out the roots, spacing them 30-45cm (12-18in) apart. Carefully cover the crowns with 5-7.5cm (2-3in) of soil, leaving the tips of the stems just visible. Gradually fill in the rest of the trench as the plants grow through the soil.

If planting container-grown plants, plant with the top of the rootball 7.5cm (3in) below soil level.

If you are going to grow lots, leave 45-60cm (18-24in) between rows and stagger the placement of the plants within the rows.

Water in well and mulch the soil with 5cm (2in) of well-rotted manure.

How to care for asparagus

It is important to keep asparagus beds weed free. This is best done by hand as the shallow roots can be damaged when hoeing.

Add a 5-7.5cm (2-3in) thick mulch annually in spring to reduce weed growth, keep the plants and soil fed and help retain soil moisture. Apply a general granular feed in early spring and repeat once harvesting has finished.

Allow the foliage to turn yellow in autumn before cutting it down to 2.5cm (1in) above the soil surface.

Harvesting

It's important to allow the plants to build up their strength, so it is best not to harvest any spears for the first 2 years. In the third year, stop

cutting after 6. From then on, you can crop normally as and when the spears are produced.

The best way to harvest is to cut each spear with a sharp knife 2.5cm (1in) below the soil surface when they are 15-20cm (6-8in) long.

Pests

Asparagus may be susceptible to asparagus beetle.

Foliage season(s)	Spring, Summer, Autumn
Sunlight	Full sun
Soil type	Clay, Loamy
Soil pH	Neutral
Soil moisture	Moist but well-drained
Ultimate height	Eventually up to 1.2m (4ft)
Ultimate spread	Up to 30cm (1ft)
Time to ultimate height	9 months

What vegetables to harvest in February

February should provide plenty of vegetable crops, especially if you grow lots of brassica. Any of the following will be ideal for a February harvest:

- Broccoli
- Brussels sprouts

- Celeriac
- Kale
- Leeks
- Lettuce
- Parsnips
- Swede

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.

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

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

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

Where to plant and place your chard

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

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

Caring and nurturing your chard

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

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

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

Frequently asked questions about chard

Can I eat all of the Chard plant?

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

Can I grow chard in containers?

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

Can chard grow in shade?

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

Does chard come back each year?

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

Common pests and diseases with Chard

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Key features of chard

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

What's not to love about broccoli? Part of the cabbage family, it is low in calories, high in vitamins A and C and high in fibre. Broccoli has some fantastic health benefits and is good for your eyes, your skin, your bones and your teeth. It's also anti-inflammatory and is a great vegetable in the fight against cancer, heart disease and even diabetes!

Apart from that, it's easy to grow, easy to cook and we think it's absolutely delicious. Which all adds up to growing your own [broccoli](#) to be a great idea.

Getting started with your broccoli

First, choose the type of broccoli you want to grow. You'll find there is what supermarkets tend to call broccoli but which is actually properly known as calabrese. It's the big green heads of broccoli which you most often find on sale. Then there's sprouting broccoli which comes in a variety of colours (purple, white and green) which takes longer to reach harvest point but can be overwintered to produce a crop in spring.

All broccoli is easy to grow and relatively low maintenance. You're going to need rich, fertile soil that is both well-drained and moisture-retaining, ideally with a pH of between 6 and 7. If you can, make sure you prepare the soil well in advance of planting by digging some well-rotted compost

or manure in the previous season. Broccoli does like full sun, but it is a vegetable **that will grow in the shade** too!

Growing sprouting broccoli

If planting sprouting broccoli from **seeds indoors**, plant about 1 cm deep and roughly 10 cm apart, allowing a few seeds for each hole. You'll probably need to carefully thin out your broccoli at about 10 days and they'll be ready to plant out at about 4-6 weeks or when the plants are approximately 12cm tall.

Plant about 60 cm apart. If you are going to plant straight out, then you can do so from mid to late May. Water before and after sowing and make sure that the soil always remains moist but not waterlogged.

If you want a spring harvest and you are **planting outside**, you need to do so before the first frosts so ideally in September or even August although broccoli doesn't like very hot weather so take care. Make sure you plant in a sunny and sheltered spot and somewhere that won't get too waterlogged during the winter.

Keep an eye on your plants during the winter in case they need some protection or staking.

Growing Calabrese

Heading broccoli or calabrese is grown in almost exactly the same way as sprouting broccoli, the main difference being that you can sow from March to June and your crop will be ready earlier.

Calabrese is best grown from seed in a proper, sectioned seedling tray to minimize root disturbance when you plant out which will be about a month after sowing. Harden your seedlings off for about 10 days (using a cloche or fleece or bringing them in at night) before planting out. Plant about

20cm apart and give them a light feed to give them a good start.

Looking after your broccoli

Make sure you regularly water your broccoli especially when planting out or during periods of dry weather and keep the area around your plants well weeded. A layer of mulch can work well for keeping the weeds down and the moisture in and look out for pests, particularly in the early days. You may need to use slug pellets or netting.

Your calabrese should be ready to harvest from July onwards depending when you planted but keep a careful eye on it because it is easy to let it go over. If it starts to open up and turn yellow, you've missed the boat. If it has started to flower, it's no longer edible.

Your sprouting broccoli will take a bit longer and will ready from late autumn right through to spring, depending again on when you planted. Harvest your calabrese by cutting it off at the stalk with a sharp knife about 10cm below the head and with sprouting broccoli try and include a few of the side stems when you cut.

Whatever type of broccoli you grow, it's pretty easy to cook and very versatile. Steam it, stir fry it or serve it raw in a salad, but just enjoy this healthy and easy addition to your garden. Let us know how you get on and any favourite broccoli recipes or grow your own broccoli tips on our social media sites.

Parsnips in particular will be full of flavour after a couple of months of cold weather. Freezing conditions bring out the sweetness in them - just make sure to harvest them on a day without frost when you can get a garden fork into the ground.

If you're harvesting leeks, don't forget to leave a last plant in the ground so that it flowers. Pollinators love leek flowers, and they are a large, beautiful ball shape. Once the seed head has dried out, the seeds can be saved for sowing.

It's always a good idea to apply a mulch to the soil (at least 5 centimetres or 2 inches) after harvesting. This will help to improve the soil and protect it against weeds and bacteria – a soil conditioner or peat-free composted bark would be ideal.

Fruit

If you're thinking to yourself, 'can I plant fruit trees in February?' you might be surprised at the sheer variety of species that will take to the soil

at this time of year. It's also a good time to prune any existing fruit trees you have in your garden – including apples and pears – and to do a spot of weeding in anticipation of the warmer weather.

What fruit to plant in February

A trip to the garden centre in February might allow you to pick up some end-of-season bargains. Many will be clearing space ready for spring stocks and will be keen to move out the last of their container-grown fruit plants. Any of the following fruit plants can be planted now:

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

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

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

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

How to grow apples

Cultivating apples

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

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

Apple tree varieties

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

Some of the most popular are:

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



Rootstocks for apples

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

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

Apple pollination

Almost all apple varieties need another different apple variety that flowers at the same time to help pollinate it and produce good crops of

fruit. Even those described as self-fertile will crop better if there are other suitable varieties growing nearby.

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

Planting apples

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

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

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

How to care for apples

Once established, apple trees are unlikely to need regular watering, except in extreme drought conditions. But watering during fruit set will help ensure a bumper crop. Trees growing in containers, however, will need regular watering in spring and summer to prevent the compost drying out.

Add [a controlled-release granular plant food](#) to the soil surface each spring to ensure the tree is fed throughout the growing season.

How to prune apple trees

If you buy a fully trained tree, apples need little in the way of pruning for the first few years. Beyond that, it pays to know what, how and why you're pruning, as wrong or excessive pruning can lead to crop

reduction. Most times all you need to do is remove dead, diseased, dying or damaged branches, branches that rub against each other and those that cross from one side of the tree to another.

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

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

Free-standing trees: Prune in winter. If the variety is a tip bearer, thin the branches out, to open up the centre of the tree, ensuring that the remaining branches have their tips uncut.

Spur-bearing varieties: Cut shoots back to about 4 buds to encourage new flowering and fruiting spurs to develop. Thin out excess spurs.

Trained trees (espaliers, cordons and pyramids): Prune in late summer, when the new growth is cut back to 2 buds. They may benefit from a second prune in winter, when some of the older spurs can be thinned out.

Thinning fruit on apple trees

Apples tend to thin themselves by dropping some of their fruit in early summer, known as the 'June drop'. If you still have a bumper crop that the tree can't fully carry in mid- to late summer you will need to thin out. Thin dessert apples to leave 1-2 fruit every 10-12.5cm (4-5in) and cooking apples to 15-20cm (6-8in). The centre of each fruit cluster has an apple called the king fruit, and it's best to remove this one as it usually develops into a misshapen fruit.

How to harvest apples

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

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

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

Common apple pests and diseases

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

Flowering season(s)	Spring
Foliage season(s)	Spring, Summer, Autumn
Sunlight	Full sun
Soil type	Chalky, Clay, Loamy, Sandy
Soil pH	Neutral
Soil moisture	Moist but well-drained
Ultimate height	Up to 5m (17ft)
Ultimate spread	Up to 2.4m (8ft)
Time to ultimate height	6-10 years

Blackberries are sometimes overlooked for growing at home – but they shouldn't be, as they are easy to grow and produce lots of luscious, tasty and juicy fruit with very little work and care.

