

# HOW TO CHOOSE, GROW & ENJOY HEALTHY, HOME GROWN PRODUCE



TOP 12 EDIBLE PLANTS FOR GROWING  
SPRING/SUMMER IN PERTH

(A guide for beginners)

**THE GREEN LIFE SOIL CO**

Helping you grow a better garden

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# Growing your own healthy herbs & vegies at home is very rewarding.

If you're just starting out, we've compiled this helpful guide to 12 of the best edible plants to select from this Spring/Summer to try in your garden.

Choose what you like to eat, and what you can grow in your available space.

Start small – many useful plants can be grown in pots and containers; so even if you have a tiny courtyard or balcony YOU can get growing today!

This guide contains useful growing tips for Perth gardeners on growing some of the best & most popular summer vegies & herbs:

- Basil
- Beans
- Carrots
- Chillies
- Corn
- Cucumber
- Lettuce
- Pumpkin
- Rocket
- Tomatoes
- Watermelon
- Zucchini

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# Basil

With its delicious aroma and distinctive flavour, Basil would have to be one of THE most popular herbs to grow over the warmer months.

It is an annual, and doesn't like the cold, so it is best planted in spring and enjoyed right through until late autumn.

Basil originated in India and tropical regions of Asia, but interestingly these days we tend to think of it as a Mediterranean herb, due to its long association with Italian cooking.

There are many different types of Basil, all with slightly different flavours and growth habits. There are some with gorgeous purple/red leaves, and a crinkly leaf form, which are highly decorative to grow in the vegie patch.



The most common form is Sweet Basil, which has bright green leaves which grow to about 7cms long. The Sweet Basil plant will grow to about 30-50cms in height, with a similar spread.

Flowers are grown on spikes above the foliage, and are highly attractive to bees. If you are growing the plant for regular harvest, it is a good idea to trim flower spikes to encourage the plant to produce more bushy, leaf growth.

Perennial forms of Basil that will live for several years are available. They can be used for culinary purposes, but the flavour is different and more aniseed.

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## Growing Basil

Although in Spring many interesting varieties are available in the herb range of your local nursery, Sweet Basil is easy to grow from seed. It can be sown in trays or pots, or can be direct seeded in your garden. Wait until conditions are warmer – if you want to get a crop going early, it is best to do it indoors or in a warm, sheltered spot.

It prefers full sun, fertile well-drained soil, and regular water and will certainly benefit from regular liquid feeding to help produce lush leaf growth.

Basil is a hardy plant and is not likely to suffer from disease. However, do watch out for leaf eating pests like snails.

Basil tends to make an excellent companion plant for tomatoes, and is said to improve their flavour. (Basil and tomatoes certainly make an excellent food combination in cooking!)

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## Using Basil

The entire plant is edible, but usually leaves are snipped or hand-picked for use fresh as required. Flowers can be added to salads or used as a garnish.

Excess Basil can be dried, frozen in icetrays for popping straight into casseroles, or made into pesto and stored in the fridge or freezer until required.

# Beans

In the home garden, beans can be grown in either Spring or Autumn, providing you time it right! Crops can be grown over summer, but will need regular water, shelter from sunburn and extra TLC. Generally they don't like extremes of hot or cold, so you need to watch your window of opportunity to get a crop going at the right time.

Luckily, they are a quick growing crop and can be prolific bearers, so you can enjoy your fill.

There are two types of beans: Climbing and Dwarf.

Climbing beans can easily reach 1.5 – 2m high, and need a structure, trellis or frame to support them as they grow. This makes great use of vertical space, so you don't need a huge area of garden bed in order to grow them. Seeds can be sown about 40cms apart.

Climbing beans take a few extra weeks to harvest, but usually continue bearing for longer.

Popular climbing bean varieties include: Blue Lake, Lazy Housewife, Purple King (bears lovely purple pods which turn green once cooked), and Westralia.

Dwarf or bush beans tend to only reach about 1m, and have a wider growth habit, so plant about 1m apart to allow adequate access for harvesting and tending, and for good airflow between plants.

Popular bush bean varieties include: Strike, Gourmet Delight, Idelight and Redland Pioneer. There are also pale coloured 'butter bean' varieties like Cherokee Wax.



