

TOP 12 EDIBLE PLANTS FOR GROWING AUTUMN/WINTER IN PERTH

(A guide for beginners)

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



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 Autumn/Winter 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!

Winter is an amazing time to grow in Perth – the milder weather makes conditions almost perfect for many popular vegies. Here are some of our favourites:

- Asparagus
- Beetroot
- Broad Beans
- Broccoli
- Cabbage & Kale
- Cauliflower
- Coriander
- Garlic
- Onions
- Peas
- Potatoes
- Silverbeet & Spinach

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Asparagus

Once you have Asparagus established in your garden, plants will reward you with crops for at least 20 years; so it is a worthwhile plant to grow!

Many people are surprised to learn that the spears (which we all recognise as asparagus) when not picked, grow up into large, ferny foliage about 1.5 metres high! So keep in mind the eventual size of your asparagus plant and make sure you give it room to grow undisturbed.

Although they are surprisingly drought tolerant, keeping them well mulched over summer will keep the plants happier. They can then survive well on one deep watering per week.



Growing Asparagus

Asparagus grows easily from seed; however it takes years for seedling plants to mature (3-5 years). To get quicker results, buy Asparagus crowns – which are available in winter when plants are dormant and they are divided up for propagation. Plants grown from crowns can generally be harvested in their 2nd year. Asparagus spears can be picked once the plant is producing ones of reasonable thickness. In order to continue growth and photosynthesis, it is important to leave some of the spears to grow into foliage. Some people do this by harvesting ALL spears for approx. 6 weeks, then leaving the plant alone; while others selectively harvest only some spears over a longer period. If the plant is beginning to struggle, spears will become thinner and thinner.

To plant crowns, dig a trench approx. 30cm wide and almost as deep. Place the crowns on a mound of soil and spread the roots out. Leave 40 – 50cms between each crown. Cover with a mixture of soil and compost to a depth of about 15cms and continue to add more rich soil as the plants begin to sprout. Trenches can be mulched with straw/pea straw to keep weeds down.

Asparagus prefer a near neutral, enriched soil. Spears will begin to appear late winter/early spring, and keep appearing through early summer. Then in late autumn the ferns will begin to yellow off. Once they turn brown, cut them back to a few centimetres above the soil. Top dress with manure, compost and a handful of rock dust ready for spring. Adding a good amount annually is pretty much all the feeding they require.

Asparagus are relatively pest & disease free. Watch for snails as new shoots emerge, particularly with seedlings.

Using Asparagus

Asparagus contains potassium, Vitamins B & C and other anti-oxidants, and tastes delicious lightly steamed, and can also be baked, barbequed or fried! Young spears can be added to salads raw, or lightly steamed.

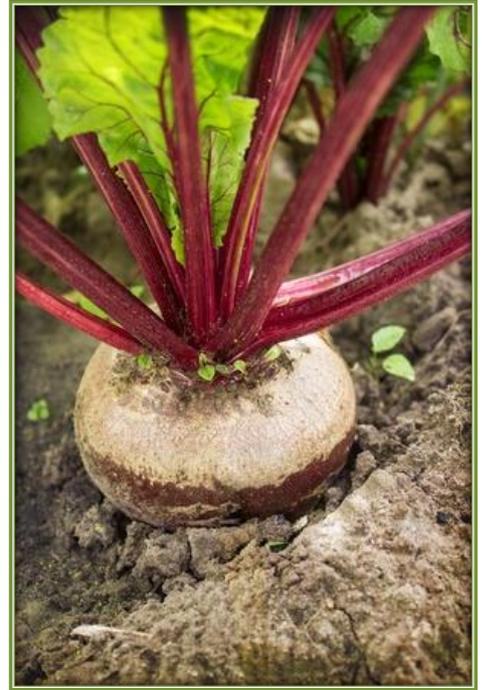
Good companions are parsley and basil.

Beetroot

Beetroot is one of the most versatile vegetables you can grow – and definitely worthy of a spot in your garden. In Perth, they will grow all year-round, and the entire plant is edible. Leaves can be eaten cooked like spinach (they are actually related) and young leaves look gorgeous in salads.