Of course, if you don't want to grow them yourself, you can always go pick them blackberries the wild - but there are lots of great varieties for home growing, which produce good yields of tasty, sweet fruit usually much bigger and sweeter

than those of the wild ones found growing in hedgerows and other places.

If you don't like the thought of having to deal with the sharp thorns, there are thornless varieties, such as Oregon Thornless. This is also very decorative, with deeply cut leaves that turn a rich red colour in autumn.

As well as blackberries, there are also several hybrid and related berries, including loganberries, tayberries, boysenberries and Japanese wineberry.

How to grow blackberries

Cultivation

Blackberries will grow in partial shade as well as full sun. Because they flower late in spring, they can be grown in frosty areas, where other fruit won't grow particularly well. They need a good, moisture-retentive but well-drained soil with lots of added well-rotted organic matter, such as well-rotted manure, compost or soil conditioner, to hold moisture and nutrients.

Blackberries and hybrid berries are all self-fertile, so you only need to grow one plant and don't need to worry about cross-pollination. They are vigorous plants, so need to be given plenty of room. Allow around 3m (10ft) between plants.

Blackberry varieties

There are several great varieties to grow, which produce large yields of excellent fruit:

- Fantasia Produces large blackberries with an excellent flavour, similar to the subtle flavour of the wild blackberry.
- Loch Ness Thornless and produce lots of large, well-flavoured berries from late summer until the first autumn frosts.
- Oregon Thornless Thornless stems and attractive foliage as well as good taste.
- Reuben Produces lots of very large, very sweet fruit.
- Silvan Prolific crops of large fruit.

Planting blackberries

Container-grown blackberries can be planted at any time of year, but autumn to spring are the best times.

Dig a hole 60x60cm (2x2ft) and 30cm (12in) deep. Add a layer of organic matter – such as compost or well-rotted manure – to the base of the hole and fork it in.

Place the roots in the planting hole and adjust the planting depth so that it is planted at the same depth as it was originally growing and the top of the roots are level with the soil surface.

Mix in more organic matter with the excavated soil and fill in the planting hole.

Water in well, apply **a granular general feed** over the soil around the tree and add a 5-7.5cm (2-3in) deep mulch of well-rotted garden compost or bark chippings around the root area.



How to care for blackberries

Water well during the first year whenever the weather is dry. In subsequent years, watering when the fruit is swelling may be needed if there are prolonged periods of dry weather.

Mulching around the plants in late spring will help to conserve soil moisture and keep down weeds.

For maximum crops, feed in early March with **a general controlled-release feed**.

Support and training

Blackberries need a good support system for the stems. Knock in sturdy 7.5cm (3in) 2.4m (8ft) high posts into the ground and stretch heavy-gauge wires horizontally between the posts at around 75cm (30in) 1.2m (4ft) and 1.5m (5ft) above ground level. Tie the stems to the wires as they grow with soft twine.

Alternatively, they can be trained along wires attached to a fence or even a shed. There are several ways of training the stems. As they fruit on stems produced the previous year, the easiest method is the one-way rope system. The new, current year's stems are trained out and tied in on one side of the plant, while the stems produced the previous year, and which will carry the fruit, trained out on the other side.

Pruning

As soon as you finish harvesting, simply cut back the fruited stems down to ground level. Make sure you don't cut out the new/current year's stems as these will produce next year's fruit.

Harvesting

The fruit is ready for picking from mid-summer onwards. Pick it when it has developed a good colour and before it becomes too soft. With thorny varieties, it pays to wear gloves when picking!

Flowering season(s)	Spring
Foliage season(s)	Spring, Summer, Autumn
Sunlight	Partial shade, Full sun
Soil type	Chalky, Clay, Loamy, Sandy
Soil pH	Neutral
Soil moisture	Moist but well-drained
Ultimate height	Up to 2.4m (8ft)
Ultimate spread	Up to 2.4m (8ft)
Time to ultimate height	1-2 years

All about growing currants

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

How to grow currants

Cultivation

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

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

Currant varieties

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



Planting currants

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

Plant bare-root currants in winter. November or December are best, although it can be done right up to the end of February, whenever the

soil isn't frozen solid or waterlogged. Container-grown currants can be planted at just about any time of year.

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

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

How to care for currants

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

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

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

Pruning and training

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

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

Redcurrants and whitecurrants

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

Blackcurrants

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

Harvesting currants



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

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

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

Forget the hard, green bullets you often buy in shops for cooking with, dessert gooseberries have rich, sweet, and juicy flavours. Gooseberries are easy to grow and can often be pretty much left to their own devices.

But a little care and attention and some annual pruning will produce bumper crops of tasty fruit.

How to grow gooseberries

Cultivation

Gooseberries aren't too fussy about situation. They love a sunny position, but will also grow and fruit very well in shade and other

awkward positions in the garden. They will also tolerate a more exposed position than most other soft fruit.

They need a moist, but free-draining soil that doesn't become waterlogged in winter. It will pay dividends to improve the structure of all soils by adding lots of organic matter, such as [compost](#) or [soil improver](#). This is particularly the case with clay soils, where it will improve drainage, and on light sandy soils, where it will increase its moisture-holding capacity.

Gooseberry varieties

Gooseberries are divided into cooking and dessert varieties, although most are dual purpose and all taste sweeter when left to fully ripen on the plant. The fruit is also available in four different colours – green, red, white and yellow. The following are all good dessert varieties, except Careless, which needs cooking.

Fruit colour	Good varieties
Green	Careless, Invicta
Red	Pax, Rokula, Whinham's Industry
White	Langley Gage
Yellow	Bedford Yellow, Golden Drop, Leveller



Planting gooseberries

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

Gooseberry bushes should be planted around 1.5m apart (5ft). They fruit on older wood and on the base of young wood, and can even be trained into cordons and fans against walls or fences if space is tight.

Dig a hole 60x60cm (2x2ft) and 30cm (1ft) deep. Add a layer of organic matter into the base of the hole and dig in. Place the roots of the gooseberry bush in the planting hole at the same depth as they were originally growing, so that the old soil mark is at soil level.

Now mix in more soil improver to the soil and fill in the planting hole. Add [a general granular plant food](#) and water in well. Finally, add a 5cm (2in) deep mulch of well rotted garden

compost, bark or other bulky organic material around the root area.

Container growing

Gooseberries grow and crop perfectly well in a large pot or other container. You will need a pot of at least 30-38cm (12-15in) in diameter, filled with **a good quality potting compost**. Obviously, plants in containers will need regular watering and feeding throughout the growing season to ensure good results and a large crop.

How to care for gooseberries

Water the newly planted bushes during the first year if the weather is dry. In subsequent years, watering when the fruit is swelling may be needed if the soil is not already moist.

For maximum crops, feed each year in March with **a suitable granular plant food**, and top up the mulch to retain soil moisture at the roots.

Prune your gooseberry bush annually between late autumn and late winter, cutting back new growth to two buds and main shoots (leaders) by one-third. Pruning new growth to 5 leaves in summer will also encourage a bigger crop the following year.

Covering plants with netting will protect the fruit from birds and may also help prevent damage from gooseberry sawfly caterpillars.

Harvesting

A few weeks before they are ripe, remove alternate fruit and use them for cooking. Leave the remaining fruit to ripen on the plant, but don't leave them until they become too soft. The fruit tastes delicious straight from the bush, but it can also be frozen. You can expect a yield of about 5kg (11lb) from each gooseberry bush.

Flowering season(s)	Spring
Foliage season(s)	Spring, Summer
Sunlight	Partial shade, Full sun
Soil type	Chalky, Clay, Loamy, Sandy
Soil pH	Neutral
Soil moisture	Moist but well-drained
Ultimate height	Up to 1.8m (6ft)
Ultimate spread	Up to 1.5m (5ft)
Time to ultimate height	5-10 years

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

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

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

How to grow pears

Cultivating pears

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

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

Pear varieties

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

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

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



Rootstocks

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

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

Pollinating pears

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

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

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

Planting pear trees

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

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

Now mix in more organic matter to the soil and fill in the planting hole. Stake the tree with a rigid tree stake and two tree ties so that it is fully supported against the prevailing winds. Water in well, apply a **granular**

general feed over the soil around the tree and add a 5cm (2in) deep mulch of well-rotted garden compost or bark chippings around the root area. Large patio pots (minimum of 40-50cm/16-20in in diameter) can be used to grow pear bush trees. Use **John Innes No 3 Compost** with soil for pears trees, as its weight will help with stability.

How to care for pears

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

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

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

Pruning pear trees

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

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

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

- Free-standing trees:** Prune in winter (December/January). Cut shoots back to about 4 buds to encourage new flowering and fruiting spurs to develop. Thin out excess spurs.

- Trained trees (espaliers, cordons and pyramids):** Prune in late summer, when the new growth is cut back to 2 buds. They may benefit from a second prune in winter, when some of the older spurs can be thinned out.

Thinning fruit

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

Harvesting pears

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

easily with the stalk attached.