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## Growing Beans

Beans tend to like neutral, fertile soil – improve before planting with aged, well-rotted manure, compost, and a handful of blood and bone. Generally, additional fertilisers are not required once plants are established in good soil.

Beans are best sown from seed. Pre-soak the seeds in warm (not hot) water for a couple of hours or overnight. This serves to soften the hard outer casing of the seed, and hastens germination.

Plant seeds into damp soil, water in well and leave. Don't water again until after germination. (With continued watering, the seed may rot.) If you plant seeds too close together, thin weaker plants.

Planting new seeds every 3 weeks will give you a good succession of fresh crops producing.

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## Using Beans

Once the plant starts producing, keep picking the beans regularly. The plant will keep bearing if pods are harvested, in a quest to reproduce.

Surplus beans can be blanched and frozen.

All beans can be picked and allowed to dry, then used in cooking as a dried bean. Some varieties are better for this than others; Borlotti is a good one.

Drying mature pods will also provide you with seed of your own to sow again next year.

# Carrots

In Perth, we are lucky enough to be able to grow carrots year-round. They are easy to grow, but the trick lies in successfully germinating the seed.

Unfortunately, like most root crops, carrots are best grown from seed, as transplanting seedlings can be detrimental (although don't let that deter you from buying a punnet, if you are more confident about growing them that way. Generally they don't like root disturbance BUT it can be done).

Either way, carrots are a worthwhile vegie to grow – they are packed with nutrients and don't take up much space to grow. You can even grow them in pots; make sure they have at least 30cms depth.

There are many varieties of carrot – while they have similar taste, you can get a lovely range of colours (including white, yellow and purple) and shapes - from traditional baby carrots to round ones (which are the best choice for heavier soil).



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## Growing Carrots

Carrot seed is very tiny. It is very difficult (impossible) to pick out individual seeds to sow, so generally people plant out a pinch at a time, and then thin them as they grow. Another alternative is to mix the seed with a quantity of dry sand, and shake the sand & seeds out along a planting row. The sand serves to 'dilute' the seed and space it out somewhat.

Carrot seed should be sown on top of moist soil. Lightly cover the seed with a SPARSE sprinkling of sand or fine, sieved compost. If you bury the seed too deep, it may germinate but die before the emerging seedling can break the soil. So here's the problem with carrot seed. It needs to be kept moist in order to germinate, but if left on top of soil (or just below a few grains of soil) it will tend to dry out. This can kill the seed off while it's germinating, meaning you won't get a crop.

In warmer conditions, one trick is to lay a piece of shade cloth over the ground until germination occurs, then it can be removed. At other times of the year, regular watering/misting the surface should be enough.

Carrots do not need particularly fertile soil. In fact, too much nitrogen in the soil can cause them to twist and distort as they grow. Likewise, hard soils, or those with lots of rocks or lumps can cause this to happen. It's best to grow carrots in loose, sandy soil – almost pure sand. Nutrition can be supplied by regular, light liquid feeding.

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## Using Carrots

Tiny carrots removed for thinning can be eaten. You can try carefully transplanting them but it's not always successful. The thinning process may need to be done a few times until you have one carrot every 5cms or so. Ultimately the remainders will have the space to grow in to lovely, large carrots.

Sow a successive crop every 2-3 weeks and you can supply fresh carrots year-round. Approx. 3m<sup>2</sup> devoted to carrots should be enough to supply a family's needs for a year.

# Chillies (& Capsicum)

Chillies and Capsicum are closely related. If you like a little heat in your food, growing chillies can be a fun thing to do. There are many varieties; ranging from mild to extremely hot. And they come in a diverse range of colours and shapes. Chillies are actually quite ornamental to grow. Personally, I'm not a chilli eater – but they are worthwhile for their shape and colour, and can look spectacular in a pot.

Chilli bushes tend to be slightly smaller growing than capsicum, with most plants growing to a height and spread of about 30-50cms. Capsicum bushes tend to grow to around 75cms.



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## Growing Chillies

Chillies grow from seed quite well, and can be planted directly into the garden, but are also equally suited to starting off in seedling trays. If you want to get a head start on the season, this is the best way to do it, so you can control the environment and keep the soil warm to encourage early germination.

