

# Grow your own organic vegetables



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## Vegetables

In the last talk we covered what plants to choose, where to put them, how to prepare the soil for them, and how to protect them. If you did not come to the last talk and would like the notes for these and the following vegetables, then please ask for a copy. We also covered potatoes, parsnips, summer onions, broad beans, peas and mange touts, and spring leaves.

### **Veg started off in containers under cover**

The following vegetables are successful when sown in pots or seed trays, started off inside, on a windowsill, in a greenhouse or polytunnel:

### **Leeks**

You can sow leek seed early spring, and I would recommend sowing in the ground, in around 1ft area marked with pegs. However if you need to sow in trays you can, they just don't get as big. Weed the seedlings carefully as they look grass like when small. Hopefully by the start of May they should have reached around a foot tall.

Position leeks in the same crop rotation bed as onions.

**Soil Preparation** These need manure as they are hungry plants and the manure helps to conserve water in the soil too.

**Planting** The white part of the leek is the part grown below soil, so the leaves are blanched and tender. The longer your leek is, the deeper you can plant it. The rows should be 1 foot apart, but the leeks can be closer together within the rows, depending on how thick you want the stems to be. We usually plant them 10 cm apart. Use a wooden dibber, or metal pole or something similar to create a hole. Then put one leek seedling in the hole so the top shows at

least an inch above the surface. You do not need to fill in the hole, as it will naturally cover the root with soil as it rains.

If your leaves are shorter, you can earth up like potatoes as they grow to hide the base of the leek from the sun.

If you have extremely short leeks you can try planting them in trenches and filling them in as they grow, and even earthing up as well. This is slow work but really worth it.

You can also plant leeks in containers, sowing them in the bottom of the pot on top of about 10cm of soil, and then filling up the pot as they grow. Remember to feed and water regularly as leeks are hungry and thirsty plants.

**Protection** A recent problem unfortunately is leek moth which lays its eggs in your leeks and the larvae eat the leaves, and although can be cut out at this stage, if left in the ground for a while for winter harvest, the leek can develop rot from the damage and dissolve from within. To solve this problem, cover your leek seedlings with fleece and weigh down around the edges. To prevent the leek bending you may wish to support the fleece with hoops made from wire or plumbers tubing. If protecting leeks grown in a pot, you can make a loose tent over the pot with fleece and tie the edge around the pot. You may want to leave a bit of excess fleece and loosen it if the leaves become cramped. If growing leeks in your garden, or planting fast growing leeks for an early crop you may avoid the leek moth altogether. This pest usually becomes apparent around June – July. Choosing a variety that is slow to bolt (form a flower) is helpful when using fleece.

*Note: although I found this to be a problem in around 2013, I haven't seen any for the last few years, perhaps due to the weather?*

**Water** leeks if it's really dry in the summer to prevent them from bolting.

**Harvest** as soon as the stem looks big enough. You can do mini-

leeks, about 2cm wide, by planting close together and choosing a summer type. These do seem more susceptible to rust, but grow a bit quicker. I also grow over-wintering types and plant them wider apart, so they become up to 3cm wide! These are hardier, frost tolerant and do not seem to get rust. You can also just plant the winter type and harvest throughout the year.

## **Celery**

Celery comes in 3 types, self-blanching, trench celery and Chinese celery. If using trench celery, you need to blanch the celery yourself, either by planting in a trench then earthing up with soil or wrap in heavy brown paper collars to keep the stems tender and pale, a bit like leeks. Trench celery is moderately frost hardy if covered in straw, but I've never had any luck with it, I think it rotted with too much rain.

The self-blanching type tends to be quite tough and stringy, but is easy to grow and good in soups, stir-fry, pies and stews. It is not frost hardy, although I have found it will survive a mild winter, especially if protected with fleece. If you leave any celery for the following year it will produce seed, which you can either save to sow next year, or eat sprinkled on salads.

Chinese celery is small but strongly flavoured. You wouldn't eat it raw unless it was chopped finely, but makes a fantastic ingredient in soups and stews and coleslaw, and is perfect for small gardens, potager type gardens and containers.

**Position** Plant in a leaf salad bed near the house, or anywhere there is space. Trench celery needs to be planted 1 foot apart in rows 1 foot apart. Self-blanching types can be planted closer together as their closeness helps the leaves to blanch the stems. It can be planted in pots, the trench celery is said to be particularly good as you can sow near the bottom of the pot and earth up as you would with leeks grown in pots.

**Soil Preparation** manure or compost

**Harvest** as soon as it's big enough for your meal.

## **Celeriac**

This is also known as turnip-rooted celery, and the advantage of this is it gives the taste of celery to winter soups and stews.

**Position** They like plenty of space and compost, the biggest I've grown were in a single line one year along the edge of a flowerbed, whereas rows 1ft apart, with plants 20cm apart gave smaller roots. I grow mine in the root rotation bed, but as long as you move them around from year to year, they can go anywhere.