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

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

Flowering season(s)	Spring
Foliage season(s)	Spring, Summer, Autumn
Sunlight	Full sun
Soil type	Chalky, Clay, Loamy, Sandy
Soil pH	Neutral
Soil moisture	Moist but well-drained
Ultimate height	Up to 4.2m (14ft) depending on rootstock
Ultimate spread	Up to 1.8m (6ft) depending on rootstock
Time to ultimate height	5-10 years

Plums, and their closely related damsons and gages, are all easy fruits to grow at home. They produce large (often too large!) reliable crops of fruit, which is available in a range of coloured skins and flesh. Dessert plums and gages produce sweet flesh and can be eaten fresh straight from the tree. The more tart culinary plums and gages, and damsons make delicious jams, preserves, pies and crumbles.

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

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

How to grow plums, damsons and gages

Cultivating plums, damsons and gages

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

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

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

Plum, damson and gage varieties

Plums are large, usually soft-fleshed – perfect for eating or cooking, depending on the variety. Gages are small, round and generally very sweet. Damsons are hardy and have a tart flavour, which is excellent when cooked.

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

Plums varieties

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



Damson varieties

- Farleigh, Merryweather, Prune Damson



Plum, damson and gage pollination

Many plum, damson and gage varieties are self-fertile, meaning you only need to grow one tree, rather than having to worry about pollination from another variety that flowers at

the same time. So it is a better and easier choice to stick to self-fertile varieties.

Rootstocks for plums, damsons and gages

Plum, damson and gage trees are available grafted onto different rootstocks, which control the overall size the tree will grow to as well as how early in their life they start fruiting. The eventual size will vary, depending on your soil; on heavy clay and fertile soils the trees will grow slightly bigger.

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

Planting plums, damsons and gages

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

To start planting plum trees, dig a hole 60x60cm (2x2ft) and 30cm (12in) deep. Add a layer of organic matter - such as compost or well-rotted manure - to the base of the hole and dig in. Place the roots of the tree in the planting hole and

adjust the planting depth so that the old soil mark on the trunk is level with the soil surface.

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

How to care for plums, damsons and gages

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

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

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

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

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

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

How to prune plums, damsons and gages

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

Pruning must always be carried out when the tree is in full growth – usually any time from May to the end of August. Pruning at other times of year risks infections from disease – particularly bacterial canker, which can kill even fully grown trees.

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

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

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

Bush

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

Pyramid

Shorten the central main stem by around two-thirds early in the tree's life. Repeat every year until the tree has reached 1.8m (6ft) high on Pixy rootstock and 2.4m (8ft) on St Julien A. After that, shorten it to 2.5cm (1in) or less each May to keep the tree at the same height. Vertical shoots at the top of the tree competing with the central main stem should be removed.

Fans

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

Thinning fruit

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

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

How to harvest plums, damsons and gages

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

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

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

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

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

Equipment list for growing rhubarb

To grow delicious rhubarb, you will need:

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

Rhubarb varieties



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

- Rhubarb 'Hawkes Champagne' AGM: a compact, high-yielding variety, producing bright red stems with a sweet taste.
- Rhubarb 'Timperley Early' AGM: bred especially for indoor forcing, this variety also grows well unforced, producing an early harvest of pink stems streaked with green.
- Rhubarb 'Victoria': one of the oldest varieties but still popular, producing a heavy crop of pink-tinged green stems with a good balance of sweetness and acidity.
- Rhubarb 'Glaskin's Perpetual': a late-cropping variety producing large, juicy pink- and green-streaked stems with a sweet flavour.

Where to grow rhubarb

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

How to grow rhubarb

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

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

1. Clear the area of all weeds and stones.
2. Plant the rhubarb crowns 1m (3ft) apart with 1.2m (4ft) between rows.
3. Plant the crowns with their buds just below the surface of the soil.

Caring for rhubarb

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

- In spring, cover the plants with fleece to protect the new stems from sudden cold snaps. If the stems are caught by frost, they are likely to blacken and wilt, but the plants themselves will survive and produce more stems.
- Feed the plants with a **balanced fertiliser** in spring.
- Water regularly in dry spells.
- Deadhead any flowers as soon as they appear, to focus all the plants' energy into producing stems and leaves.
- Once the foliage has died back in autumn, cut off all old leaves and compost them. Provided the soil is well-drained, the plants will not be harmed by cold winter weather. In fact, the crowns need a period of temperatures below 3°C (37°F) to stimulate new growth in spring.

- Mulch around the plants in autumn with a thick layer of organic compost or well-rotted farmyard manure. Take care not to bury the crowns when mulching, or they may rot.
- Rhubarb plants need to be divided every five to six years to rejuvenate them. In winter, when the plants are dormant, dig up any crowns that need to be divided. Using the sharp edge of a spade, cut the crowns into three or four separate segments, making sure each segment has at least one bud. Replant each segment as a new plant.

Forcing rhubarb

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

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

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

Rhubarb problems to look out for

Rhubarb is generally trouble-free, but in wet soil it can suffer from crown rot. This causes the crowns to turn brown and soften, and the rot may

spread to stems and leaves. Dig up all affected plants as soon as possible and destroy them.

Harvesting rhubarb

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

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

When to pick rhubarb

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

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

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

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



FAQs

When is the best time to pick rhubarb?

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

Can I grow rhubarb in a pot?

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

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 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.
4. 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.
5. 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

.

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

7. Cut the canes down to 25cm (10in) above ground level, to encourage them to produce plenty of fruit-bearing shoots.

Growing raspberries in pots

1. Choose a large container, at least 60cm (2ft) in diameter.

2. Fill the container with a soil-based compost such as John Innes no 3.

3. Plant up to six raspberry canes per pot, spaced equally around the edge of the pot.

How to care for raspberries

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

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

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

How to prune raspberries

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

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

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

Common raspberry pests and diseases

Raspberry cane blight

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

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

Raspberry beetle

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

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

Key features of raspberries

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

How to grow peach trees

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

Types of peach trees to grow

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

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



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

- ‘Bonanza’: crops in late summer with large red and yellow skinned fruits with yellow flesh.

- Sibley's Patio Peach 'Melred': the sweet yellow flesh parts easily from the stone. Magenta red flowers.
- 'Garden Lady': a later fruiting variety with yellow and red skins and yellow flesh.

What you'll need to grow peach trees

Peaches do best grown in well-drained, fertile soil. If you have heavy clay, you may find they grow best in a large container, such as the

variety 'Bonanza' - but you can improve drainage by adding mulch every year. You can enrich all soils by adding **well-rotted manure**.

To grow peaches in a container you will need:

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

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

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

- Polythene sheeting shelter: in winter this protects the tree from peach leaf curl.
- Horticultural fleece: in early spring this protects the delicate blossom from frost. Remove it during the day for any early pollinating insects to reach the flowers.

- Strong netting: from April through to harvesting because birds love to eat the peaches off the tree.

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

Where to plant and place your peach trees

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

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

Caring and nurturing your peach trees

Follow these care tips for growing successful crops of peaches:

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

- Thin out any badly placed or misshapen fruits from the growing clusters to allow the remaining fruits space to develop. This should be done when the fruits are about 1cm wide. Aim to leave about 15cm between each peach.
- The fruits are ready to harvest when their skins have coloured up and the flesh around the stalk yields slightly. Cup your hand around the peach and remove it from the tree by giving a slight twist. Peaches do not store well and are best eaten when freshly picked.
- Prune peach trees immediately after harvesting. Because peaches flower on one year-old growth, remove as much old growth as possible. Cut back stems which have fruited to a new shoot, and tie in the new growth to the support to replace the old growth.
- Re-pot container grown peach trees approximately every three years.
- After the first year, never prune peach trees in the winter, as this can lead to disease.
- Peaches tend to be self-fertile, so you should harvest enough fruit even with one plant.

Common pests and diseases with peach trees

What is peach leaf curl?

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

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

Can aphids attack my peach trees?

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

Frequently asked questions about peach trees

Do you need two peach trees to produce fruit?

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

How big do peach trees get?

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

What is the lifespan of a peach tree?

Peach trees live for an average of 12 years.

Where do peach trees grow best?

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

Key features of peach trees

Botanical Name	Prunus persica
-----------------------	----------------

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

How to grow cherry trees

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

Types of cherry trees to grow

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

- *Prunus* 'Accolade' gives interest throughout the year, with large pink flowers in the spring, and bright orange-red leaves in the autumn.

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



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

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

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

What you'll need to grow cherry trees

A wide range of cultivars of cherry tree are available to buy online. You'll also find cherry trees for sale at most garden centres. Choose one with

an appropriate rootstock for the space you have available - rootstocks limit the size of the mature plant.

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

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

To plant the cherry tree:

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

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

Where to plant and place your cherry trees

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

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

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

Caring and nurturing your cherry trees

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

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

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

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

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



Common pests and diseases with cherry trees

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

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

Why do my cherries have small holes in them?

Cherry fruit fly can lay eggs in young fruit, and when these hatch the worm-like larvae eat the flesh and then exit the fruit, leaving a small hole. You can prevent this by encouraging birds into the garden (protect with netting when fruits are forming). Squish small populations by hand, and spray with **BugClear™ Ultra Gun!** If the problem persists.

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

Canker is a serious disease which can kill a cherry tree and can spread to other trees. Remove infected sections of the plant using secateurs or a pruning saw, cleaning the tool carefully before using again. Destroy the affected material.

Frequently asked questions about cherry trees

Do cherry trees have thorns?

No, cherry trees are thornless.

Can you grow a cherry tree from a cherry pip?

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

Are cherry trees poisonous to horses?