Transplant strong seedlings and plant out about 50cms apart. Chillies and capsicum plants are usually grown as an annual, however plants can actually survive for up to several years, although their growth slows right down in the cooler months (and plants will be killed by frost if you happen to get them where you live).

Chillies & capsicums like a sunny spot in the garden, and should be planted into fertile soil. Regular feeding will ensure a good crop (although avoid too much nitrogen rich fertiliser, which will promote leaf growth over fruiting). Pick fruit regularly to encourage the plant to continue producing flowers and fruit.

If you have very young children, you may wish to plant your chillies in a spot where they are out of reach of small fingers. Ripe, red fruit can look very appealing after all.

Capsicums can be used at various stages of their development – traditional capsicum varieties like Yolo or Californian Wonder can be eaten when green, or left on the bush to mature and eventually ripen to red, when they will be sweeter tasting.

When you do decide to remove your plants, practise crop rotation and don't re-plant chilli, capsicum, eggplant, tomatoes or potatoes into that bed; as they are all from the same extended family of *Solanum*. With all members of this family, it's important to water regularly - spasmodic watering tends to promote a common problem called blossom end rot.

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## Using Chillies

Unless you are a real chilli lover, 1 or 2 plants will most likely be enough to keep you supplied. Excess chillies can be dried, or made into a paste to enjoy any time of year. It's advisable to wear rubber gloves when chopping and processing your chilli crop to avoid accidental contact with your skin, which can be unpleasant to say the least.

Chillies can be used to make simple treatments for sap sucking insects in your garden, like aphids.

# Corn

Eating fresh, home grown corn is totally different experience to eating store-bought cobs. It's an experience we should all enjoy, every summer! Thankfully corn is fairly easy to grow, so give it a go!

There are many different varieties of sweetcorn available. Most seeds and seedlings you find are hybrids – cross bred from different strains for superior flavour. These are not the same as genetically modified, and are perfectly natural – however you won't be able to save seed and grow the same corn next year. If you wish to do this, look out for heritage seed or non-hybrid seed, which will grow true to form. Should you wish to seed-save, grow only one variety of corn to avoid natural hybridisation in your backyard.

Sweetcorn does take up a fair bit of room in your garden. Although there are dwarf growing varieties, most can reach 1.8m in height.

This can be utilised when planning your garden – they will provide shade for lower growing plants around them over the height of summer.



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## Growing Corn

Sweetcorn are hungry feeders. Before planting, improve the garden bed with well rotted manure, compost, blood & bone and rock dust. Corn can be easily grown from seed, or seedlings if you prefer.

Plant out each seed (or young seedling) about 25-30cms apart. It is better to plant your corn in a block rather than in one long row, as grouping plants together aids cross pollination and provides a better crop.

Plants like full sun, but try not to have them in an area that gets hit by strong winds, as plants are susceptible to breaking.

During their growth stage, liquid fertilise regularly and ensure plenty of water. Corn is shallow rooted so don't allow the soil to dry out. Mulch with straw or pea straw to help retain moisture in the ground.

Pumpkin & squash and beans make excellent companion plants for corn. Beans can climb corn stalks and pumpkin will act to protect the soil. Look up 'Three Sisters Gardening' for more on this method used by Native Americans.

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## Using corn

Cobs are usually ready for picking once the 'silk' has dried, is turning brown and can be pulled out in one or two strands. If unsure, carefully 'unwrap' a cob and have a look. Poke a fingernail into one kernel and see how mature it is. Immature kernels will be hard; ripe ones will have a sweet, almost milky juice in them. If cob seems immature, carefully replace the 'wrapping' and leave a few days longer before checking again.

Ripe cobs are best picked and eaten really quickly – they say put the pot on to boil the water before going out to pick the cobs. Sugars in the corn change once the cob is removed from the plant, so try at least one this way to judge for yourself! Of course cobs can be stored in the fridge for eating within a few days, or blanched and frozen if you have surplus.

# Cucumber

Nothing quite says summer like a sweet, crisp home grown cucumber. I was astounded by the sweetness the first time I had the pleasure of trying one.