And then the only maintenance you need to do is to trim off the outer leaves as they flop and die as this encourages the root to swell.

**Harvest** from late autumn through the winter. You can leave them in the ground over winter, but they do get damaged by harsh frosts, snow and slugs. So before the winter, cover the plants in a layer of straw and even fleece on top of that, as they rot from the top if frost damaged. Or remove and store in sand.

## **Mange Touts / Peas**

**Position** Plant out once they are 5-10cm high. Plant 1 foot apart in rows with something to climb up, I like to put a wire mesh fence up between 2 rows, and leave a wider space between the next 2 rows to enable you to get between the rows, but there are many methods of supporting peas, see slide.

**Soil Preparation** Plant in the peas and beans rotation, otherwise known as legumes. Use compost, as manure tends to be too acidic, and lime them if their leaves look really pale.

**Protection** You may need to protect your peas with a net to stop pigeons eating them. You can erect a structure you can walk under, if you just drape the net over the support; make sure the



peas do not grow through the net. This can be done by making the net higher, or cutting off the tops of the plant to encourage bushy side shoots within the net. Check if using heritage types as to how high they grow. Height makes them much easier to pick if you have built a net structure and they can be contained within. I find on a fence, pigeons sit on top and pinch the tops, preventing them getting higher than the fence, but leaving the peas underneath.

**Sow Peas** all through the year for succession, but from March to May is usual. Later sowings may be more susceptible to pea moth, but you can pod around these! They should not be as susceptible to mice eating them if sown in situ as mice have more to choose from to eat later in the year, but you can still start them off indoors if you like.

**Harvest Peas** are delicious eaten fresh from the pod and make a lovely addition to salads when raw. Picking and podding large amounts of peas can be very time consuming, so I prefer to grow small amounts in succession, and obviously mange touts and sugar snap peas are less time consuming.

**Pea Shoots** Peas may also be sown closer together and the thinnings eaten as pea shoots, the remainder left to grow full size. You can keep pinching the shoots as the plant grows, it will produce side shoots in response and you will get a really bushy plant. Pea shoots grown just for salad are successful in pots with successive sowings monthly from January to July.

## **Spinach and chard**

True spinach is mostly successful grown as a cut and come again baby leaf as it goes to seed quickly, especially if the weather is hot and dry. It is good grown close to your door, even in a container, for frequent harvesting. Do successive sowings every month between March and August to ensure a continuation of harvests.



Perpetual spinach is actually a type of chard, both of which are very easy to grow. Chard has very attractive stems in white, yellow, red and pink and looks lovely in a flowerbed. Perpetual spinach also can survive a cold winter, resprouting in march to give an early green crop, as a biannual it will flower the second year if left in, when you can save the seed for the following year.

**Plant out** when big enough to handle, teasing the plants apart gently so as not to damage them, and plant 1ft apart in rows and 1ft between plants. Harvest by giving the plant a “hair cut” or if you have time and patience, you can harvest the outer leaves, leaving the smaller inner leaves to grow. The latter allows the centre to continue growing; making it less likely that you will kill the plant. This is an ideal plant for a potager style garden as it looks pretty, but the main pests are slugs.

## **Lettuce**

Lettuce comes either as a ball head or loose head type, or as a cut and come again. Those that grow into a “headed” lettuce need more space, so always refer to the packet.

**Protect** Slugs are a problem for lettuce, so either grow in a pot with 2 rows of copper tape around, or employ all the methods shown in *Fifty Ways to Kill a Slug* by Sarah Ford, a little book I found highly amusing and really helpful. Winter lettuce has less of a problem with slugs, because they are less active, so if your summer harvest is poor, try some over-wintering types, such as Winter Density (crispy leaved cos type), Miner’s Lettuce or Claytonia - cut and come again).

## **Broccoli**

**Position** These are members of the brassica family, so need to be in the same rotation as other brassicas.

**Soil preparation** add compost and lime if needed. This helps to prevent club root.

**Sow** There are two main types of broccoli. The type you find in supermarkets under broccoli, large and green, are known on seed packets as Calabrese. Early types such as Di Cicco are sown in April and May and can be harvested in the summer. Late types such as Marathon F1 are sown in June and August and harvested in October and November. I like Eos F1, as it's shorter in height and easy to protect with fleece.

The other type of broccoli is known in the supermarkets as purple sprouting, but shown on seed packets as broccoli. Sow early types in April and May to harvest in February to May the following year. Sow late types in May and June to harvest in April and May the following year. If sowing late and planting out late, eg sowing in July and planting in September, will result in shorter plants, but they should still produce a crop, just lower yield.