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

Key features of cherry trees

Botanical Name	<i>Prunus spp.</i>
Plant Type	Woody perennial
Family	Rosaceae
Light	Full to partial sun

Exposure	
Soil pH	Neutral to slightly acidic
Flowering Time	April-May
Flower Colour	White, light and dark pink

How to grow and care for fig trees

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

Top six fig tree care tips

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

indoors in greenhouses are more likely to produce two crops in a year as they get enough reliable warmth.

Essential shopping list

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

How to plant fig trees

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

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

Growing fig trees in containers

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

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

Growing fig trees in containers

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

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

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

Growing fig trees indoors

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

Caring for fig trees



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

Pruning fan-trained fig trees:

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

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

Pruning free-standing fig trees:

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

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

Feeding fig trees:

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

Fig tree problems:

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

Harvesting figs



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

1. Signs of ripeness: Figs are ready to harvest when they hang down on the branch, feel soft to the touch, and emit a sweet fragrance. Ripe figs will come away from the branch easily. They do not ripen after being picked, so wait until they are ready before harvesting.
2. Protecting your crop: Birds and other wildlife are attracted to ripe figs. Use a wildlife-safe crop protection net with holes no larger than 4mm to protect the fruit. Ensure the net is pulled tightly over the tree or use a frame to create a cover.

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

Propagating fig trees

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

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

Growing a fig tree from a fig seed is possible but can be tricky as the **germination** success rate is low. To find out whether your fig seeds are viable (i.e. likely to germinate), cut the fig in half, scoop out the flesh containing the seeds and place them in a jar of water for a couple of days. Viable seeds will sink to the bottom of the jar, while non-viable seeds will float. Fill a seed tray with well-draining **seed compost** and sow the viable seeds on the surface. Place in a sunny spot and water regularly to keep the compost moist. Seeds should germinate within 2 weeks. Once the seedlings are large enough to handle, prick them out and pot them on into individual pots filled with multipurpose compost. It takes several years for seed-grown fig trees to produce fruit.

FAQs

When do fig trees produce fruit?

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

How long does a fig tree take to grow?

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

Can I grow a fig tree indoors?

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

Can fig trees grow in shade?

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

When buying an apple tree, remember that different trees will produce different types of apples. The four main types are cider apples, crab apples, dessert (eating) apples and culinary (cooking) apples. Choose a type that will meet your culinary needs.

Consider adding a naturally derived peat-free compost to your new plants that has been specifically formulated to support growth in fruit. Make sure the compost covers all of the roots and give it a thorough watering.

Growing fruit in February

If you didn't quite get your fix from all of that pruning in January, then you're in luck! There's plenty more to be done. February is an ideal time to prune:

- Autumn raspberries - cut them all to just above ground level.
- Apple and pear trees - whilst they are still dormant and before the warmer weather arrives in March.
- Blackcurrants - remove old wood to promote good air circulation between the branches.
- Citrus plants - remove the spindly growth.
- Mulberries – remove the dead and broken branches.
- Nectarines and peaches – specifically the very young ones and where they are being trained to shape. Cut about one third from each branch, to just above a bud.

Treat any early flowering plants with an organic plant feed formulated to nurture tastier and more abundant produce.

If a cold snap is forecast (as they so often are in February) cover any apricots, nectarines, plums and strawberries with horticultural fleece. This will protect the blossoming flowers from frost and will encourage

strawberries to flower earlier than usual. Remove the fleece once the weather has warmed to allow pollinators to get to the flowers.

Finally, make sure you weed around all fruit plants. In particular, look out for perennial weeds which should be removed before they have a chance to establish and form strong roots. If you have particularly invasive weeds, consider using a naturally derived weed control product.

What fruit to harvest in February

Although technically a vegetable, when it comes to the kitchen, rhubarb is usually treated as a fruit. Easy to grow, rhubarb crowns need to be

divided every few years to reinvigorate them, so ask your neighbours to see if someone you know is planning to divide their clump.

Remember - only rhubarb stalks can be eaten; the leaves are highly poisonous and should be removed and composted.

Herbs and spices

If your herbs and spices cabinet is starting to look bare then you're in luck, as there are plenty of herbs that can be picked at this time of year. When it comes to choosing what herbs to plant in February, those that are leafy and green tend to be most suitable.

What herbs to plant in February

Seeds of the following herbs can be sown from February through to early spring. All of them will produce leafy green growth which can be harvested later in the year:

Plant seedlings of the following

How to grow basil

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

Types of basil to grow

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

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

Essential equipment to grow basil

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

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

Where to grow basil

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

How to sow basil

You can sow basil indoors from late February onwards.

1. Fill pots with multipurpose compost and firm down.
2. Sprinkle seed thinly over the top of the compost. Basil seeds germinate easily, so don't sow many more than you need.
3. Cover the seeds with a light layer of compost.
4. To avoid disturbing the seeds, stand the pots in a tray filled with water so that the compost can soak up water from below.
5. Place the pots in a propagator at a temperature of 15-25°C (59-77°F). Alternatively, place a clear plastic bag over each pot and place the pots somewhere warm with bright indirect light until the seeds germinate.
6. Water regularly but lightly.

7. Once the seeds have germinated, take them out of the propagator, or remove the plastic bags and let the seedlings grow on until they have developed at least two true leaves (these are the second pair of leaves to appear).

8. Hold each seedling by a leaf (never hold the stems, as these are easily damaged) and ease it out of the compost, using a pencil or something similar to help. Repot each seedling into its own individual pot.

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

Caring for basil

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

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

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

Slugs and snails love basil and can devour entire plants, There are various ways to protect plants, including copper tape around pots,

crushed egg shells, beer traps and sawdust, but physically checking the plants with a torch last thing at night is often the most effective solution.

Harvesting basil

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

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

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

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

Storing basil leaves

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

- To freeze basil leaves, remove all leaf stalks and wash the leaves. Blanch the leaves in boiling water for a couple of seconds, then drain and rinse in iced water. Pat the leaves dry and place in an airtight container in a freezer.
- To dry basil leaves in an oven, turn it on to its lowest heat, then place the basil leaves on a baking tray and leave them in the oven for two to four hours until they crumble when bent.

- To air-dry basil, cut leafy shoots with long stems, tie them in bunches and hang the bunches somewhere cool and well ventilated, in bright but indirect light. Air-drying basil takes about a month.

Common pest or disease problems of basil plants

Black spots on basil leaves

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

- Avoid splashing the leaves when watering.

Powdery mildew

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

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

Fusarium wilt

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

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

Slugs and snails

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

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

Glasshouse whitefly

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

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

Glasshouse red spider mite

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

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

Key features of basil

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

How to grow and care for coriander

Coriander has recently become a very popular herb to grow at home. Grown mainly for its green leaves which are sometimes known as Cilantro and also its spicy seeds, this herb is a must in salads and as a fragrant green addition to Indian, Thai and Chinese curries. The seeds are a vital ingredient of curry powder.

Coriander varieties

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



What you'll need to start growing coriander

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

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

Cultivating coriander

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

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

Sowing coriander

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

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

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

How to care for coriander

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

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

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

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

Harvesting coriander

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

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

Common problems, pests and diseases in coriander

Slugs and snails

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

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

Aphids

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

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

Bolting

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

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

Key features of coriander

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

Chives are a low maintenance, easy to grow perennial herb, grown for their onion-scented tasting leaves. These are a delicious addition to salads, and can be added to many other savoury dishes.

Their taste is milder than onions, so they are the perfect choice for soups and savoury dishes – where their more subtle flavour is needed.

Although mainly grown for their leaves, chive plants also produce highly attractive pinky-purple flowers. These are also edible and are an attractive salad garnish. They also attract bees and butterflies.

Because chives are compact, they are ideal for edging paths and borders, as well as growing in mixed borders, vegetable gardens, herb gardens and in containers.

How to grow chives

Cultivation

Chives will grow perfectly well in a position in full sun or in partial shade. They grow best in a fertile, moist but well-drained soil. Dig in plenty of organic matter – such as [garden compost](#), [well-rotted manure](#) or other [soil improver](#) –

especially in very well-drained sandy soils to hold moisture. Add grit or sharp sand to heavy clay soils to improve drainage if needed.

Chives varieties

The usual chives grown as a herb, is the straight species, *Allium schoenoprasum*. You may also find Staro and Fine Leaved, which have a milder flavour, and Forescate, with a slight garlic flavour and pale pink flowers.



Sowing chives

You can sow chives seeds thinly outdoors in spring where you want them to grow. Prepare the soil well with added compost or other soil improver and rake to a fine tilth before sowing. Thin out the young plants to 23-30cm (9-12in) apart when large enough to handle.

Chives can be sown indoors from March to June in pots or cell or plug trays filled with seed sowing compost at a temperature of 18-21C (65-70F). Lightly cover the seed with more compost and keep moist. When seedlings are large enough to handle, transplant into 7.5-10cm (3-4in) pots in

bunches of 4-6 seedlings per pot. Grow on the seedlings in cooler conditions of around 10C (50F) and plant outside when

the last frosts are over, after hardening off – gradually acclimatising them to outdoor conditions – for 10-14 days.

Planting chives

You can buy young chive plants from garden centres, which can be planted outside any time of year.

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

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

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

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

How to care for chives

Chives are very easy to look after and need minimal maintenance.