There are many varieties to choose from: - there are round 'apple' and 'lemon' type cucumbers (not usually found in the shops) to pale skinned Armenian cucumbers, to the more traditional Lebanese and Marketmore long cucumbers we see regularly.



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## Growing Cucumber

Easily grown from seed, but you can also find these available in punnets, which gives you a couple of weeks head start on growth. Although plants are prolific bearers, I'd suggest planting out more than you need. I find young seedlings are vulnerable to slaters and can die off in a sudden hot spell if allowed to dry out, so best to hedge your bets with a few 'spares'. You can always thin out weaker plants at any stage by just cutting them off at ground level.

Plant out cucumbers about 50cms apart. They do like to ramble so it is an idea to give them their own bed and allow them adequate space. They can be encouraged to climb up a trellis if you need to tame their spread.

Plant cucumbers into fertile soil and feed regularly. Cucumbers can be prone to fungal diseases like mildew on their leaves, so it's best to avoid overhead watering if possible, and allow good airflow around plants – another good reason to give them adequate space. Avoid watering in the afternoons so moisture doesn't sit on the leaves overnight. Watch for signs of disease on the leaves and remove any infected ones to avoid fungal spores spreading (dispose of in the bin). Cucumbers really don't like humid conditions.

Cucumbers are also susceptible to blossom end rot, so water at the same time of day, every day, to avoid the stress on the plant that causes this symptom to develop.

Once plants start to bear, they will keep coming and coming. Regular picking will encourage this – if you leave fruit on the vine the plant will stop producing flowers. Pollination is essential to get fruit to set, so encourage bees to your garden with flowering plants around your vegies.

Cucumbers are prolific bearers so it is unlikely to will use more than two or three plants for a family. (A Diggers book I read suggests 2 Armenian Cucumber plants can yield up to 46kgs of fruit!)

Bitter cucumbers usually result from lack of water – they are a thirsty crop and need lots (probably more than you think) especially once forming fruit. Avoid picking fruit in the heat of the day, and enjoy soon after picking for maximum sweetness.

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## Using Cucumbers

Cucumbers can be used when very small (that's what pickles are). Oversized cucumbers will tend to have tougher skin and more seeds, so you will need to find the 'sweet spot' that is right for you. Home grown cucumbers will have prickly skin (these are removed on commercial crops) – just give the cucumber a very light rub with a plastic scourer to remove the tiny spikes.



# Lettuce

Lettuce grows amazingly well in our Perth winters, but can struggle in our high summer temperatures. However – summer's when we love our salads the most, so it is worth providing the right conditions to keep harvesting your own greens as long as possible.

There are many varieties of lettuce, and some are better suited to warmer temperatures than others. Look for varieties listed as 'bolt-hardy', 'bolt-resistant' or 'slow bolt' - they mean the same thing; that the plants are less likely to go straight to seed in an effort to reproduce under stress.

Saving your own seed over generations will mean plants acclimatise to your local conditions; so in a few years you will have a variety very well suited to your requirements. Look for non-hybrid varieties and pick the plants that held off from flowering the longest to use for seed saving.



Lettuce comes in many forms: 'loose leaf' types that grow in an open form and are ideal for constantly picking the odd leaf or two (but leaving the plant in the ground), 'crisp head' types that form a tight head (like the standard iceberg lettuce you see at the shops), and 'butter head' types that fall somewhere in between. Then there's 'cos' types that have an elongated, upright heart.

There is a staggering array of leaf colours (from green to red to spotty to variegated) and leaf shapes. It's no wonder lettuces are a big part of traditional potager gardens – grown for their beauty and form as much as their edible nature. It's fun to grow a few different types, and make some truly gorgeous salads.

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## Growing Lettuce

You can grow lettuce from seed, or from seedlings. The advantage of seedlings is you can begin harvesting small leaves within a couple of weeks, rather than wait 6-8 weeks for your seeds to have reached this stage of growth. If growing from seed, plant out a few every 2-3 weeks to ensure you have a constant crop ready to come on.

Lettuce can be grown in pots, but in summer special care needs to be taken to ensure the soil temperature stays cool – so choose with care. Planting several lettuce in one large pot is better than planting individual lettuces in their own, smaller pots.