**Sow:** refer to your seed packet before sowing, then sow either in pots to transfer to a seedbed after about 3-4 weeks, or sow straight into a seedbed outside, transplanting to their growing site once they are 10-15cm tall. Then space 60cm/ 2ft apart both ways. Well grown ones take up a lot of room so I suggest not doing too many, 6 at most.

You can also buy most brassica plants cheaply from garden centres such as Willowbrook, roughly £1.50 for 20 bare-root plants. Ask early as they take orders, and often only have enough plants to cover the pre-orders! Getting there late may mean you take pot luck at what you grow, or have to wait another couple of weeks.

**Protect** against slugs in their early stages, then cover in fleece during caterpillar season. I find fleece really is the best protection for brassicas, good against flea beetle, cabbage root fly, whitefly, butterflies and pigeons. Enirvonmesh is good to make a taller

structure as in for purple sprouting, as it can be sown together and washed in the washing machine!

**Harvest** Make sure you check them regularly once they start to bud. They can go to flower quickly. Calebrese can be cut once, then the rest of the plant left to re-shoot smaller heads. The beauty of purple sprouting is that it will continue to produce small spears, as long as you keep it from flowering, until around May.

## **Cauliflower**

**Position** These are Brassicas, so belong in the brassica bed.

**Soil Preparation** Compost and lime to prevent club root.

**Sow** early, summer types, such as All Year Round between January and May, harvesting between June and October, and sow winter types, such as Allsmeer, between May and June, harvesting between April and May the following year.

Sow either in pots to transfer to a seedbed after about 3-4 weeks, or straight into a seedbed, thinning to 10cm apart, then transplanting to a final position 60cm/2 foot apart each way

**Water** Cauliflower dislike any check in growth, most commonly lack of water, so make sure you water regularly.

**Protect** from caterpillars with fleece

**Harvest** before they flower. I advise successive small sowings or they can all come at once.

## **Summer cabbage**

**Position** These are Brassicas, so belong in the brassica bed.

**Soil Preparation** compost and lime to prevent club root.

**Sow** either in pots to transfer to a seedbed after about 3-4 weeks, or straight into a seedbed if you can protect the young seedlings

from slugs and flea beetle, as one slug can destroy your entire row in 1 night. If slugs are a problem sow in modules and transplant once slightly bigger. Transplant to their final space once about 15-20cm tall They need lots of room 2ft by 45cm -although refer to the packet.

**Protect** Again, caterpillars love them, so grow under fine netting or fleece. Sow ASAP to give them a head-start on the caterpillars.

**Harvest** as soon as the heads are big enough

### **Autumn / Winter Cabbage**

Seeds choose a type that either stands well outside (like January King) or stores well (like Marner Storing Red). I have found some autumn-storing types were ready during the summer, and the longer storing ones lasted longer in the fridge, but will store in a cool room.

All other info as summer cabbage, check the packet for sowing times.

**Protect** all winter as although the caterpillars die out when the frosts come, the pigeons will then take over as main destroyer! They also eat the tender growing points.

## **Veg sown in situ**

The following vegetables should be sown in situ, which means where you want them to grow, once the soil has warmed up in spring

### **Carrots**

Carrots can be sown up to about June. This allows for successive sowings, keeping you eating carrots even into the winter. You do have to be quite organised and have a fair amount of time to remember to do successive sowings! I found just doing 2 sowings per year, one now and one in mid May, works well. You can also sow from August to early October in a polytunnel for early spring crops.

Sow directly into soil, shallowly and about 1 inch apart between seeds and 1ft apart between rows. Use a pole or string to keep the lines straight as it makes it easier to weed. If you are short of space, or would like to grow in containers, they can be sown thinly in a square, harvesting those with the biggest top, leaving small ones to grow bigger.

**Position** in the root rotation bed, but do not add manure. This gives too much nutrient to the soil and causes the carrots to fork.

**Prepare the soil** Carrots like a reasonably aerated soil, but too much air makes the water run through too quickly, making germination harder. I have a heavy clay soil that carrots do not like, but digging municipal compost in has really helped

**Protect** early sown seedling with a covering of fleece to encourage germination. This will not be necessary in warmer weather. Protect them from carrot fly by constructing a 3ft-high fence all around using canes and either fleece or even better, enviromesh. You can also create cloches (or mini tunnels) using hoops, if you have a smaller area. Containers can be kept at a height, say on a table, to

prevent carrot fly from reaching them.

And then all they need is careful weeding about 3 times, don't need to water except for when first sown. You also need to thin out the seedlings so they are around 1 inch apart in the rows. If you don't do this you are more likely to get small carrots, watch out if they are too small they will be pointless!

**Harvest** carrots once the green tops become bushy. They can get frost damaged outside in the winter, so lift them all up and lie flat in dry sand in trays. Do not wash the soil from carrots if you are not eating them straight away as they will become limp.