Keep the soil moist by watering regularly during prolonged dry periods in summer.

Feed with [a general granular plant food](#) each spring.

Plants may become congested over time and need rejuvenating every 3 to 5 years. Carefully lift, divide the plant

into smaller portions and replant in well-prepared soil in spring.

To keep the plants productive and with the best-flavoured leaves, remove flowers as they form or cut them when young for brightening up salads.

When chives die back in late autumn, clear away all dead leaves and any other debris.

Harvesting chives

Harvest leaves as needed with scissors, cutting them back close to the base of the plant. The more regularly they're cut, the more new leaves they will produce.

Chives are best used fresh, as soon as they are cut. They can be frozen by cutting them up and packing into ice cube trays with water.

Flowering season(s)	Summer
Foliage season(s)	Spring, Summer, Autumn
Sunlight	Partial shade, Full sun
Soil type	Chalky, Clay, Loamy, Sandy
Soil pH	Neutral
Soil moisture	Moist but well-drained
Ultimate height	40cm (16in)
Ultimate spread	30cm (12in)

Time to ultimate height

6-9 months

Dill is a useful and attractive annual or biennial herb, which is quite similar to [fennel](#), although its aniseed/licuorice flavour is more subtle/delicate compared to fennel.

The ornamental, feathery dill leaves can be chopped into soups and salads, used to flavour rice and is the perfect accompanying flavour for fish dishes – particularly salmon and gravlax – and, of course, pickling with gherkins to make dill pickles.

The plants produce sprays of yellow flower in summer and the seeds can also be used in cooking. Grow dill in large containers or the middle of beds and borders where its feathery foliage forms an attractive foil for other plants.

How to grow dill

Cultivating dill

Dill needs a position in full sun. It grows best in a fertile, moist but well-drained soil. Dig in plenty of organic matter – such as [garden compost](#), [well-rotted manure](#) or other [soil improver](#) – especially in very well-drained sandy soils to hold moisture.

Dill varieties

Although there are several different varieties, such as 'Bouquet' and 'Dukat', most suppliers simply sell "dill seeds".



Sowing dill

Dill seeds can be sown indoors from early April individually in cell trays or small pots at a temperature of 20°C (68°F), or outside where you want them to grow from May to July. Make regular sowings for a successional harvest and a long picking period.

Dill does not grow well when transplanted, so don't try to prick out young seedlings.

Gradually acclimatise indoor sown plants to outdoor conditions for 7 to 10 days before planting outdoors when all risk of frost has passed.

Thin seedlings to or plant out at 30cm (12in) apart.

How to care for dill

It may be necessary to keep the soil moist by watering regularly, especially during prolonged dry periods in summer, but don't overwater and allow plants to sit in very wet soil or compost.

Feed by applying **a general granular plant food** to the soil when sowing or planting out. Liquid feeds throughout the

summer will help increase the amount of leaves produced and help keep the soil moist.

Plants may need support with bamboo canes or twiggy sticks in windy areas and gardens.

Removing developing flower heads will prolong the supply and flavour of the leaves. But the seeds themselves are also useful and can be used in cooking – especially as an ingredient in curry powder.

Being a biennial, plants will die back to ground level in winter. When this happens, tidy up the plants by cutting back flower stems and removing dead and dying foliage. Depending on the severity of the winter, and how well the soil is drained, they should come back for a second year. If not, just sow some more!

Harvesting dill

Dill leaves can be harvested at any time they are available, as soon as the plants have a minimum of 4 to 5 leaves. Pinch off the leaves or cut them off with scissors.

Picking the leaves regularly will help keep plants producing lots of fresh leaves and delay flowering. They can be used fresh or frozen or dried for use over winter.

For dill seeds, allow the flowers to fade and harvest once the seed heads have fully ripened and the seeds have turned brown. Seeds can be used fresh or dried for winter use.

Flowering season(s)	Summer
Foliage season(s)	Spring, Summer, Autumn
Sunlight	Full sun
Soil type	Chalky, Clay, Loamy, Sandy
Soil pH	Neutral
Soil moisture	Moist but well-drained
Ultimate height	90cm (3ft)
Ultimate spread	30cm (12in)
Time to ultimate height	3-4 months

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

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

How to grow parsley

Cultivating parsley

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

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

Parsley varieties

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

Common parsley: Bravour, Champion Moss Curled, Envy

French parsley: Festival 68, Italian

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



Sowing parsley

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

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

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

Planting parsley

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

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

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

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

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

How to care for parsley

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

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

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

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

Harvesting parsley

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

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

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

Parsley growing conditions

Flowering season(s)	Summer
Foliage season(s)	Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter
Sunlight	Partial shade, Full sun

Soil type	Clay, Loamy
Soil pH	Neutral
Soil moisture	Moist but well-drained
Ultimate height	Up to 20cm (8in)
Ultimate spread	Up to 15cm (6in)
Time to ultimate height	3-4 months

Both marjoram and oregano are versatile and essential herbs that good cooks will always have to hand. They are perennial herbs and a plant of each will provide lots of tasty leaves – and even their colourful flowers – for cooking.

Marjoram or oregano?

Marjoram and oregano are both very attractive garden plants, especially when flowering, and there are also varieties with golden coloured leaves.

The commonly grown marjorams are sweet marjoram (*Origanum majorana*) and pot marjoram (*Origanum onites*); oregano is *Origanum vulgare*. Both are popular in Italian,

Greek and Mexican dishes, soups, stuffings, pasta and tomato sauces and to flavour oils and vinegars.

As for tastes, most marjorams have a more delicate, sweeter flavour than the stronger tasting and pungent leaves of oregano, which have a definite spicy taste. Oregano is typically used to flavour foods that already have strong flavours. Marjorams provide background flavours rather than dominant ones, and most people say that sweet marjoram is the best marjoram for cooking purposes. Because of its strong taste,

many dried oreganos bought in shops also contains some marjoram.

Cultivating marjoram and oregano

As marjoram and oregano are natives of the Mediterranean, they need a warm, sunny position. They are fairly drought tolerant and need a well-drained, humus-rich, preferably alkaline or neutral, soil.

As plants can be killed by overly wet soils, and if your soil is heavy, poorly draining clay, marjoram and oregano are perfect for growing in containers of **John Innes No.2 compost** or **multi-purpose compost with added John Innes.**

Marjoram and oregano varieties

- **Origanum 'Kent Beauty'**: very ornamental, but not strong flavour, with grey-green leaves and very showy pinky-purple bracts surrounding the flowers.
- **Origanum majorana**: sweet marjoram - pinky-purple flowers.
- **Origanum onites**: pot marjoram - dark green leaves and pink flowers.

- **Origanum vulgare**: oregano - dark green leaves and pink flowers.
- **Origanum vulgare Aureum**: golden oregano - bright yellow leaves and pink flowers.
- **Origanum vulgare Aureum Crispum**: crinkly golden leaves and pink flowers.

- **Origanum vulgare Compactum:** compact oregano with pink flowers.
- **Origanum vulgare Nanum:** dwarf oregano - compact growth, small leaves and whitish flowers.
- **Origanum vulgare subsp. hirtum:** Greek oregano - bright green leaves and white flowers.



Sowing marjoram and oregano seeds

You can grow both marjoram and oregano from seed. Sow seeds indoors from February to May with warmth – preferably in a heated propagator – in small pots. When seedlings are large enough to handle, prick out 3 into an 7.5-9cm (3-3.5in) pot of **multi-purpose compost with added John Innes.**

Grow indoors until early summer or until all danger of frost has passed, then plant outdoors.

Planting marjoram and oregano

Plant small plants in very well-drained soil, with added compost and/or grit to improve drainage. Although plants are

fairly drought tolerant when established, they need watering in until well established.

Add a mulch of horticultural grit or gravel around plants to prevent moisture sitting at the base of the plant.

Suggested planting locations and garden types

Flower borders and beds, patios, containers, city and courtyard gardens, cottage and informal gardens, herb gardens.

How to care for marjoram and oregano

Once established, plants in the ground will rarely need watering, apart from when growing in very light soils or during very prolonged periods of dry or drought conditions in summer.

Water plants growing in pots regularly, but avoid overwatering or the roots may die. Raise pots off the ground in winter to aid drainage. Give plants **a liquid feed** during summer to improve growth and flavour.

Keep the plants compact and bushy by trimming them back after the flowers fade. Also cut back any dead stems to their base.

To ensure winter harvests of leaves, place potted plants in a well-lit position under cover. You can divide older plants in spring or after flowering in late summer.

Harvesting

Marjoram and oregano can be picked all year round, but the flavour is strongest during summer. Pick the leaves before the flower buds open.

Marjoram leaves are generally used fresh, whereas those of oregano can also be dried or frozen and stored.

Flowering season(s)	Summer
Foliage season(s)	Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter
Sunlight	Full sun
Soil type	Chalky, Clay, Loamy, Sandy
Soil pH	Alkaline or neutral
Soil moisture	Well-drained
Ultimate height	30cm (12in)
Ultimate spread	Up to 50cm (20in)
Time to ultimate height	2-3 years

If you're a foodie with a knack for stirring out a pesto dish, then what better way to add a personal touch to a home-cooked meal than with your own homegrown herbs?

Basil, thyme, rosemary – there are [so many herbs you can grow at home indoors](#) all year round to use in cooking, or even just to update your household interior. In another article, we talked about [the benefits of having greenery in the home](#) – such as health and even productivity. Herb tree in the office anyone?