Wicking beds (basically outdoor versions of self-watering pots) are great for lettuces. Once plants are well established, they can access moisture constantly from the reservoir below. Lettuce are almost impossible to over water, and do require HEAPS. Daily watering over summer is required, and hand watering is ideal. If lettuces are stressed due to heat and insufficient moisture, they will be bitter tasting and bolt to seed.

In the height of summer, lettuce should be grown in the shade – at least avoid direct sun in the hottest part of the day. Consider a temporary shade structure or position a bed in a shady, sheltered spot that you use for your summer picking greens. Shelter from hot, drying winds and reflected heat from paving and fencing is also important. Mulch well around plants to protect the soil.

Lettuce likes fertile soil and regular feeding. Liquid manure/compost teas, fish emulsion, worm whiz and kelp are all fantastic to use in rotation to keep up soil fertility and ensure lush leafy growth.

# Pumpkins

Pumpkins are a really useful veggie to grow. The fruit stores well, so you can be enjoying your harvest many months after it was grown. There's nothing like pumpkin soup on a cold winter's evening!

There are lots to choose from – popular varieties include Butternut, JAP (which stands for Just A Pumpkin – they originate from America and have nothing to do with Japan!), and the more traditional grey skinned varieties like Iron Bark and Queensland Blue. You can grow sweet little gourmet pumpkins, HUGE exhibition pumpkins like Atlantic Giant, and strange looking variegated Turk's Turban pumpkins. Take your pick!



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## Growing Pumpkins

Pumpkin vines to sprawl, so they need a reasonable amount of space to grow. One tip is to plant them at the edge of your veggie bed and let the vines spill over the edge. They may take over the pathways, the lawn, etc – but does it matter? Vines can be trained to scramble up frames, but you will need to provide a sling to support fruit as it grows, so it may not be worth the bother.

Pumpkins are easy to grow from seed, and can be started in trays or planted directly into the garden. They like well drained, fertile soil. Plant into raised mounds about 20cms high (2-3 seeds can be sown around the mound) and water well. Watch out for slater damage to young seedlings (avoid using mulch around the plants until they are more established) and try to keep water off the leaves. Like Cucumbers, Pumpkins are susceptible to mildew and fungal diseases, and don't like humid conditions. The first sign of symptoms treat quickly with a homemade spray – 1 part regular milk to 9 parts of water. You may need to re-apply weekly; some plants tend to be more susceptible than others. Badly affected leaves should be removed and disposed of in the bin.

Pumpkins will grow in full sun – the leaves may droop on hot days, but in late afternoon once it cools down, the leaves will recover.

Pumpkins develop male and female flowers. If you look closely, you will see tiny, immature fruit at the base of some flowers – these are the female ones. Often, vines will produce lots of male flowers first and no females. Usually they will pop out female flowers too, but if you haven't found any female flowers within a few weeks, pick off some of the males to stimulate the vine to keep producing flowers. If you have enough insects and bees around, you should find pollination occurs naturally. If flowers are pollinated, the petals will drop off but the tiny fruit will keep growing and maturing. If they haven't been fertilised, the whole flower and the tiny fruit will wither and die. If you suspect bees aren't doing their thing, you can hand pollinate. Pick a fresh male flower, remove the petals and brush the pollen-laden stamens onto the stigma (the tall bit in the middle) within the female flowers.

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## Using Pumpkins

In autumn, the vine will begin to die back, and you usually harvest once stalks have turned brown. Larger pumpkins will make a hollow sound when tapped. Leave about 5cms of stalk on each fruit and allow to cure in the sun for a week or two (turn them every few days) before storing in a cool, dark place. Curing the pumpkins will prevent them going mouldy. Use any fruit that has soft spots first, as they won't keep well.

# Rocket

Known sometimes as Roquette, and in America as Arugula, Rocket is a peppery flavoured salad green that adds flavour to salads, stir fries, sandwiches, dips, pesto, pizza toppings, etc. A plant or two is all you need, but it's definitely a worthwhile addition to your summer garden.