Don't pinch all the leaves though – the plant needs them to produce the plant sugars that it stores in the rich, red beet – which actually only grows partially underground. This means it's easy to gently test the size of your beets and you can begin harvesting when they're about the size of a golf ball. Left in the soil, they will continue to grow MUCH larger – but often are not quite so sweet and tender when too old. Use freshly harvested if possible.

Beetroot are traditionally red and round, however, there are more cylindrical varieties, as well as yellow, white and candy striped Beetroot varieties!



Growing Beetroot

Beetroot 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, although a light liquid feed monthly is fine.

Beetroot are easily grown from seed, although if you're impatient you can also buy seedlings – they are one of the few root crops that transplant OK.

Beetroot can be slow to grow – especially over winter. You're looking at 3 – 6 months until they are harvestable size – but in this time remember you can be using the odd leaf. I find they're great to plant in amongst faster growing crops – by the time they're ready to be removed the beetroot can take up the space as it matures.

Planting new seeds every 6-8 weeks will give you a good succession of fresh crops producing. Seeds are actually a cluster (of individual seeds) which is why you will always get several plants growing together. You can leave these all to grow; however it's usually best to leave the strongest one/s and to sacrifice the weaker seedlings to allow the stronger ones more room.

Using Beetroot

Beetroot contains potassium, magnesium and iron as well as vitamins A, B6 and C, fibre and folic acid. It also contains useful compounds for liver detoxing (so they have a reputation for being good for hangovers!) and lowering blood pressure.

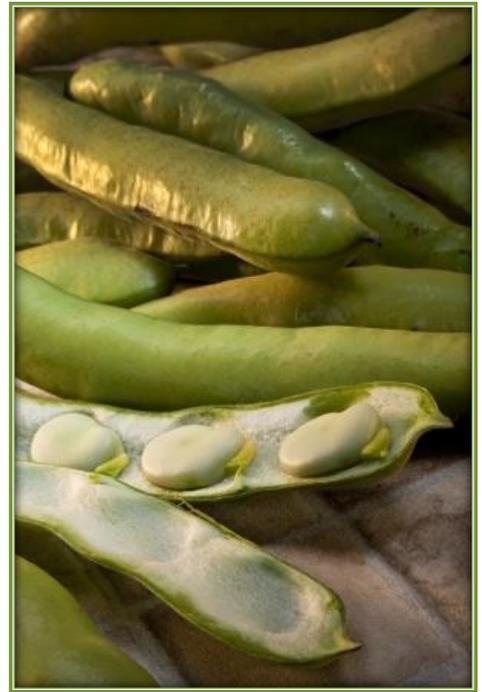
Beetroot can be boiled, baked, roasted & pickled. It can be eaten raw in salads or steamed and allowed to cool before tossing in with the salad greens. Be careful when you peel beetroot as most of the nutrients are found just under the skin, so peel it thinly. Alternatively, scrub the skins well before cooking, and eat the skin too! Because of its sweetness, cooked beetroot is often used in chocolate cakes and desserts to give rich texture and colour (a natural way to colour red velvet cake, for example). It's also excellent added to your healthy juices and smoothies.

Broad Beans

Broad Beans are not a TRUE bean; they are related, but are more closely related to peas. They have been cultivated around the world for centuries - seeds have been discovered in Egyptian tombs. Also known as Fava or Faba Beans, they are a worthwhile and productive crop to grow.

People who say they don't like broad beans generally haven't had the chance to eat them fresh & home grown!

Crops grown for the shops tend to be allowed to grow way too big and tough; whereas young beans are sweet and delicious!



Growing Broad Beans

Broad beans are easily grown from seed. Plant them out at least 30-40cms apart, and max. 3cms deep. Each mature plant will grow to approx. a metre high and 50cms wide. Plants that are close together tend to support each other as they grow. Generally, they don't require staking but are susceptible to snapping in strong wind, so a couple of criss-crossed stakes throughout the crop may be useful. The usual time for planting is around May/June. Earlier or later crops can be planted but it's always a gamble depending on how early/late the seasons run.