Providing a light source

Growing herbs indoors is convenient, easy and saves you money off supermarket produce and is great for a house without a garden. All you need is to ensure the right

environment for your micro-garden and you can have a herb garden at your reach all year round.

In terms of light, the aim is to achieve approximately 12-18 hours of light with a minimum of 8 hours direct, bright light. This does depend on the herbs you wish to grow. For example, basil and coriander generally need more light than others. The good news is you can mix natural daylight with artificial light to ensure your indoor herb garden receives enough light to flourish. If light levels are low (as they often can be in Britain, especially in winter), give them a boost. You can do this by placing two or three fluorescent lights above your indoor herb garden. Doing so will increase growth and mean you have more delicious ingredients at your fingertips.

Compost

You may have heard that most herbs grow better in poor soil. What this means is that some soils allow herbs to develop a stronger flavour. It's the essential oils in herbs that make them so tasty. Most general, multipurpose composts are perfect for growing herbs indoors in containers. For long-term herbs, such as rosemary, you could use a loam-based compost - go for John Innes No 1 or 2.

Picking the right containers for your herbs

You can create your indoor garden out of pretty much any container – providing it has good drainage. Alternatively, you can even create a self-watering planter out of beer bottles. The DIY fans out there may wish to recycle used pasta sauce jars or jam jars that you can use in this project. You could even try out these ideas for labelling your herbs.

Feeding and watering your herb garden

Depending on which compost you have chosen, your herbs will need feeding after about 5-6 weeks. As you are growing your herbs in a small container, the roots are limited to a small space and will absorb nutrients quickly. We suggest feeding with a half-strength feed every fortnight.

When you water, do so until there is some spillage out of the bottom of the container, but make sure not to overwater - most herbs generally prefer things on the dry side and won't tolerate waterlogging.

Enjoying your herbs

It is important to wait until your herbs are well grown before you start harvesting from them to ensure you don't affect the growth. The process normally takes about 4-6 weeks depending on the type of herb you are growing, for example, basil (the perfect ingredient to any pasta dish) is at its best when harvested after a few weeks and well before flowers are produced. Tip: You will get your highest essential oil level when harvesting towards the end of a dark period. As a general rule do not pick over one-third of the plant at one time to enable it to regenerate.

There are three main types of parsley. Flat-leaved parsley has a strong flavour, curly-leaved parsley looks pretty, and Hamburg parsley has a flavoursome root. All of them can be grown from seed and planted outside as soon as the last frosts are over.

Coriander will usually bolt in warm weather. Bolting means that the plant has started to flower and produce seed. Flowers, seeds and leaves of

coriander can all be eaten. Alternatively, you can allow the green seed heads to dry out, harvesting them when they go brown and resowing them for a new batch of coriander plants.

Basil is a tender plant and should be sown and kept indoors until all risk of frost has passed. It is also a favourite of slugs and snails. It will grow indoors as happily as it will in the garden, so if you have room on the kitchen windowsill, you may find it easier to grow there instead.

Growing herbs and spices in February

Alongside planting and harvesting, there are some maintenance tasks which should be undertaken with herbs early in the year.

If you have rosemary or lavender, monitor the plants for rosemary beetles (you'll know them by their metallic-looking shell) and remove them on sight before they have a chance to make a meal of your plants.

Check that the containers or barriers around lemon balm and mint plants are intact. They will both go rampant if their roots are not contained. Although they're beneficial for the local wildlife, they will quickly crowd out other plants. You should also consider repotting any herbs that are in containers and adding in some new peat-free compost to provide a fresh nutrient boost. This only needs to be done every two to three years, or when you notice the plant has lost its vigour.

How to grow peppermint

Peppermint, or *Mentha × piperita*, is super easy to grow. It's an incredibly useful plant in the kitchen, with the aromatic leaves giving a refreshing flavour to food and drinks. The flowers attract beneficial wildlife to the

garden, and peppermint plants are rumoured to deter mice, rats and mosquitos! Follow our peppermint growing guide to find out how to grow peppermint in your garden.

Types of peppermint plant to grow

Peppermint is a cross between two other species of mint - spearmint and watermint. It's grown worldwide but originates from Europe and the Middle East.

It's also a perennial plant, growing to about 90cm (36") tall. Peppermint has distinctive smooth, square shaped stems, with dark green pointed leaves and dark leaf veins. The delicate lilac-purple coloured flowers will appear throughout the summer months, and will teem with bees, butterflies, overflies and lacewings in the sun.

There are some stunning cultivars of peppermint to try:

- Mentha × piperita 'Black peppermint' plant. Very dark leaves with a purple tinge and a strong flavour.
- Mentha × piperita 'Candy mint'. Slightly reddish stems.
- Mentha × piperita 'Chocolate Mint'. The leaves and stems when rubbed between the fingers smell like a popular chocolate mint sweet.
- Mentha × piperita 'Citrata'. Lots of different varieties, including basil, grapefruit, lemon and orange.
- Mentha × piperita 'Crispa'. Wrinkley leaves.
- Mentha × piperita 'Lavender Mint'. Lavender scented leaves.
- Mentha × piperita 'Lime Mint'. Lime aroma and flavour.
- Mentha × piperita 'Variegata'. Usual green leaves with a lighter pattern.

Peppermint will benefit from being cut frequently, so choose a cultivar which you think you will use a lot in the kitchen. Of course, you can just add prunings to the compost heap, but it's great to make use of the

pungent foliage if you can! Don't be shy when harvesting - cut stems to within 3cm (1") of the ground, ideally just above a pair of leaves.

Add peppermint leaves to drinks, salads, peas and new potatoes. They can also be used to make flavoured ice cubes, by simply removing a few leaves from the stem, and immersing them in water in an ice cube tray - allow to freeze and then pop a cube or two into a glass of freshly poured lemonade. Peppermint leaves also make a wonderful tea, great for digestion.

What you'll need to grow peppermint plants

Peppermint has a much stronger flavour than spearmint. So, what's the difference between spearmint and peppermint plants? Spearmint, also known as common mint and garden mint, is related to peppermint. However, peppermint is distinguished by its typically purple-brown stems, and leaves which are much thinner than those of spearmint.

And can you grow peppermint outdoors? Yes, of course. Peppermint can be quickly and easily propagated from a piece of another plant. Simply remove the plant from the container, or dig up a clump from the border, and use a sharp spade to divide the clump into smaller sections.

Part-fill a freestanding container with **Levington® Multi Purpose Compost**. Alternatively, cut away the bottom of a container, and place it into the soil, deep enough to keep the rim of the container above soil level, and part-fill with **compost**. This will stop the roots from spreading, which they will do very quickly if allowed, crowding out other plants.

Replant the clumps in the container, backfill with soil, and water well until established.

Peppermint plants are best planted out in the spring, ready to put on new growth which can be harvested throughout the summer and autumn. They can also be grown on a windowsill in a small pot, all year round.

Where to plant and place your peppermint plants

Because peppermint grows from rampant roots, give careful thought to how you will restrict its growth. The fleshy roots can grow very thickly and re-grow from short pieces, so don't allow it to get out of control. It's not difficult to dig out if it does spread, but better to prevent the problem, as by the time it has taken over, other plants may have suffered.

As with other herbs grown for culinary use, keep them within easy reach of the kitchen door. Make sure that the soil is moisture retentive, enriching with **Levington® Multi Purpose Compost** if needed.

Peppermint is hardy and can withstand repeated frosts, so don't worry about providing winter protection. It also isn't fussy when it comes to sunlight, so is a good plant for a tricky location where there's a lot of shade or poorly drained soil.

Caring and nurturing your peppermint plants

Peppermint is fine in full shade, or with full sun, or anywhere in-between. It's a very versatile plant and should be planted out into soil which has been enriched with a **general multipurpose compost**. This will help the plant to retain moisture. Make sure you water peppermint plants well in hot weather, as they do prefer damp conditions.

Cut back the entire plant to ground level in the autumn, and then mulch the surface to provide protection and food to the plant. Choose a mulch

that will provide the peppermint with nitrogen, such as **Levington® Composted Bark**, which will encourage strong green growth.

Prune during the growing season if needed to maintain shape and dig out any roots which have spread.



Common pests and diseases with peppermint plants

Peppermint is a resilient plant, and it will withstand attacks from a lot of pests and diseases. There are just a few worrying problems to look out for.

Why is my peppermint plant wilting?

Verticillium wilt can cause a peppermint plant to suddenly collapse, especially in hot weather. This is a fungal disease characterised by dark markings on (and in) the stem, as well as yellowing lower leaves. Remove and destroy any affected material, and ensure the peppermint plant receives adequate watering and a feed in the autumn.

What are the pretty metallic green insects on my peppermint plant?

Unfortunately, these beautiful bugs are the destructive Mint leaf beetle. This pest will create holes in the leaves as they chew on the foliage. The leaves then don't look attractive. However, peppermint is so vigorous that

it will usually survive a nibble. If you're worried, remove by hand and destroy.

What are the orangey-yellow patches on my peppermint?

Rust can cause patches of orangey-yellow to appear on the plant. Dig up and destroy affected plants, and don't propagate a new plant from another which has signs of rust.

Frequently asked questions about peppermint plants

Are peppermint plants perennials?