## **Beetroot**

**Sowing** You can sow beetroot until around June, with successive sowings as in carrots. I do however find this a little unnecessary as beetroot last quite well in the ground. Some people find the seedlings get eaten by birds, in this case cover with fleece until they are bigger. Young seedlings also get eaten by slugs; so if this is a problem in your garden, use the usual precautions for slugs. For this reason they work well in containers with copper tape around the pot.

**Position** Sow seeds in rows 1ft apart, seeds as far apart as the size you want your beetroot. Plant in the root rotation with your carrots. (this year I have started them off in late february in modules in the polytunnel for an extra early crop, but by now they should be fine sown directly in the ground).

**Soil Preparation** I have never added anything to the soil and they have always grown well.

**Harvest** And then really easy, just weed a couple of times and harvest! They can stand in the ground for a long time; I don't find Boltardy get woody until late in the season.

Harvest before the first frosts, the excess makes lovely chutney or a really healthy drink when juiced.

Alternatively beetroot can also be grown intensively in a square foot of ground or container. Scatter the seeds over the whole square, around 1 inch apart. Harvest some as baby leaves and eat raw in a salad. Harvest some later on as baby beetroot and then leave some to grow to full size later in the season.

## **Spring Onions**

These are quite easy in pots, grow bags or in the ground.

**Position** in the same rotation as onions, garlic and leeks.

**Sowing** in situ. Either mark off an area around a foot or two square. Scatter seeds so they are around an inch apart. Or sow in a line, 15cm between rows, no thinning is required. Sprinkle or sieve, soil or compost on top.

And then Make sure they stay weed-free as the seedlings look very small and a bit like grass. Once growing, sow another lot for succession of crops.

## **Swede**

**Position** Swede is members of the brassica family and so need to be in the bed with other brassicas.

**Soil preparation** add compost and lime if needed

**Sow** Swede is best sown in May to prevent mildew. Sow in situ in rows 45cm apart, 1 ft between plants. They need lots of room or they don't grow very big. If you have a small space, they can be planted closer if you only have one row.

**Protection** They are part of the brassica family so caterpillars love



them! I recommend covering with fleece stretched over hoops in a tunnel. You must put this over them when you sow them, as any whitefly on the leaves when it's put on later will have a field day under the fleece as their predators won't be able to get in either. And then weed regularly and harvest when they are big enough.

## **Turnip**

These are really easy because although a brassica, caterpillars do not eat them! They also have the speed of growth of radish, so just sow a few at once and then sow some more 2 weeks later, giving successive crops through the year

## **Radish**

Really easy although don't forget to harvest them quickly before they get too big.

## **Witloof /Forcing Chicory**

This is an interesting crop to give you fresh if rather bitter leaves throughout the winter, at a time when there is not much else growing.

**Position** These are the same family as lettuce, I don't have a specific bed for lettuce, just fit them in anywhere, but preferably somewhere different each year. They can do well in some shade.

**Soil preparation** They grow really easily, are dandelion family, so don't need any specific nutrients. You are more likely to get forked roots with manure.

**Sow** End of April to early May, in rows 30cm apart, thinning to each plant being 22cm apart.

**Protection** None needed, doesn't even need watering except while

tiny as the roots are long so will look for water.

**Harvest** You grow this type of chicory through the summer and autumn in order to harvest the root in autumn before the frosts. You can at this stage eat any white parts of the leaves that grow in the centre, any green leaf will be too bitter. Then cut the tip of each root off so you end up with the thickest end being 20cm long. You can store the extra ones in sand on their side, although they do sprout it is slowly. Place 4 in a large pot, and fill with compost. Place in the complete dark above 11 degrees C. The chicons will grow from the top of the root, blanched due to the dark and much sweeter because of it. I kept ours in the airing cupboard and David kept his in the garage cupboard. You do need to keep the compost damp and replace with new roots if you spot greenfly! I really enjoyed going upstairs on a cold winter night and harvesting fresh, beautiful little leaves.

Harvest all through the winter until early May. I found picking the leaves from the outside like cut and come again lettuce made each root last longer.

## Sowing and Planting Tender Veg

These vegetables originally came from hot countries, so are very susceptible to frost. They must have protection from frost until all danger has past in May. It's a good idea to have some fleece handy to cover them at night if you hear there will be a late frost. They also will not germinate unless it is warm enough, so sow indoors or in the greenhouse or ploy tunnel. You can double insulate an unheated greenhouse or poly tunnel with horticultural bubble wrap. This does seem to be enough for later spring frosts. Remove this plastic in the summer and store in shade to reuse next year, as sunlight degrades it.

### Tomatoes

**Sow** tomatoes indoors or under a little heat, they need 15 degrees to germinate, between the end of January and valentines day. LED lights can stop them getting leggy, but if on a windowsill, choose on with the best light.

