

BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO... GROWING

**BETTER
FOOD**
Organic. Local. Ethical.

5 rules to growing your own food

1 Don't worry too much about rules.

Gardeners use all kinds of techniques to get the same result. Do what works for you. Learn from people you trust, whether a green-fingered friend or allotment neighbour. The Royal Horticultural Society provides sound advice for anybody who likes to stick to the rules.

So, bearing no.1 in mind...

2 All plants need water, just like us.

In the West Country, water may not be a problem. But, if there's no rainfall when the sun gets stronger, you'll need to regularly water your crops (especially after planting or sowing).

3 All plants need food.

The best way to supply the right nutrients to your plants is to add lots of organic matter to the soil. This might be garden compost, well-rotted farmyard manure or even sowing a 'green manure', such as buckwheat, when your plot is bare. Organic matter also helps soil to maintain a good structure, retain water and encourage biological diversity.

4 Keep on top of weeds, or they'll get on top of you.

They will rob your precious plants of nutrients, water and light. We recommend organic methods of controlling weeds through good old hard graft, mulching or, better still, using a no dig method as advocated by Charles Dowding.

5 Expect disappointment and triumph.

Every season brings challenges, no month or year is the same. For some crops, you'll have more harvest than you can eat and for others, the season won't go as planned. That's ok, the joy of tucking into food that you grew yourself far outweighs a few disappointments.

How to grow great food without the effort

Easy fruit

If you have enough room for a fruit bush, or even something bigger like an apple or pear tree, go for it. They will still look lovely (particularly an apple tree in bloom), help pollinator insects, and give you tasty, home-grown fruit with little-to-no effort. We recommend the following for small gardens and even containers on a patio or balcony...

Strawberries: 'Aromel'. Will give you a smaller crop of fruit regularly throughout the summer, so you don't just have to gorge around Wimbledon.

Blueberries: 'Juke'. Late flowering shouldn't be affected by frost and will give lots of tasty fruit in early summer. Likes acidic soil, so this may be one for containers in Bristol.

Raspberries: 'Autumn Bliss'. The easy option compared to summer raspberries – pruning is a doddle – simply cut all of the stems back to just above ground level each winter.

Easy Veg

In May (depending on the weather and how warm the soil is), it's possible simply to sow certain seeds directly into prepared soil.

Clear any weeds to make sure nothing will compete with your crop (and so that you know whether it is a weed or crop germinating!). Dig plenty of organic matter into the soil. Then, depending on your plant of choice, sow your seeds at even spacing according to the eventual size of the plant; the packet should give a guide. Seeds should be buried about two to three times their size in depth. You might want to sow two at a time to better your odds, since there is no guarantee of germination from every seed.

You'll have to be quick this year, but cabbages, cauliflower, broccoli, peas, sweetcorn, French beans and runner beans can all be sown directly into the ground in mid to late May. You may need to protect the young, delicate plants from pesky slugs, snails and other pests!

For those that like to eat sprouts, BioSnacky Seed Germinators from A. Vogel are available at our St Werburghs and Whiteladies Road stores for compact table-top indoor growing.



Ready, set, grow!

Grow your own cress egg head

A fun activity for kids and big kids alike!

You will need:

- An eggshell (boil the egg and eat it for breakfast first!)
- One part of an egg box or an egg cup
- A felt tip pen
- Cotton wool
- Cress seeds

What to do:

1. Scoop out any bits of egg, then fill with cotton wool that has been sprinkled with water.
2. Carefully draw a face on the egg shell with a felt tip pen; if you can, position the face so that it is high enough to peek out above the cup. Once done, put the shell in an egg cup.
3. Sprinkle on a thin layer of cress seeds.
4. Leave for two or three days until the seeds start to sprout.
5. Once the seeds have sprouted, stand by a window. Remember to sprinkle them with a little water each day.

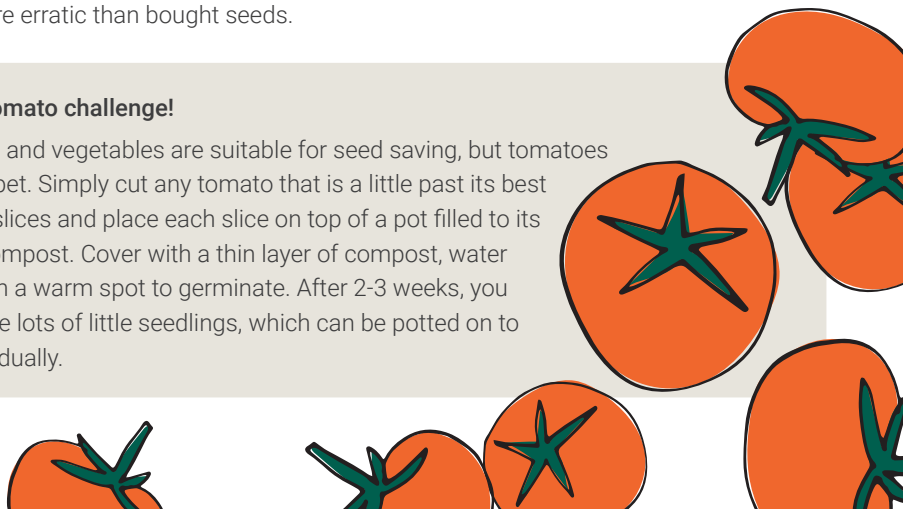


Saving seeds

One of the most sustainable ways of growing is to use seeds saved from a previous crop, or even fruit and veg purchased from a shop. Just bear in mind that the plant may not turn out to be exactly the same variety as the one the seeds came from, and that germination could be a little more erratic than bought seeds.

Take the tomato challenge!

Not all fruit and vegetables are suitable for seed saving, but tomatoes are a safe bet. Simply cut any tomato that is a little past its best into 5mm slices and place each slice on top of a pot filled to its rim with compost. Cover with a thin layer of compost, water and leave in a warm spot to germinate. After 2-3 weeks, you should have lots of little seedlings, which can be potted on to grow individually.



Think you know your onions?

Have a go at our growing quiz

Answers are below, tell us on social media how you get on...

Questions

1. Why could a head of broccoli be compared to a bouquet?
2. The berries of which plant are the key botanical in London Dry Gin?
3. From which flower is saffron derived?
4. Which flower, a member of the daisy family, is often dried and used to make herbal tea infusions?
5. True or false: tomatoes and potatoes are related.
6. What soothing extract is derived from the English Marigold?
7. The longest carrot in the world measured...
a) more than 1m **b)** more than 3m **c)** more than 6m?

Answers

1. A broccoli is actually a large cluster of flower buds.
2. London Dry Gin is made using juniper berries.
3. Saffron comes from *crocus sativus* (or autumn crocus).
4. Camomile is the flower used to make herbal tea infusions.
5. True, both tomatoes and potatoes are part of the Solanaceae (nightshade) plant family.
6. Calendula is derived from the English Marigold. Did you know that the National Plant Collection of Calendula is held at Bristol Zoo?
7. **c)** more than 6m. The longest carrot measures 6.245m and was grown by Joe Atherton, as verified at the UK National Giant Vegetables Championship. This measurement included the finer roots, not just the body of the carrot!

Bristol Food Kind

The Bristol Food Kind campaign wants to hear about acts of food kindness at home and in the community. Share your ideas on social media using #BristolFoodKind. bristolfoodnetwork.org/bristol-food-kind/



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