Yes, peppermint plants will come back year after year.

Can you eat peppermint leaves?

Absolutely, yes! They are reputed to aid digestion and are great paired with potatoes and peas. They add a different flavour dimension to salads and drinks and can be made into a refreshing tea by just adding a few leaves to a cup of boiling water.

Key features of peppermint plants

Botanical Name	Mentha × piperita
Plant Type	Herbaceous perennial
Native Location	Middle East and Europe
Family	<i>Lamiaceae</i>
Light Exposure	Full sun to shade
Soil pH	Acid, Neutral, Alkaline.
Flower Time	June to September
Flower	Lilac

Colour	
---------------	--

Lavender in full flower is one of the most beautiful sights of summer. The fragrant flowers are a magnet for butterflies and bees, and lavender doesn't only look and smell lovely – it's also great at repelling unwanted insects and pests like clothes moths.

Growing lavender requires only two things: plenty of sunshine and a well-draining soil. Lavender is very drought-tolerant once established, copes well on poor soil and doesn't need regular feeding, so it's an ideal choice for low-maintenance gardens.

Types of lavender

The most common types of lavender are English lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*), French or Spanish lavender (*Lavandula stoechas*) and hybrid lavender (*Lavandula x intermedia*). The common names can be misleading, as lavender actually comes from the Middle East and Asia as well as southern Europe.

English lavender has grey-green scented leaves and compact flowerheads on slender stems in summer. The flowers are usually purple, although a few white and pink varieties are also available. English lavender is hardy and can withstand cold winters, provided it is grown in well-draining soil.

Hybrid lavender looks similar to English lavender, but with longer flower stems.

French lavender is showier than English lavender, with shorter stems bearing plump flowerheads with a feathery tuft of bracts on top of each flower. It flowers earlier than English lavender, in late spring and early summer, and is not as hardy, so is best grown in pots and moved into a frost-free place in winter. Most lavenders prefer an alkaline soil, but French lavender will also grow on acid soils.

Other less common lavender types include:

-

- Lavandula x chaytoriae – a hardy lavender very similar to English lavender, with silvery-grey foliage.

- Green lavender (*Lavandula viridis*) – hardy, with lemon-scented foliage and greenish-white flowers topped with tuft of pale yellow bracts.

When to plant lavender

The best time to plant lavender is in mid-to late spring as the soil warms up. Avoid planting lavender in winter when the soil is cold and wet, as the roots are likely to rot before they have a chance to get established.

Tips on planting lavender:

- Choose a site that gets at least six hours of sunlight, with a well-drained soil. Even hardy lavenders are likely to die over winter if they have to sit with their roots in cold, wet soil.
- If growing lavender in heavy clay soil, dig in lots of grit to improve drainage. Place each plant on a slight mound, so that water can drain away from the roots.

Alternatively, plant lavender in raised beds or pots filled with free-draining compost.

- When planting lavender, add some bonemeal into the planting hole. Once the plant is established, there's no need to feed regularly.
- Water lavender regularly in the first year after planting. Once established, it is drought tolerant and shouldn't need regular watering.
- Move pot-grown lavenders into a bright, dry, frost-free place in winter.

Pruning lavender

It's essential to prune lavender to keep it looking compact and bushy. Lavender doesn't respond well to hard pruning, so old, leggy lavender plants are best replaced with new ones.

Prune English and hybrid lavender in mid to late summer once the flowers have faded. Whilst you should avoid cutting hard back into old wood, you still need to cut back reasonably far to stop the plants growing leggy and straggly. Look for the new grey-green leaf shoots that should be visible on the lower half of each stem and cut just above these, making sure to leave several new shoots on each stem for next year's growth.

French lavender can flower more than once in a season, so prune it after the first flowering is over in the same way as English lavender, and then deadhead as needed for the rest of the summer. Don't prune French lavender after early September, as it won't have time to recover before winter.

Good lavender varieties to grow

- *Lavandula angustifolia* 'Hidcote' AGM – one of the most popular and reliable English lavenders, with grey-green foliage and deep purple flowers.
- *Lavandula angustifolia* 'Imperial Gem' AGM – a dwarf variety with deep purple flowers, good for small spaces.
- *Lavandula angustifolia* 'Munstead' – another dwarf variety with light purple flowers.
- *Lavandula* 'Fathead' – a vigorous French lavender with plump, deep purple flowerheads topped with mauve bracts.
- *Lavandula stoechas* 'Willow Vale' AGM – a particularly lovely variety with dark purple flowerheads topped with crinkly-edged paler purple bracts.
- *Lavandula x intermedia* 'Grosso' – said to be the best-scented lavender, with long flowerstems and purple-blue flowers.

• **Harvesting lavender**

- Lavender flowers have been harvested for centuries to add fragrance to our homes and repel moths and other pests. English and hybrid lavenders are the best to use for harvesting and drying.
- For the best scent, harvest flowerheads when the buds have formed but not yet opened into individual flowerlets.
- Harvest early in the morning, before the fragrant oils in the flowers disperse in the sun.

- Using sharp secateurs, cut the flowerstems low down, but leave at least two sets of leaves on the plant for the following year's growth.
- Gather the cut flowerstems into bundles and tie each bundle with string
- Hang the bundles somewhere warm and dry, out of direct sunlight, with the flowers pointing downwards
- After three to four weeks, the lavender flowers should be fully dried. Gently rub the buds off the stalks into a bowl.
- Fill small cloth bags with dried lavender flowers and place them in cupboards to repel moths.

There's so much to love about lavender. It looks beautiful, it's easy to grow, bees love it and it's useful too! Plant some in your garden today.

What herbs and spices to harvest in February

Perennial herbs and those which are reasonably frost-hardy, such as coriander and parsley, can be picked in February. These include:

Coriander and Peppermint

There's more to mint than just growing it to make mint sauce – the traditional accompaniment to roast lamb! The leaves can be used in many dishes, including salads, where they will infuse a delightful additional flavour. And they can be infused in hot water to make a refreshing herbal tea. Even the flowers can be used to also add colour to dishes.

How to grow mint

Cultivation

Mint is generally easy to grow – often too easy – and it's spreading underground and overground runners can soon spread.

Mint needs a position in bright light, but with shelter from strong summer midday sun. A light, but partially shaded area is usually better for the full flavour to develop.

Mint will grow in most soils, but prefers a humus-rich, moist but not waterlogged one. They are perfect for growing in containers – often the best place for them to restrict their growth.

Mint varieties

There are lots of different varieties of mint to choose from (more than 100) with completely different tastes and flavours. You may be familiar with spearmint and peppermint, but what about chocolate, lemon, lime and grapefruit mints?

And not all the different types have green leaves, there are also red and variegated mints, which are ornamental. Not all mints are good for culinary use, so check first before growing them.

Here are just some of the most popular and commonly available types of mint:

- *Mentha x gracilis* Ginger mint, with a spicy minty scent
- *Mentha x piperita* Peppermint
- *Mentha x piperata* f. *citrata* Chocolate Chocolate mint, tastes like chocolate creams!

- *Mentha spicata* Spearmint, garden mint, the most commonly grown mint
- *Mentha suaveolens* Apple mint, with a minty apple flavour
- *Mentha suaveolens* Variegata Pineapple mint, with a sweet scent and flavour and white variegated leaves
- *Mentha x villosa* var. *alopecuroides* Bowles' mint, one of the best culinary mints



Planting mint

Mint can be planted directly into the ground, but it is vigorous and can spread rapidly. So, it is better to plant it in a large

container filled with multi-purpose compost or John Innes compost. Place the pots

near the back door so they are readily to hand when you need to pick some.

Alternatively, grow mint in a large, bottomless bucket or similar and plunge this into the soil. Make sure the lip of the container sits above soil surface to help prevent shoots from escaping over the top and then rooting into the surrounding soil.

If you're growing several different types of mint, plant them in different containers and keep them away from each other, otherwise they can lose their individual flavours and end up smelling and tasting the same.

Suggested planting locations and garden types

Patios, containers, cottage and informal gardens.

If you're growing several different types of mint, plant them in different containers and keep them away from each other, otherwise they can lose their individual flavours and end up smelling and tasting the same.

Suggested planting locations and garden types

Patios, containers, cottage and informal gardens.

How to care for mint

Give plants plenty of water when growing, especially those growing in containers and particularly during hot, dry weather.

Give liquid feeds of **a balanced plant food** throughout spring and summer.

During mid to late summer - especially a hot, dry one - plants can lose some of their vigour and freshness of their leaves. Trim the plants back, give them a good watering and feed to rejuvenate them for a supply of flavoursome leaves for a few more months.

When plants finish flowering, cut back the flowered shoots to 5cm (2in) from ground level to promote more new shoots. In early autumn, cut the plants back to ground level.

Lift and divide the plants every few years to keep them young and fresh and producing the best quality leaves.

Harvesting

Pick mint throughout the growing season and use it immediately or freeze it for use later on. Pick regularly to keep the plants compact and producing lots of new growth.

Flowering season(s)	Summer
Foliage season(s)	Spring, Summer
Sunlight	Partial shade, Full sun
Soil type	Chalky, Clay, Loamy, Sandy
Soil pH	Neutral
Soil moisture	Moist but well-drained
Ultimate height	Up to 1m (40in) depending on variety
Ultimate spread	Up to 1.5m (5ft)
Time to ultimate height	1-2 years

Rosemary is an ornamental evergreen shrub with attractive, aromatic, deep green leaves and blue flowers in spring and early summer. Although it is usually thought of as a herb for use in the kitchen, it is a colourful and attractive garden plant in its own right.