**Plant out** tomato seedlings in April under the cover of a polytunnel or greenhouse, but wait until May to plant them out outside. They are very easily frost damaged. You can add further protection by covering the small plant in a 2 litre clear plastic bottle, cutting off the bottom and pushing that edge into the soil. Leave the lid off so the plant can breathe. Remove once the plant becomes crowded and risk of frost has passed. You can also use a hot box as described in the February notes. If you haven't managed to start off your tomatoes indoors, all garden centres sell tomato plants; I found the best being from Chelston nurseries. My favourite are Ferline F1 and Sungold tomatoes.

**Position** in the rotation with other frost tender plants, or if you have 2 sides to your greenhouse or polytunnel, make sure you swap sides each year. Plant each tomato 1 meter apart in rows,

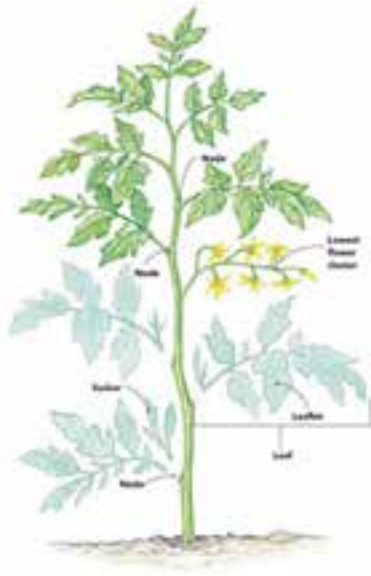
and 45cm – 1 meter apart in the rows. Do not be tempted to cram more in as they like airflow to prevent blight, they need plenty of light to grow, and you need to be able to get between them to harvest them

**Soil Preparation** Tomatoes are hungry plants and so will need manure. If growing in pots, I would give them a large pot, and if growing in grow bags, I would split the bag in two, down the middle, and stand upright, giving a deeper and larger growing space, as trailed on Gardeners world one year.

**Watering & feeding** Tomatoes need steady watering, too little and they wilt and their growth is stunted, too much during fruiting and the skins can split. We water one large watering can full per 6 plants, daily, or every two days. If you get leaves that are curling when grown inside, this can be because it's hot, and not due to under watering. Brown tips to the leaves and wilting are the first signs of under watering.

Feed your plants regularly with liquid fertiliser when watering, say once a week. We had fantastic growth when we hung a mesh sack of chicken manure pellets in the water butt, but it did smell in the close confines of the polytunnel! We now often use the less-smelly homemade comfrey liquid (see February notes).

**Pinching out** As tomatoes grow you may need to pinch out the side shoots if you have chosen a cordon type; bush types do not need pinching out as they form bushier lower plants. Can I recommend cordon types if you have a few in rows in the greenhouse, and bush types if you have one in a container on the patio. One year I grew bush types in the polytunnel and they were a nightmare to harvest and work around as they sprawled everywhere. To pinch out cordon types, cut off with scissors or pinch with your nails, the shoots growing between the main stem and the branches see picture below.



This is to allow airflow, stop them getting bushy and uncontrollable, and therefore to prevent blight. Gradually removing the leaves from the bottom up while the fruit are developing, helps the fruit ripen as the fruit is not in as much shade from the leaves. Removing the lower leaves once the tomatoes are taller prevents them from drooping on the floor and become wet while watering, to prevent blight and give better air flow.

As the plant grows it will get tall and will need staking to prevent it falling over, making harvesting and watering also easier. Put the stakes up when planting out, and tie in as they grow, rather than waiting until they fall over!

Once your tomatoes have reached a good height - say to the top of your greenhouse, you can stop further growth by cutting off the top. This concentrates the plant into growing and ripening the fruit you already have.

**Blight** If you have blossom end rot, which is seen where the blossom was, it is because the soil does not have enough calcium. We had this in the 6th year of growing in the polytunnel and always manuring but not liming. Add some lime to the soil and it should provide the calcium they need. It can also be a sign the soil is getting dry, preventing them from getting the right nutrients, so make sure the ground looks damp around the roots in hot weather. Another way we have found prevents blight is by leaving both doors of the polytunnel open, day and night, from when the frosts are definitely over - say mid may. I have found the variety Ferline F1 is particularly blight resistant, and grow amazingly tasty and large fruit.

If you see the first spot of blight you have a number of options. You can spray with Bordeaux mixture (which is apparently organic, but still a chemical as far as I'm concerned!) and remove infected leaves and fruit and hope for the best. Or I would recommend immediately removing all the fruit and storing them in trays (try not to let them touch each other) in a cupboard in the dark to ripen off the plant. These have slightly less flavour but make great sauce and chutney and tomatoes for sauces. Keep checking them and removing and that start to rot or develop blight. You can fry green tomatoes, use them in curry and also chutney. They are lovely in stews and curries etc, with a sharper taste and keeping their shape more like other vegetables. Coated in breadcrumbs and parmesan and fried, they work well as tapas.