Plants don't require fertile soil – they are a great crop to grow after a hungry one like tomatoes or corn in your crop rotation. Prepare the soil with a little potash and rock dust which can help with stronger cell structure making them less prone to disease

Broad Beans aren't usually bothered by pests, although slugs, snails and aphids may be something to watch for. Poor air circulation may lead to leaf spot fungal problems, so avoid overhead watering and if necessary, remove any plants (or sections of plants) if you think overcrowding is causing this. Never compost diseased material – get rid of it in your bin.

Flowers will emerge on your Broad Bean plants some time before you see pods form. The timing of this is something you can't control (based on temperature and daylight hours) so be patient – it will happen! October to November is when maximum cropping occurs.

Spent plants make a great green manure plant to mulch and allow to rot back into the soil – however make sure you remove any diseased material as fungal spores can spread to other crops grown in that spot.

Using Broad Beans

Very young broad beans can be eaten pods and all, just like French beans. Growing tips and young leaves can be steamed and eaten, with a mild spinach like flavour.

Once the beans are mature, they need to be shelled. When young their individual, inner skins are tender and fine to eat. Eating young beans (around the size of a 5 cent piece) is ideal. When older, the inner skins tend to be tough, so removing this is advisable, even if tedious!

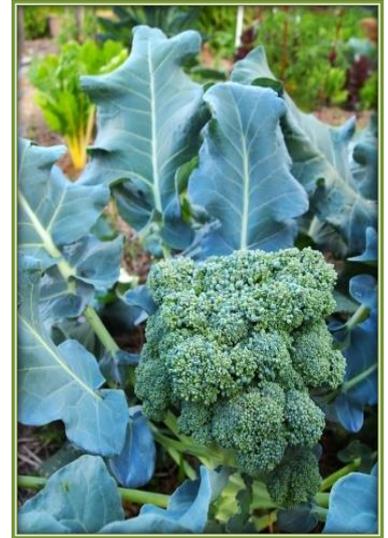
Broad beans are a great vegetable on their own, or are useful added to soups and casseroles. They can be blended to add a thick texture or use as for hummus. Beans can be dried and you can easily save your own seeds (from healthy plants) to use next year.

Broccoli

Broccoli is in the same family as Cabbage, and is closely related to Cauliflower. It is actually the flower head we pick and eat – left on the plant the flowers will open (lots of tiny yellow ones) and eventually seeds will follow if flowers are pollinated.

Broccoli is highly nutritious – containing more Vitamin C than oranges; along with fibre, Vitamins K and A, folate, chromium, manganese, calcium and iron. It has anti-inflammatory and anti-oxidant benefits.

There are several types of Broccoli – from the large green heads we're familiar with, to purple broccoli, and the amazing Romanesco broccoli which is so pretty! (Pictured below). There is also Raab broccoli – sometimes confused with broccolini as both grow a series of smaller 'cut & come again' heads. While related, Raab broccoli belongs to a different sub-group of brassica along with turnips; so has a more pungent flavour.



Growing Broccoli

Broccoli can be grown from seed or seedlings. If growing from seed you can plant directly into beds, or raise seedlings in trays first. It likes well drained soil which has been improved with compost, manure and rock dust before planting. It is a heavy feeder, and benefits from a light liquid feed of at least twice a month throughout the growing season.

Allow at least 50cms between plants – they will grow to take up this space, and crowded plantings lead to smaller heads. Plants take about 90 – 120 days from transplant to harvest. Ensure plants get regular water.

A winter crop in Perth, it does best in temperatures between 18 – 23°. Hot conditions tend to make Broccoli run to seed, and insect pests like Aphids, Cabbage Moth and Cabbage Butterfly are an issue come Spring. Exclusion netting is a great way to keep pests away. Once your plants form heads, inspect them regularly and pick off any caterpillars you find. Prior to cooking, drop the heads into water and allow to soak for 5 -10 minutes. Caterpillars will soon become visible as they try to escape the water. With a bit of care you can avoid serving steamed grubs to your friends and family!

Traditionally, it is the large head of Broccoli that we eat – however the stalks and leaves are edible and just as nutritious; if not as palatable. Once the large first head has been harvested, for another 4-6 weeks at least the plant will continue to produce smaller off-shoots that can be picked and eaten regularly.