There are two types of rocket – the common type (top picture) and wild rocket (bottom picture). Wild rocket has smaller leaves, but has the same spicy taste. Wild rocket is a little tougher; handling extremes of heat and cold better than common rocket. They are unrelated, but strangely the flavour is the same.



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## Growing Rocket

Both forms of Rocket can be grown from seed, and are very quick growing. But if you're only after a plant or two, it may be best to pick up a more mature plant in herb pots. It will be pretty much ready to use!

Rocket likes fertile, well-drained soil and regular water. Over summer, rocket will do better with shade protection in the hottest part of the day. Leaves grown in shade will be larger, too. Feed regularly with liquid fertiliser to promote healthy leaf growth. Older plants will have a stronger flavour, and if plants are stressed they become bitter.

Common rocket is a member of the Brassica family. Growing it very densely and digging it back into the soil (leaving roots and all to decompose) will help deter nematodes in sandy soil. Rocket makes a good companion for Tomatoes – which are particularly susceptible to root knot nematodes – so it makes sense to grow them together.



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## Using Rocket

Rocket is a superfood – related to Kale, it is packed with Vitamins, anti-oxidants, folates and compounds believed to have anti-cancer properties and anti-inflammatory benefits. It is low in calories and high in dietary fibre. All parts of the plant (both types of Rocket) are edible; flowers make a lovely addition to salads, or used as a garnish.

Rocket is fantastic to grow as a microgreen. This means using the young seedlings when only about 5cms high. To do this, use a shallow seedling tray and a good quality seed raising mix (like ours) and thickly sow seeds over the top. Lightly cover with a thin layer of soil and water gently. Keep moist, and in a warm, sheltered spot. Seed will germinate within a week, and once the seedlings reach about 4-5cms tall, trim them just above ground level with sharp scissors, and use the 'microgreens' to eat. They will be very tightly growing together - Just trim what you need.

Plants will re-sprout, but usually after 2-3 trimmings they are much weaker (of course, you can fertilise the seedlings). Most people have a few trays on the go and once they are no longer producing well, turf them out and start again. Remember to use certified organic fertilisers and wash any produce well before consumption.

# Tomatoes

Of all the home grown delights, tomatoes generate the most passion among gardeners. Dubbed 'pomme d'amour' or 'Love Apples' by the French, tomatoes are certainly well loved – being probably the most widely used fruit in the world.

There are many, many different varieties of tomatoes, and it's worth trying lots of different ones to see what you like, and how they grow in your garden. Tomatoes come in yellow, green, red, orange, blush pink, purple – and an almost true black form is being commercially developed in the UK. They range from tiny cherry tomatoes to large 'too big to fit in your hand' – but I can guarantee that any tomato grown at home, picked and freshly eaten will have superior flavour to shop bought ones. Cherry tomatoes are especially prolific, and are a great choice for beginner gardeners.



There are two types of tomato plants: 'Determinate' – these are lower growing, bush type tomatoes usually growing to 1 – 1.5m high. Determinate varieties will tend to have their fruit ripen at once – so if you intend to bottle or preserve your crop, this would suit your purposes.

'Indeterminate' are taller growing, vine tomatoes which can grow 1.5 – 2m high. They definitely require staking or growing against a trellis to support their weight. Indeterminate tomatoes will fruit over a longer period, so if you like to have your crop spread for picking and using regularly, this would work best for you. Ensure you set up stakes/trellises prior to planting to avoid damaging roots.

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## Growing Tomatoes

Unfortunately, tomatoes are rather prone to a number of diseases, and some pests. However, don't let that deter you from having a go! Plants can be grown from seed or seedling. If you intend to try several different varieties, you may be better off buying a mixture of strong plants in pots, which can be transplanted to your garden into improved, well-drained soil. Add compost, aged manure, rock dust, blood and bone and potash to the soil a good week or two before planting out. Don't grow tomatoes in the same spot year after year – practise crop rotation to lessen the chance of disease. If space is limited, you can grow tomatoes will in pots. A minimum of 30L size would be ideal. Grow your plants in a sunny spot, and water at regular intervals to avoid plant stress.