In the past, during wet years, we have spotted blight around the end of August, and in drier years in September. Removing all plants as soon as you spot it reduces the likelihood of contaminating the greenhouse soil or glass for next years crop, and allows you to sow carrots to harvest in late winter and early spring. We seem to have stopped seeing it since we used Ferline F1 tomatoes in an open

polytunnel. The same variety outside got blight last year, and a different variety in the polytunnel got blight in 2012, which was really wet weather.



**Harvest** tomatoes regularly, even as much as every day, which you can do before watering. I like to skin the excess and store in the freezer as chopped tomatoes for cooking in the winter, or even making up tomato sauce and storing it in the freezer, I will my favourite recipe is in July's notes, see <https://ttw.org.uk/how-to-grow-organic-vegetables>.

## **Aubergine**

**Position** These are part of the same family as cucumber; so if you have a greenhouse, plant on the other side to the tomatoes. They can also grow on a sunny patio in a 20cm pot.

**Soil preparation** well drained reasonably fertile soil, I like to add manure, and they will need feeding while they grow.

**Sow** They need 20 degrees C to germinate, and at least 15 degrees nighttime temperature. I liked the variety Black Beauty, as it grows well. Moneymaker were a bit small, and Bonica a bit big!



**Protection** These need room, light and heat to grow, so give them enough space; planting 45cm apart. They like humidity too so ideally suited to a greenhouse, with a bucket of water nearby to evaporate increasing humidity. I got a good tip one year when mine were looking less than great in the poly tunnel, to erect a smaller plastic cover inside the ploy tunnel. This way you can have the door open for ventilation for the tomatoes, and high temperatures and humidity for the aubergines in the same space. This worked really well but you need to allow access for pollinators. Since using Bonica and Black Beauty varieties, these seem to have more cold tolerance.

**And then** Feed with liquid fertiliser every 10-14 days. Remove the growing tip of the main stem once 25 cm high to encourage side shoots to develop. Large plants may need staking, and large fruiting varieties may only be able to support 5 fruit at a time. They keep on producing more throughout the season like tomatoes.

**Harvest** once the fruit is black and shiny, if left too long the skin goes dull and the fruit will be bitter.

## Sweet Peppers

**Types** Thicker-walled peppers may have trouble ripening in Europe, where thinner-walled types have been bred to withstand lower temperatures and light levels.

**Position.** Preferably in a greenhouse or polytunnel, or if grown outdoors, under a cloche. Choose somewhere with the highest light levels possible. Planting through white plastic or white paper mulch which can help to reflect more light.

**Soil preparation** lots of lush growth can adversely affect fruit production, so avoid manure and use compost instead.

**Sow** inside and plant 45 cm apart

And then keep well ventilated and feed with a high potash liquid fertiliser every 10 days once the fruit start growing, such as comfrey or seaweed fertiliser.

**Harvest** if it starts getting cold and the fruit have not ripened, it is best to eat the fruit green rather than waiting too long, as the fruit will eventually start rotting on the plant.

In the past I have put rows 1m apart and plants 45cm apart and only managed to produce thick walled, green peppers, one year I tried a thin-walled fruit, with much more success and plenty of small orange fruit. I suggest the earliest possible planting, spaced widely, possibly buying vigorous plants from a garden centre, and feeding regularly with a liquid feed such as comfrey or dissolved chicken manure.

I have found Thor F1, from Kings seeds are an amazingly productive variety, reasonably thick-skinned and produce masses of fruit that often turn red by the end of the season. They are quite expensive seed, and don't germinate hugely well, but the plants are fantastic, need staking due to the weight of the crop.

## **Chilli Peppers**

Are much easier! Use all the directions for sweet peppers. You will only need 1-2 plants for a really good harvest. They need minimal care apart from supporting if they start to lean over.

## **Courgette**

These grow easily from seed, but don't sow too many as if you do, some turn into male only plants and don't produce courgettes, a waste of space. I recommend growing 2-6 plants max, as they are very prolific. Sometimes you get a stunted plant

or its eaten by slugs when young, so I always get at least two, just in case!

**Position** These can be grown outside. I put mine in rotation with other frost tender plants, such as squash and sweet corn, but really they can go anywhere, some people like to plant them in the square open types of compost bin!

**Soil preparation** I put manure in the soil or as a mulch before planting, and they also like seaweed-based fertilisers

**Sow** early to mid April, they are very susceptible to frost. Plant out once you have 2 true leaves and the 3rd developing. Plant 90cm apart. Slugs like the small seedlings.

**And then** Courgettes like a lot of water, so in 2012 even though there was very little sun, there was a lot of rain and crops were very good. In dry years, water well.

**Harvest** often! Large ones can be used like marrows. We grow Pasqualine F1 as it is a pretty courgette and if left to grow large, makes a good marrow. Marrows can be stored for some time in a cool dark place, once their skins have been hardened in a dry sunny place.