Using Broccoli

A versatile veggie, Broccoli can be eaten raw, steamed or boiled (don't cook it for too long or it will become mush). It is great added to salads and stir fries. Excess can be blanched and frozen.

Cabbage (& Kale)

Cabbage & Kale are both members of the Brassica family, and do best in our Perth winters. Cabbages grow into tight hearts, which are harvested and eaten at once. Kale has an open growth habit, so we cut individual leaves for repeated harvest.

Cabbage varieties to try include Red cabbage, Savoy (which have a great, crinkly leaf), and Sugarloaf. Plus you have a range of Chinese cabbages like Wong bok, Bok choy, and Pak choy – which are among the fastest growing vegies you can have. Cabbages are quite ornamental & colourful and look fantastic in your garden.

Kale is a 're-discovered' vegetable – it wasn't terribly popular or well known until fairly recently (although it survived via traditional 'peasant' gardeners who knew a thing or two). Kale re-surfaced being touted as a 'super food' – and now we're all growing it!

Popular Kale varieties are Nero (sometimes called Black Kale, Tuscan Kale, Cavolo Kale – pictured right) which has a long, crinkled very dark green (almost black) leaf; Red Russian – which has attractive reddish/purple stems and veins, but a green leaf with frilly edge; Scotch Kale (sometimes called Curly Kale) – which is smaller growing and has a green and very crinkly leaf.

Growing Cabbage & Kale

Brassicas are hungry feeders. Before planting, improve the garden bed with well-rotted manure, compost, blood & bone and rock dust. Cabbage & Kale can be grown from seed or seedlings if you prefer. You don't need many plants, so best to stagger plantings every 2-3 weeks with a few seeds so you have a constant supply without being swamped!

Plant out each seed (or young seedling) about 30-40cms apart. If growing from seed, plant closer together and thin weaker seedlings once established. Traditional headed cabbages will take around 12-16 weeks to reach harvest size. Chinese cabbage varieties can be as quick as 6-8 weeks. You can begin to harvest a few leaves of Kale when they are large enough for you. Allow it to continue to grow to maturity and plants will keep producing for 1-2 years.

Plants like full sun, and plenty of water. A light liquid feed at 1 -2 times a month is useful.

Pests to watch out for are Slugs & Snails, Aphids, Cabbage Moth and Cabbage Butterfly. Treat any infestations quickly. Caterpillars can be removed by hand unless they get to plague proportions – when you would be best to treat with Dipel. Insect netting is also a good way to protect crops.

Using Cabbage & Kale

Cabbage & Kale can be eaten raw in salads (who doesn't like coleslaw?), boiled, steamed and made into sauerkraut – something gaining popularity at the moment due to the health benefits of fermented foods. Kale is a popular addition to green smoothies. Kale and Cabbage are excellent sources of Vitamins A, C and phytonutrients, glucosinolates and flavonoids and is thought to help fight cardiovascular disease, asthma, arthritis, and prevent several types of cancer.



Cauliflower

Cauliflowers are a good winter crop to grow, but may not be the easiest of plants for novice gardeners. The trick is to get them in at the right time and allow them enough time to mature – Cauliflowers are slow growing, but will bolt to seed if temperatures get too warm (so you don't want to plant them too early – or too late!)

But if you have the space, it's definitely worthwhile giving them a go. There are some attractive yellow and purple varieties if you want to try something unusual in your garden.



Growing Cauliflower

Cauli's can be grown from seed, but you can also find them available in punnets, which gives you a several weeks head start on growth. (And this is a more reliable method for new gardeners, generally.) Depending on the variety, they can take up to 20 weeks to mature; so don't be in a hurry!

Plant Cauliflowers into fertile soil and feed regularly. A light liquid feed every 2 weeks is great. Seedlings should be spaced about 75cms apart – plants can grow quite large and you need to give them enough space. They do like a sunny position in the winter garden – a spot that gets about 6 hours sun per day is ideal.

