

Growing food at home series

Growing vegetables in spring

Pack D Notes 6a

These notes contain information to assist the home grower in selecting suitable vegetables to grow in spring through to summer. Whilst growing your own food is fantastic and rewarding, there is no doubt, there's much information to understand, numerous factors to consider, and various approaches to take. To assist you assess your resources to select the best site in your garden for growing vegetables and prepare the soil refer to the information in [Pack A](#), [Pack B](#) and [Pack C](#). When the site is prepared it is time to start sowing seeds and planting seedlings. Information on how is in [Pack D1](#), [Pack D2](#) and [Pack D3](#).

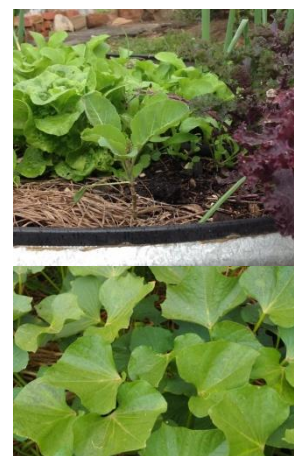
Separate information sheets on manage crops over the seasons is in [Pack D5](#)

Growing spring vegetables

Spring is the time that you can look at planting a wide range of vegetables. The cooler weather and soil moisture from winter rains allow you to start many vegetables direct from seed in the garden. As well, warmer weather plants can be started in punnets or pots to be planted out in late spring.

Planning successive crops through to summer

Plan your vegetable garden to have a succession of crops that carry you throughout summer. Consider the time till harvest and how long the vegetable crop will need the space. Most vegetables need 3 months or so, with solanums-tomatoes, capsicum, chilli, eggplant and cucurbits-pumpkin family generally taking the space for 4-5 months or longer.



Early spring (September) you can plant direct in an open site with a full day's sun to warm up the soil.

- Short harvest time (3-4 months) beans/peas, beetroot, bok choy/pak choy, broccoli/cauliflower/cabbage, carrot, celery, chicory, coriander, corn, dill, kale, kohlrabi, leek, lettuce, mizuna, mustard greens, onion, potato, radish, rocket, silver beet, spring onion, sunflower, turnip, watercress
- Long harvest time (4 months or more) amaranth, artichoke, chives, garlic chives, marjoram, mint, parsley, parsnip, rhubarb, rosemary, sage, tarragon, thyme

Late spring when the ground warms up you can plant solanums (tomato family), cucurbits (pumpkin family), basil, choko, ginger/tumeric, okra, peanut, snake bean, sweet potato, taro, water chestnut, yam. These plants will occupy the plot for the rest of summer.

Planning for increases in temperature

It is important when planning your garden to consider the weather conditions likely in summer i.e. excessive heat with late afternoon sun. Most vegetables will need some shelter from this in the form of shade and mulch.

When planning for summer growing you need to consider providing shade from the western edge of your plot where the late afternoon sun will be strongest. You can use shade cloth, structures with plants growing on them or tall plants to protect the rest of the garden.

- Tall plants that will handle the heat include: amaranth, corn, Jerusalem artichoke and sunflowers. Beans are great to grow up a trellis or onto other plants for protection
- Sweet potato can also help shade other plants
- Mediterranean herbs such as rosemary, lavender, oregano and sage can also help protect other plants. These are permanent feature of the garden
- Chillies, capsicum and eggplant will handle the western sun but not tomatoes
- Moving east you can plant other tough plants including tomatoes. Then your “softer” plants which include all the salad greens, basil, carrot, celery, brassicas and onion family.



Using taller plants to provide shelter against late western sun in summer

Tall plants on the western side

Offer protection for the plants next in line to the east

- amaranth
- beans- grown up a trellis
- corn
- jerusalem artichoke
- sunflowers

Plants that cope with western sun

- capsicum
- chillies
- eggplant

pumpkin under corn

Next in line, protected from the taller plants

- basil
- brassica
- carrots
- celery
- onion family
- tomatoes
- salad greens



Low growing plants shade soil- “living mulch”

- sweet potatoes
- pumpkin
- zucchini

Supporting beneficial wildlife

Plan to have a variety of plants flowering throughout summer to provide habitat and food for beneficial insects and other animals. These can be vegetables that you let go to flower (and collect the seed from) or flowering plants such as alyssum, calendula, pansy, violets, sages, daisies and a range of native plants. The saltbushes have been shown to be very good habitat for lacewings (and spiders).