Feed tomatoes regularly (every 2 weeks) with a balanced fertiliser, but once flowers start to set, give them extra potassium (use sulphate of potash) and cut back on nitrogen, (which encourages leaf growth at the expense of fruiting). With fertilising, 'a little, often' is the best approach. Use a weak mixture, but apply regularly and religiously for best results.

Tomatoes don't like humidity. Avoid overhead watering and getting water onto leaves. Water gently around the base of the plant (avoid splashing soil onto foliage, which can spread disease). It is not uncommon for tomatoes to succumb to some type of disease towards the end of summer – dying vines will actually pump out more fruit in an effort to reproduce, so don't rip your vines out in despair. However, it's usually a good idea not to compost spent tomato plants if they had issues – dispose of them in your bin or burn them.

Keep an eye out for stink bugs and caterpillars, which like to attack your fruit and can spread disease. Treat with low toxicity, non-systemic sprays.

# Watermelon (and melons)

What can beat the refreshing qualities of a sweet, juicy chilled watermelon on a hot summer's day? Good news – growing your own watermelons is pretty easy! (Rockmelons and Honeydew melons are closely related, so these notes apply to them too!)

If you wish to grow a seedless watermelon, you will need to find a hybrid variety. The non-hybrid forms tend to have seeds – although some naturally produce less than others.

There are lots of varieties of melons to choose from. They do grow reasonably large, so ensure they have enough space to ramble around your garden. As a general rule, the larger the variety of fruit, the less will be produced by the plant. So a large, oblong watermelon variety (like Crimson Sweet) may only grow 2 -3 fruits per vine, a smaller type variety (like Sugar Baby), or rockmelons may produce 8 or more fruit per vine.



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## Growing watermelon

Melons can be grown from seed or seedlings, and should be planted into enriched soil. Raise up a mound about 20cms high and plant 2-3 seeds around the mound. Keep watered and fertilised well, with regular applications of seaweed, fish emulsion, etc.

Melons need bees or insects to pollinate flowers and produce fruit. If you look closely, you will see tiny, immature fruit at the base of some flowers – these are the female ones. Often, vines will produce lots of male flowers first and no females. Usually they will pop out female flowers too, but if you haven't found any female flowers within a few weeks, pick off some of the males to stimulate the vine to keep producing flowers. If flowers are pollinated, the petals will drop off but the tiny fruit will keep growing and maturing. If they haven't been fertilised, the whole flower and the tiny fruit will wither and die. If you suspect bees aren't doing their thing, you can hand pollinate. Pick a fresh male flower, remove the petals and brush the pollen-laden stamens onto the stigma (the tall bit in the middle) within the female flowers.

Growing conditions are similar for pumpkins (they are related). Try to avoid watering leaves and creating humid conditions, which can bring on fungal problems. Watch for slater damage on young plants, and once fruit is forming, check underneath for insect damage. You can put something under developing fruit to keep it directly off the ground if this helps. Melons are loved by rats and mice too – so keep watch if these are a problem in your garden.

As fruit is nearing maturity, reduce watering. This will give your fruit better keeping qualities, and concentrate the sugars meaning your fruit will be sweeter. A sudden increase in water when melons are almost ripe can cause fruit to split on the vine. (Watch out for this if we get summer rain.) Ripe melons sound hollow when tapped, and should smell sweet. Fruit that is ready to pick should pull from the vine easily. If you have to pull hard on the vine, it isn't ready.

If you grow traditional, non-hybrid varieties, you can save your own seed to grow next year. If you do this, it's best to only grow one type of watermelon, as they cross pollinate each other. Rockmelons and Honeydew won't cross with watermelon, but they will cross pollinate with each other.

# Zucchini (and Squash)

Be warned: Zucchini are one of the most productive plants to grow. It is unlikely you will need more than one or two plants to keep you supplied over summer. Unfortunately, ripe fruit doesn't tend to keep well, so you need to get creative with their use. Fresh zucchini can be eaten raw or cooked, so it is a pretty versatile veggie.

Zucchini grow around a central base, but plants can get pretty large – about 1m x 1m. Squash grow on trailing vines, but they are related, and their growing requirements are the same. Some countries refer to these plants as 'marrows' – a broad term for the entire family.