Rosemary looks great in beds and borders and in Mediterranean planting schemes. It makes a perfect container plant for a sunny patio.

Rosemary can also be used to create informal hedges, and there's even a low growing, sprawling variety that is good for ground cover - *Rosmarinus officinalis* 'Prostratus Group'.

How to grow rosemary

Cultivating rosemary

Rosemary is easy to grow and look after. It grows well in relatively poor, well-drained soil and a sunny position. The sunnier the site, the stronger the scent from the foliage.

The best time to cut stems for use in the kitchen is in early afternoon, when their flavour will be its strongest.

Rosemary varieties

Although most varieties produce blue flowers, there are those with white flowers, such as 'Lady in White', and those with pink flowers, such as 'Majorca Pink'.



Suggested planting locations and garden types for rosemary

Flower borders and beds, patios, containers, city and courtyard gardens, hedges.

How to care for rosemary

Rosemary is fairly drought tolerant, but like all other drought-tolerant plants, needs watering until established.

Although reasonably hardy, plants may suffer in severe winters and in cold, exposed gardens.

Avoid feeding with high-nitrogen feeds, which encourages soft growth that is more susceptible to cold damage, so use balanced and high potash ones instead. The latter will encourage flowering and stronger growth.

How to prune rosemary

It's a good idea to **prune** newly planted rosemary plants to encourage strong, bushy growth.

Established rosemary plants need little in the way of regular pruning, apart from removing wayward or overly long shoots. But cutting back

plants by around one-third will help prevent plants growing too tall. Prune immediately after flowering.

Rosemary does not readily re-shoot from old wood, so never prune old, brown, leafless stems - otherwise the plant will die. Old, neglected plants are best replaced with new ones.

Common rosemary pests and problems

Rosemary may be susceptible to the following pests and diseases: Rosemary beetle, Root rot.

Flowering season(s)	Spring, Summer
Foliage season(s)	Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter
Sunlight	Full sun
Soil type	Chalky, Loamy, Sandy
Soil pH	Neutral
Soil moisture	Well-drained
Ultimate height	1.5m (5ft)
Ultimate spread	90cm (3ft)
Time to ultimate height	6-10 years

Sage is a very popular shrub, mainly grown for its leaves, which are strongly scented. These are used as a herb in cooking to flavour many meat and vegetable dishes. Where would sage and onion stuffing be without the sage? The leaves are also used to make teas and tisanes.

Sage also produces masses of purple-blue flowers in summer that, along with the attractive grey-green foliage, make it a very ornamental evergreen/semi-evergreen shrub for beds, borders and pots.

How to grow sage

Cultivating sage

Sage prefers a warm, sheltered position in full sun, but will also grow well in light or dappled sage, although the flavour isn't as strong. It needs a relatively fertile, moist, well-drained soil.

Sage varieties

The straight species, *Salvia officinalis*, is the one commonly grown as a herb. It is ornamental and attractive in its own right, thanks to its grey-green leaves and purple-blue flowers, but there are also some more ornamental varieties too. The foliage of these can be used in cooking, but it tends not to be as strong a flavour as the species.

Icterina Green and yellow variegated leaves.

Purpurascens Purple young foliage and stems, becoming grey-green as they age.

Tricolor Pink, white and green variegated leaves. Not as hardy as the common sage.

Broad-leaved sage Larger leaves and stronger flavour, making it an excellent culinary sage.



Planting sage

Planting is best done in spring or summer.

Dig a good sized planting hole, big enough to easily accommodate the rootball. Add a layer of organic matter – such as **compost or planting compost** – to the base of the hole and fork it in.

Place the rootball in the planting hole and adjust the planting depth so that it is planted at the same depth as it was originally growing (except hardy fuchsias) and the top of the roots are level with the soil surface.

Mix in more organic matter with the excavated soil and fill in the planting hole. Water in well, apply **a granular general feed** over the soil around the tree and add a 5-7.5cm (2-3in) deep mulch of well-rotted garden compost or bark chippings around the root area.

Where to plant sage

Plant sage in flower borders and beds, patios, **containers**, city and courtyard gardens, cottage and informal gardens.

How to care for sage

Sage is easy to grow and look after. It is fairly drought tolerant, but like all other drought-resisting plants needs watering until well established. Plants may also need watering during prolonged dry periods, but always avoid overwatering.

Avoid feeding with high-nitrogen feeds, which encourages soft growth, so **use high potash ones** instead, which encourage flowering, better flavours and strong, hardy growth.

You can care for sage plants by covering them with horticultural fleece in winter to protect the leaves from the worst of the weather and help keep

them in good condition for picking. Protection with fleece may be a good idea in very cold and exposed areas.

Pruning sage

Plants can tend to become leggy in time, so it is important to prune them annually to keep them bushy and full of flowers. Pruning after flowering helps to maintain a better, bushier shape and encourages plenty of new growth.

Sage does not shoot readily from old wood, so never prune old, brown, leafless stems – otherwise the plant will probably die. Old, neglected plants are best replaced. Annual pruning should help prevent this happening.

Harvesting sage

Leaves can be picked at any time, generally the younger leaves have the best flavour. Excess harvests can be dried or frozen. Freezing is the best option using leaves picked in mid-summer.

Sage flower petals look and taste great in salads.

Sage growing condition

Flowering season(s)	Summer
Foliage season(s)	Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter
Sunlight	Partial shade, Full sun

Soil type	Chalky, Loamy, Sandy
Soil pH	Neutral
Soil moisture	Moist but well-drained
Ultimate height	Up to 1.2m (4ft) depending on variety
Ultimate spread	Up to 1.4m (4ft)
Time to ultimate height	5-7 years

Thyme has many uses in cooking and elsewhere in the kitchen. It is perfect in many poultry, meat and fish dishes, as well as casseroles and stews, and a main ingredient of Italian dishes and bouquet garnish.

Thyme is a highly ornamental and colourful herb that deserves its place in the garden – let alone for its culinary uses. The aromatic foliage fills the garden with scent on a sunny day. Many are low-growing, creeping plants that are perfect for ground cover. The colourful flowers not only look great, but will also attract beneficial insects.

How to grow thyme

Cultivating thyme

Thyme needs a warm, sunny position. The more sun it receives, the stronger the flavours. It is fairly drought tolerant and needs a well-drained, preferably alkaline, soil. It will grow well in fairly poor, even stony, soil.

As plants will die in overly wet soils, and if your soil is heavy, poorly draining clay, thyme is perfect for growing in containers of [John Innes No 2 compost](#).

Thyme varieties

There are several species and many varieties to choose from. The following are some of the most popular and commonly available:

- **Thymus vulgaris:** Common thyme is the most popular for culinary use. Green leaves and mauve flowers
- **Thymus pulegioides (T. citriodorus):** Lemon thyme has large, lemon-scented leaves and lilac pink flowers
- **Thymus pulegioides Archer's Gold:** Lemon thyme with golden leaves and pink flowers
- **Thymus Golden King:** Lemon thyme with golden-edged leaves and lilac pink flowers
- **Thymus Red Carpet:** Dark green leaves and magenta-red flowers
- **Thymus serpyllum Pink Chintz:** Early flowering, salmon-pink flowers in spring
- **Thymus Silver Posie:** Silvery-white variegated leaves and pale pink flowers



Planting thyme

Plant small plants in very well-drained soil, with added compost and/or grit to improve drainage.

Although plants are fairly drought tolerant when established, they need watering in until well established.

Add a mulch of horticultural grit or gravel around plants to prevent moisture sitting at the base of the plant.

Suggested planting locations and garden types

Flower borders and beds, patios, containers, city and courtyard gardens, cottage and informal gardens, ground cover.

How to care for thyme

Thyme will rarely need watering apart from during very prolonged periods of dry or drought conditions in summer. Ensure plants in pots are not allowed to completely dry out.

Thyme doesn't like rich soil, but will benefit from a light feeding of a **high potash plant food** in spring.

Give plants **a liquid feed** during summer to improve growth, flavour and flowering.

Cut back thyme after flowering with secateurs or shears to keep them compact and to promote fresh, new growth.

Thyme is rarely troubled by any pests or diseases. Soft growth, promoted by rich soils or overfeeding with high nitrogen plant foods, may encourage aphids.

Harvesting thyme

Thyme can be picked all year round, but the flavour is strongest during summer.

Cut off small sprigs with scissors for immediate use as needed. Take care to avoid spoiling the overall shape of the plant.

It is best to cut larger quantities for drying or freezing before the plants flower.

Thyme growing conditions

Flowering season(s)	Spring, Summer
Foliage season(s)	Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter
Sunlight	Full sun
Soil type	Chalky, Loamy, Sandy
Soil pH	Neutral
Soil moisture	Well-drained
Ultimate height	Up to 30cm (12in) depending on variety
Ultimate spread	Up to 60cm (2ft) depending on variety
Time to ultimate height	3-4 years



Editor : Gareth Richards
Treasurer
Yeovil Allotments Association

Website :
www.yeovil-allotments-association.co.uk

Email :
info@yeovil-allotments-association.co.uk