Provide a source of clean water. Fill shallow plant saucer with pebbles and cover with clean water. Predatory insects and other beneficial creatures will land on the rocks safely for a drink. Or put corks in a bird bath for bees (they drown in water without floating support).

Spring vegetables

Early spring (September) direct sowing

Start the following vegetables direct from seed in the garden.

SWEET CORN

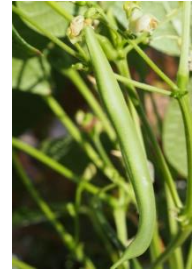
- Need rich soil (add compost)
- The super sweet F1 hybrids are best
- Plant in rows of two or more as they are wind pollinated
- Plant seeds 1-2 cm deep and water well
- Space plants and rows 50 cm apart
- Fertilise with blood and bone, compost, pellets (Neutrog's Rapid Raiser/Rocket fuel)
- You can plant leafy greens in between the rows of corn to be harvested before the corn matures



As the corn grows (50-75cm high) add runner beans to grow up the corn and pumpkin/squash to grow between the corn. This is the "three sisters" guild used by the Aztecs. The beans are planted close to the corn while the pumpkin can be grown from low mounds at the ends of the rows. Leave the corn stalks in place once you harvest it as they will be supporting the beans and protecting the pumpkin from the heat of summer

BUSH BEANS

- Fast growing and don't need rich soil.
- Plant seed 1cm deep, water well, then don't water until beans pop up
- Plant in "pairs" 15-20 cm apart to provide support
- Can be in rows or dotted around other plants
- Butter and epicure are delicious



BEETROOT is easy to grow from seed. Grow in any soil types, their very deep roots open up clay soils. Sow beetroot every 4 weeks for continued harvest. They are best planted as seed, transplanting seedlings damages the taproot

- Sow ½ to 1 cm deep in rows.
- Space 15 cm apart for good size, rows 20-30 cm apart
- Plant seed ½ -1 cm deep and keep damp
- Thin plants out to 10-15 cm spacing as necessary



CARROTS The seed needs to be fresh. Do not dig in compost or manures as these cause carrots to divide into odd shapes. They like open or light sandy soils to grow straight. Over fertilising will promote leafy growth at the expense of root growth. If they follow another crop such as Brassicas or Solanums they may need no fertiliser at all.

- Can be sown random in patches or in rows
- Cover seed with 2-3 mm soil and keep moist until germination (7-10 days)
- Thin seedlings out as they grow, you can be harvesting "baby" carrots after 6-8 weeks, leaving others to harvest at 12-16 weeks



LEAFY GREENS include lettuce, chicory, endive, parsley, rocket, coriander and mustard greens. They are best planted as seed as this ensures deep roots which is important as the weather warms up.

- Sprinkle seed around or in rows, cover lightly with soil (2-3mm)
- They can be planted with other crops and thinned out. Seedlings that come up can be transplanted or left where they come up



POTATOES are planted in trenches or in "stacks". If the potatoes have been left out in diffuse light they will develop "eyes" and shoots will emerge from these.

- Dig a trench 20-40 cm deep, laying the soil just to the side
- Plant the potatoes in the base of the trench with the eyes/shoots upwards
- Cover with 2-4 cm of soil/compost/mulch. The potatoes shoot up as a leafy green top. When they are 20-30 cm high cover with soil, leaving 10 cm uncovered.
- Repeat this as the plants grow
- You can "bandicoot" the potatoes when they are 8-10 week old, that is feel around in the soil/mulch for young potatoes and harvest them. Leave some to mature at 12 -14 weeks
- When the tops of the potatoes die back you can dig the lot up or dig up gradually as you need them

CUCURBIT FAMILY (pumpkin family)- cucumber, melons, gourds, pumpkin and squash. Either establish in 14 cm pots and transplants later or plant the seed direct where it is to grow.

