



BEGINNING TO GROW YOUR OWN

Why?

There are many benefits to growing your own vegetables. The nutrient content far outweighs that of shop bought produce – commercially grown vegetables are usually depleted in vitamins and minerals by the time we buy them, unless they are locally grown in good quality soil. Freshly picked from your own garden, the taste is a world away from supermarket vegetables and, after the initial investment for any products, seeds and plants you may need, depending on what you want to grow, it is much cheaper to grow your own, especially if you choose the right varieties.

What?

The first thing to consider is what you and your family like to eat. It may seem obvious, but think about the things you buy most of, especially if you want to save money and/or use space effectively, particularly if this is limited. Growing from vegetable plants is easier but you are also limited to the varieties that are available. Growing from seed gives you the following benefits:

- You can grow a wider range of plants and varieties generally
- You can choose according to attributes such as flavour, pest resistance, colour etc
- It's cheaper
- You can sow in succession (ie space sowings a couple of weeks apart) to avoid gluts and shortages
- You will get a better range of crops for out of the main growing season as there tends to be even less of a range of autumn planted vegetable plants available
- You'll get more satisfaction and enjoyment

Some seeds are easier than others and some require heat to germinate (eg tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, aubergines), whereas others can be sown directly into the vegetable patch as long as soil conditions are suitable. That said, it is often better to start some seeds (eg brassicas, lettuce, spinach, broad beans, peas etc) off in seed trays, modules or pots in a greenhouse, growhouse or cold frame as they will give you earlier crops and will get off to a good start for spring sowings and, at other times of the year the veg patch may be full of other crops, so sowing in modules/pots then can help you manage space better.

Crops that are easy to grow from seed include: salad leaves and other salad crops (eg radishes, spring onions), peas, broad beans, runner beans and beetroot. Potatoes and onions from sets are also easy to grow. Tomatoes and courgettes are relatively easy too, but need to be started off with heat (eg on a windowsill indoors).





Where?

Choose a sunny spot for growing vegetables as most will need plenty of light, although a few leafy vegetables like salad leaves and spinach are better off with some shade so that they don't bolt. When sowing outdoors the soil should be warm and dry enough, so be guided by weather conditions rather than dates. Rake soil to a fine tilth and sow according to instructions, being careful not to sow too close together as this will make thinning out later on more laborious. To make this easier you can use seed tapes which have vegetables already spaced out for you. Water in dry spells, especially at seedling/young plant stage. Planting distances and sowing times will vary - full details are given on seed packs. Unless you have used seed tapes or mats, it is important to thin out plants according to directions to make sure that they are not competing with each other for water and nutrients. For the same reason it is also important to keep weeds under control either manually, by hoeing or with careful application of appropriate weedkillers.

When?

To help avoid gluts and shortages, it is a good idea not to sow too many of the same seeds of faster maturing crops at once (eg salad crops, spinach, peas and French beans). Sow them at around two weekly intervals, leaving space for later sowings. Cut and come again salads are useful as they can be harvested over a long period and vegetables like courgettes and marrows will also crop for a long period if you harvest regularly and tomato plants will give you abundant cropping over a relatively long period.



How?

If you are starting seeds off indoors use a good quality seed or multi-purpose compost. The compost should be just moist. If it is too wet, spread it out over newspaper to dry it off a bit and if it is on the dry side, gradually add some water (you can do this by setting the seed trays or pots in a tray of water) until it is slightly moist. Sow according to pack instructions and thin out or transplant when large enough to handle, holding seedlings by the leaves, rather than the stems. If you have sown in biodegradable modules or pots, these can be planted direct into the soil. Miracle-Gro Grow-ables have food and compost incorporated and can also be planted direct into growing bags etc, which is less stressful for plants. Continue to keep young plants well-watered in dry periods and cover with fleece if it looks as if there is going to be a frost. Any crops grown in containers or grow bags will need supplementary feeding once they are more mature. Please ask a member of staff to recommend the right fertiliser for individual plant requirements.

For further gardening tips of all kinds take a look at the wealth of information on our website – or phone us / email us / bring us a sample or a picture and let us help guide you to success.