

Growing vegetables from seed (2)

Getting the most from your vegetable plot

The benefits of growing vegetables are many fold – the flavour and nutrient content far outweigh that of shop bought produce. To get the most from your vegetable plot it is worthwhile planning what you grow and how you grow it so that you are making the best use of space available and getting exactly what you want from your efforts – whether you want to save money, grow something a little more exotic or just want to start with things that are easy to grow. Seed catalogues contain a wealth of information and it is worth getting hold of a couple to study to help you plan. Some things you might want to look out for are **easy-to-grow vegetables**, especially if you are new to vegetable growing and/or want to involve your children, such as the Sutton 'Speedyseeds', 'Groweasy' and the 'Seed Squad' range for children. For **cost-effective** choices, if space is limited, choose vegetables that are expensive in the shops (eg unusual vegetables or baby vegetables) or 'cut-and-come-again' crops (see below). A major consideration in deciding what to grow is obviously things that most of the family enjoy and you can grow the best of them by opting for varieties that have a particularly good **flavour**. Examples of flavoursome varieties are as follows: Climbing French Bean 'Limka' (Suttons), which is also an early cropper, Lettuce 'Pandro' (Suttons) and Lettuce 'Chartwell' (T & M), both of which are mildew resistant. Onion F1 Hytech (Suttons), Coriander 'Confetti' (T & M) and Tomato 'Ailsa Craig' are other examples of varieties noted for their good flavour.

Many vegetables may be sown direct into the ground, either in seedbeds, for transplanting later, or in their final positions, according to the type of vegetable being grown. Some vegetables need to be started off (or kept) under glass. With others, this may be desirable in order to produce an earlier crop. When sowing outdoors the soil should be prepared properly. Please see out factsheet on soil preparation and crop rotation) and the seeds sown in straight lines/drills. Straight lines make for easier maintenance in the vegetable garden - they are easier to hoe. Water during dry spells, especially at seedling/young plant stage. It is also important to keep crops that are prone to bolting (eg many lettuce varieties, cabbages, some spinach varieties) when the weather is dry. Planting distances and sowing times will vary and full details are given on seed packs. 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 wise to keep weeds under control.

Using space effectively in vegetable plots

Plan your vegetable plot carefully - by choosing different varieties of vegetables and/or doing **successional sowings** you can extend the season and availability considerably. Details of whether a crop may be sown in succession will be given on seed packets. For a first time vegetable grower it can be difficult to remember what should be sown in succession and when it should be done. It is useful, therefore, to keep a diary of when the next sowing should go in as a reminder. Any seed saved for successional sowings should be stored in a cool, dry place. Certain crops have a long harvesting season and are '**cut-and-come-again**' such as spinach, courgettes, leaf beet and salad leaves. Another long cropper is Broccoli 'Sprouting Summer Purple' (Suttons) and the baby pods of the runner bean Rotbluehende (Teenie Weenie) from Thompson & Morgan are stringless and can be picked over several months. Also look for vegetable varieties that are early or late cropping. This will help to extend the harvesting season.

Another factor to consider is that some varieties are better for **storing** or **freezing** than others. The beetroot variety 'Alto F1 hybrid' from Thompson & Morgan stores well, as does Onion F1 Hytech from Suttons. 'Bunyard's Exhibition' is an example of a broad bean that freezes well. The pes variety 'Celebration' also tastes good after freezing.

There are many unusual varieties of vegetables – baby vegetables, brightly coloured vegetables (red, yellow or purple carrots, brightly coloured Swiss Chard – eg 'Bright Lights' (T & M), round courgettes, Romanesco cauliflower – there is no reason for vegetables to be boring, tasteless or expensive when you grow your own. For further information and inspiration contact seed suppliers for catalogues and literature. Suttons Seeds (tel 01803 696400) or Thompson & Morgan (01473 688821)