- For direct sowing, use rich soil to make the mound (may mix compost in) 15-25 cm high and 20-35 cm wide, with a dish in the middle
- Plant seeds 1-2 cm deep into the side of the mound and water via the depression at the top.
- 3-5 seed planted per mound can be thinned out to 2-3 plants
- Extra fertilizer can be added to the top as the plants grow
- A mound in a sunny spot will warm up earlier in spring, plant zucchini there!
- Cucumbers, gourds and melons are best grown on a trellis
- For melons this can be at an angle. The melons hang down below the trellis



Jap pumpkin



Zucchini rambling

Melons and pumpkins on moist ground or heavy wet mulch may get damaged from rot (fungal infections). Then slaters, millipedes, slugs and earwigs can chew into the melon/pumpkin. If they are on the ground put a layer of straw (or even better pine needles) beneath them as a bed. If this gets saturated replace with dry material.

It is normal for cucurbits to wilt in very hot weather. They will usually perk up as the sun goes down. This is where protective measures using other plants can be really effective. Try the “three sisters” guild of corn, beans and squash. Or grow between other tall plants or structures that provide shade in summer. Grow a trellis or tripod of climbing beans to the west of a cucumber or melon trellis.

Early spring (September) seedlings to transplant

Seedlings to transplant plant out now include:

- Brassicas- broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, kale, kohlrabi. Brassicas need rich soil. And 50 cm space between
- Celery- needs rich soil. Plant in rows 30 cm apart
- leek - plant in rows 30 cm apart
- Silverbeet - planted in rows or randomly to add colour and structure, especially the coloured varieties (chards)
- Onion- need “poor” soil, too much nitrogen stops bulb formation
- Any herbs except basil



For information on how to transplant and care for seedlings Refer to [Pack D2 Growing from seed](#)

Successional plantings are suited to many vegetables. For most this means planting every 4-6 weeks. Lettuce and the other greens, broccoli/cauliflower/cabbage, corn, beetroot 4-6 weeks. Faster growing greens such as bok choy/tatsoi, cress, radish every 4 weeks.

Plant guilds are collections of plants that work well together (tomato and basil).

Mulch

As the weather warms up the surface of the soil/compost should be mulched.- a thin (1cm) mulch to start with. Thicker layers will harbor pests such as earwigs, slaters and millipedes. More mulch can be added as summer comes on. By this time it may not be as necessary if you have a good crop of vegetables as they will shade the soil.

Early spring (September) starting seedlings for planting in later spring

Now is the time to start seedlings off for mid to late spring planting. Tomatoes, eggplant, chilli and capsicum all transplant well from punnets. Establish cucurbits (pumpkin family)- cucumber, melons, gourds, pumpkin and squash in 14 cm pots or plant the seed direct.

Water

Water seedlings daily in warm weather until they come up. Then try to establish a weekly watering regime by deep watering. If the weather is cool, or we have rain, watering may only be needed every two weeks or so. Check the soil to know when to water. In cool conditions if you water too often plants develop shallow root systems. Then when the really hot weather comes along they need heaps of water to stay alive and even then may wilt. If they do wilt, watering may not resuscitate them immediately. You may need to shade or even cover the plant entirely to prevent a setback to the plant.

Pest

Pests will do the most damage to seedlings. Use a collar for transplanted seedlings until they are at least 4-6 leaf stage. Keep your mulch layer thin until the weather really heats up. Provide a good range of flowering plants and shrubs to provide habitat for predators and parasites of pests. To find out what is causing the damage it may be necessary to go out at night and search with a torch as this is when most of the pests are active. Rats and mice will eat the fruit but rarely seedlings. Sparrows may chomp on young seedlings (especially peas). Protect with netting/gutter guard or collars.



Adapted from Harry Harrison- Grow your Own Food workshop series 2015

Compiled by Shannan Davis, September 2020
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