Varieties of Zucchini and Squash come in yellow and green forms, in a range of shapes and sizes. "Black Beauty" is the common dark green zucchini you find in the shops.



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## Growing Zucchini

Zucchini can be grown from seed or seedlings. Seeds can be started in trays or direct planted. I have found the danger with growing from seed is you are tempted to plant lots, and can easily end up with too many plants. If you have limited space, or want to get a jump start on the season, buy strong plants in seedlings. If buying a punnet, consider splitting it with a friend.

Plant into well-draining soil that has been enriched with aged manure, compost, rock dust and blood and bone. Zucchini are hungry plants, so feed regularly throughout their season with liquid fertiliser. They like regular watering and benefit from mulching to keep moisture in the soil and protect their roots.

To avoid blossom end rot, water plants consistently (i.e. At regular times of day and at regular intervals). Irregular watering patterns affect the plants uptake of moisture and minerals – particularly calcium – and this causes rot to form at the flower end of the fruit. Any fruit showing signs of this can still be used – harvest and remove the yukky bit, but use the remainder as normal.

Zucchini don't like humid conditions so avoid overhead watering if possible. They can be susceptible to leaf fungal disease like powdery mildew. Dispose of severely affected leaves in the bin, and treat plants with a simple home-made treatment of 1 part regular milk to 9 parts water. Use every 5 days, and immediately after periods of rain.

Zucchini and Squash form male and female flowers, and require good pollination to set fruit (read info on pumpkins & watermelon – close relatives). Zucchini flowers are edible, so if you really can't cope with more fruit; pick and use the flowers instead!

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## Using Zucchini

Zucchini can be picked at any stage. Courgettes are simply young zucchini picked when about 8-10cms long. Regular picking will encourage the plant to produce more fruit. If you have a glut, leave the fruit for longer (but be warned – fruit can grow very rapidly). Older fruit tend to be coarser. If you end up with too many fruit, Google; "Sneak a Zucchini onto your neighbours porch" night. (It's a real thing, believe me.)

# Our Products to Help YOU grow a Better Garden this Spring:

For planting out vegie crops, you can either:

- **Bring in fresh soil & start a brand new bed.**

If this is what you're doing, our **Certified Organic Vegetable Mix** is ideal. It is the perfect growing medium for plants with high nutritional requirements – like vegies. It contains a river sand base, plus compost, manures and a range of minerals and fertilisers (including blood and bone, rock dust) and is formulated to supply a range of nutrients over time, and to hold moisture and prevent leaching. We also boost our soils with beneficial microbes, and food sources for them.

- **Improve your existing soil prior to planting**

If you have soil, but need to enrich it to get the best results, our **Certified Organic Vegetable Concentrate** is ideal. It is not a planting medium; it is designed as a soil improver and must be dug through your existing soil to a depth of about 30cms. In very poor soil, we'd recommend using a ratio of about 50/50 with your existing soil. If your soil isn't too bad, you can use less (about 1/3 concentrate to 2/3 soil).

Our soils are available in 25L bags, in bulk by the trailer, or by the cubic metre (pick up or delivered)

Measure your garden area and we can help you work out the quantity you need.

- If growing in pots, we have **Certified Organic quality Potting Mix**.

## Vegepod

If you need to establish a new bed, check out the Vegepod. A simple wicking bed system that comes with a cover (to keep out pests, and provide protection from harsh summer sun & wind). Vegepod makes gardening really easy. We make a special soil mix (**Square Foot Gardening Mix**) which is just perfect for growing in Vegepods. We supply Vegepods and the soil mix in a kit – so you can be gardening in no time. Come and check out our display and find out more.



## Fertilisers

We have a full range of natural and organic fertilisers and pest control products to ensure you reach a successful harvest. We recommend:

- **Fish Hydrolysate** (Certified Organic) – great for stimulating soil biology for optimal growth
- **Kelp Powder** (Certified Organic) – seaweed tonic in a concentrated form
- **Blood & Bone** (with added Rock Dust) – no fillers, just a blend of meat meal, blood meal, feather meal and Rock Dust to boost your soil's fertility.
- Plus we have an extensive range of **Minerals** to correct and address imbalances in your soil.

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