## **Cucumber**

**Position** either in a polytunnel or greenhouse in the same bed as aubergine, or outside anywhere you like, either in the same rotation as squash and courgette, or I found success against a wire fence.

**Soil preparation** Plant with well rotted manure, on a ridge or mound as the stems dislike being watered

**Sow** all female varieties are best for indoor use, but get a hardier variety of ridge cucumber if growing outdoors. I liked the look of La Diva for outdoors. Look for details on non-bitter fruits.

They germinate very easily. I recommend just growing 2 plants as they are very productive, and as the seed for indoor types is very expensive, you may find it the same price to buy plants! Sometimes, the plant will get diseased as it gets older. If you sow another plant around late May or June, so you can replace a diseased plant halfway through the year.

**And then** tie up to prevent them trailing all over the place, which helps the fruit to become green all over, and make harvesting easier. I wear sleeves while doing this now, as the leaves are very scratchy!

I bury a plant pot near the roots when first planted and water into this. The same method can be used to water tomatoes to ensure an even watering

**Harvest** regularly as they produce many fruits like courgettes.

## **Gherkins**

Grow as cucumbers, either inside or outside. Be aware they need harvesting every 2 days and are extremely productive, but also very easy to grow.

## **Squash/ pumpkin**

**Position** These are courgette family and can be planted in the same group. If growing in a pot, be aware that they spread quite far unless controlled.

**Soil preparation** add some well-rotted manure.

**Sow** as for cucumbers and squash. I love Baby Bear pumpkin as it feeds 2 people without being too much, and stores a bit better than butternut squash

**And then** You can train the foliage upwards, on wire mesh. You have to support the fruit as they develop, in nets such as those

that contain oranges. I find this high maintenance, so I just leave mine trailing on the ground. When the fruit start to form, I like to put something underneath to prevent them from rotting on wet soil. I use anything I have, straw, a piece of wood, and a broken piece of patio slab! Just be careful not to break the stems. Once the area you have designated to squash starts overflowing, I start to trim off the ends of the tendrils. This concentrates the energy into the fruit instead of making too much foliage.

**Harvest** I harvest mine once the foliage starts dying back in the late autumn, when you can see what has grown! They can be stored for 2-6 months in a cool, dry, dark place. If any are not fully ripe, ripen off in sunlight in a dry place inside (e.g. conservatory).

**Seeds** Do not save the seeds of your own squash for the following year unless you have fertilised the flower yourself with a paintbrush, or have isolated the plants at least 100m away from a courgette plant, as these cross-pollinate, to give huge, tasteless fruit. Shop-bought squash are more likely to have true seeds, if they are grown in a massive monoculture field of just squash.

## **Beans**

There are so many varieties; they are so pretty when growing, and surely everyone could grow beans! There are 2 main types, climbing and dwarf. If growing in pots I would recommend dwarf types, as they do not usually need support. You can grow in succession for a continuous harvest throughout the year, making a later sowing in June. If growing climbing beans in a pot make sure the pot is weighty for counterbalance! Both types are prolific. You can get runner beans, and French types, which you eat the pod, or haricot types such as borlotti and kidney beans, which are basically all from French types, left to ripen until the

bean inside is large. Some types you can eat as either, so you can eat the pods when small, or if you forget to pick them or go away you can eat the beans!

**Position** These are legumes, which like manure from the previous season, so plant in rotation after potatoes, and they store nitrogen in their roots, so rotate before brassicas which like the nitrogen. You won't get as big harvest if you grow them in the same spot 2 years running.

**Soil preparation** add compost and lime the soil if it is acid. I like to lime the soil occasionally to prevent it getting too acid from manure, and to add calcium, so this is a good part of the rotation to do so even if you don't know your soils pH. Biochar is also alkaline, and great at holding onto nitrogen once "activated" (by combining with grass clippings or urine), so if you add to the soil in the autumn after your potatoes, this will also help the beans.

**Sow** I find greater success if sowing inside in root trainers first, then planting out when all danger has past in early to mid May. Plant 1 foot apart in double rows, 1 foot apart, with A frame canes in a row, or in groups of 5-6 around a tripod, or dwarf beans also 1 ft apart or in separate pots.

**Protection** just from slugs in the early stages. If you find birds eat the flowers of your runner beans, grow white-flowered types.

**And then** I mulch with weed free grass clippings as this helps to keep moisture in the soil. Do not use grass cuttings if you have used weed killer on your lawn, as this will poison the plant and soil for vegetable growing, another good reason to be organic in your whole garden.

**Harvest** regularly as if you let the mature beans develop seeds, the plants will stop producing new beans and will start to die.

## Sweetcorn

**Position** Anywhere, I grow with other frost-tender plants.

**Soil preparation** manure or compost

**Sow** Mice like to eat the seeds in the ground, so find greater success sowing in pots or root trainers, then planting out. They are tall plants and so have a long taproot for stability, so plant out ASAP when they have germinated, don't leave them hanging around for too long, or the plant will be smaller and weaker.

Plant in blocks rather than rows, 1-2 ft apart each way. This helps germination as it is done by the wind, as this is a type of grass.

**Protection** If you have a possibility of badgers they can destroy a crop if not protected.

**And then** I have only watered my sweetcorn once, when a really dry spell made a neighbour's plants to start going to flower while the plant was only 2 ft tall. Watering I think stopped ours doing the same, and they grew to healthy 6 ft high plants

**Harvest** They are tricky to tell when they are ready. Look for full looking cobs, which feel heavy, and the tassel at the end has gone fully black. You can peel back the leaves to take a look if unsure before picking off the plant. Don't leave them on too long or they go mushy. They store well if taken off the cob by running a sharp knife down them, blanching and freezing.

## Fruit

All your fruit bushes and trees should be in by the end of March. Any bought in a pot can still be planted but make sure you water in well and continue watering in dry weather.

Be aware that soft fruit apart from autumn raspberries needs to be netted to protect from the birds, either with a fruit cage, a netting cloche or net draped over individual plants. Birds



particularly like summer raspberries, blueberries, cherries, redcurrants, and aronia berries.

You can feed mature plants by adding manure to the surface; it will permeate the soil gradually. You can mulch blueberries with rotting bracken leaves, or pine needles, as this is good for acid loving plants

For new fruit trees, pick dead blossom off pear, plum and apple trees (after the bees have fed!) on the first year after planting, to ensure their energy goes to producing healthy roots and not fruit to get them established.

## Flowers

You may have started off your flowers earlier in the year. I find some take a while to get going, particularly Rudbekia and Echinacea. Verbena Bonasis seeds do not like the soil drying out or they will not germinate.

**Position** Try to plant flowers in any available space near the vegetables as it encourages insects that feed on pests

**Soil preparation** Most flowers are not fussy, all will grow strongly if the soil has been improved with manure etc. Some wild flowers don't germinate on really rich soil, but lots are fine.

**Sow** The following can be started off in modules inside:

Perennials: Bergamot, Echinacea, Rudbekia, Dahlia, Verbena

Annuals: Rudbekia Zinnia, French / African marigolds, Helenium, Verbena, and Helichrysum (or straw flower), Knautia, Bishop's flower, annual Euphorbia for foliage,

The following like to be sown in situ:

Annuals: all cornfield annuals such as poppies and cornflowers, Gypsophilia, scabious, Nicotiana Alta "lime green", Verbena, Knautia, Cosmos purity.

If sowing in situ, it can be hard to weed them if you can't tell exactly what is a weed and what you have planted. Avoid this by sowing in a cross. This way you can fill in a patch between other plants, and know what's what when weeding. Thin out to 4-5 plants per square foot.

More flowers include: Annual Cleome (spider flower) "Helen Campbell"

Biennial Wallflowers and *Erysimum cheri* "Fire king" or "Blood Red"

Or Sweet Williams – *Dianthus Barbatus* "Nigricans".

Bulbs you can plant in spring include gladioli, the nanus types being smaller and better for small flower arrangements, and also alliums, which are also attractive to bees.

**Plant** when the danger of frost is over, sometimes I plant out really small seedlings, as they haven't managed to get very big. I find as soon as they are in soil they start to grow much quicker, and starting them off in pots helps to position them with room to grow and makes weeding easier. Each flower will need a varying amount of room to grow, so refer to the packet.

**Support with** cut flowers they have a long stem and some need some support. Rudbekia, zinna, calendula, French marigold and cosmos seem fine without support but cornflowers, African marigold, gypsophilia, scabious, and dhalia fall over. This did not affect how many flowers they produced or how pretty they looked in the garden or jam jar, but often the stem was bent, making them impossible to do a hand-tied bouquet, they were harder to pick and drooped over the lawn. I used canes and string to support them, but it was fiddly and lots of work, which didn't get done in time for the growth. Natural pea supports, which are natural twigs, will give support while

looking nice, with also less work to do. You can buy long lasting wire plant supports from catalogues and garden centres, which are expensive but look nice. Four bamboo canes in a square, with large holed chicken wire tied a foot or two off the ground in-between, provides a cheaper option.

**Harvest** the flowers regularly as it encourages more to grow, often if you don't pick them and let the flowers go to seed, annual plants will die.

### **Things Covered in next talk**

Trouble shooting what you have done so far

Mulches

Continuation – successive sowings follow on and winter crops

Green Manures

Harvesting

Saving Seeds

Recipes –

Please send me any recipes you have enjoyed this summer to [allelements78@icloud.com](mailto:allelements78@icloud.com), and I can copy them to the notes for us all to share – thanks!

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