Once heads have started to form, bend at least two outer leaves over the head (or curd) to protect it. Too much sun can cause yellowing and less attractive Cauli's. Unlike Broccoli, once the main head is harvested, Cauli's don't produce lots of useful side shoots, so once you've harvested from the plant, it can be removed and (if healthy) added to compost, or fed to your chickens. Any diseased plant material should just go in the bin. Cauliflower leaves are edible too; and can be treated like cabbage. They may be a bit tough – which is why it's not commonly eaten.

Regular watering is important to ensure even growth and to make sure plants don't stress. Stress may lead to plants not forming proper heads, but "buttoning" - where small heads form and the plant bolts to seed. (These small heads are edible – but not really why we grow Cauliflower!)

Hopefully, if your plant forms a proper curd it will grow to a decent size 20-30cms across. If at any time the head looks like it's opening up, you should harvest it and use it. Once this begins to happen the plant will soon be running to seed.

Like all brassicas, watch out for Aphids and Cabbage Moth & Cabbage Butterfly.

Using Cauliflower

Cauli's can be eaten raw or cooked – the traditional favourite is to lightly steam it and serve with a cheese sauce – a perfect addition to a winter's roast. If eating on its own, generally don't over-cook it; however well-cooked Cauliflower can be mashed and eaten like mashed potato – or added TO mashed potato for an extra flavour. Cauliflowers roasted whole (basted during the cooking process) make a great vegetarian base for a meal and look pretty spectacular when served!

Coriander

Coriander (called Cilantro in the US) is actually a herb, but it is one of the most popular crops to grow in Perth over winter.

It has a distinctive, pungent smell that tends to divide – people either love it or hate it! Personally I find the smell much stronger than the flavour; and I definitely love adding it to Mexican and Asian dishes & stir fries, and my son happily eats it too.

Coriander is known for its health benefits – being a good source of folate, Vitamin B-6, C, A, K and iron and manganese. It is commonly used in herbal medicine as a treatment for stomach and digestive issues.



Growing Coriander

In the warmer weather, Coriander is a difficult plant – it tends to bolt to seed if stressed by hot and dry spells. In the winter, it is very easy to grow either from seed or established seedlings. It's worth growing heaps, and either drying or freezing excess to use when you just can't grow your own fresh.

Coriander needs rich, fertile soil and plenty of moisture. Keep it regularly watered as even in Winter, during dry spells, it may bolt to seed. If it begins to form flowers, keep trimming the forming central flower head/stalk off to delay the process. Plants should be spaced about 25cms apart.

Eventually the plant will go to seed. Coriander seeds are also used in cooking; but if you choose not to harvest these for use, you can collect the seed or allow it to self-seed in the garden. You will find that once cooler conditions return, it will begin to pop up again; which is useful!

Fertilise regularly to encourage lush, leafy growth.

Generally pest and disease free; but leaf eating insects like caterpillars and grasshoppers may be a problem at certain times of the year.

Using Coriander

While fresh coriander is always best, preserving your excess at least gives you something to use when it becomes too hard to grow.

Pick and wash the leaves, discarding any that are damaged. Dry them carefully in a salad spinner or with a gentle pat between tea towels. Chopped leaves can be placed in ice cube trays and frozen with water or oil. Alternatively, make a 'pesto' with olive oil or butter in the blender and store this in the freezer to use when cooking. Spreading it thinly down the side of a ziplock bag and freezing flat will give you a frozen 'biscuit' that you can break off as needed to use in cooking.

Coriander leaves can also be stored in honey. This will preserve the coriander and the flavour will infuse through the honey – making a great recipe base for marinades and sauces.

Similarly, vinegar and oil can be used to preserve Coriander & achieve a herbal infusion to add flavour to your recipes.

Garlic

Garlic would have to be one of the most popular crops for home gardeners to grow. It's always expensive to buy; and with much of the garlic sold locally coming from countries like China and Mexico; it makes sense to grow your own to know exactly how it has been treated and what chemicals you may be consuming.

There are many different types of Garlic – sourcing unusual varieties can be a bit tricky; seed saving & gardening groups can be a good resource, or look out for different (local) varieties at farmer's markets.

Russian (also known as Elephant) Garlic is a nice one to grow – having very large cloves, attractive flowers (looks great in a mixed cottage garden), and a milder flavour.

Garlic is renowned for its antifungal, antibacterial healing properties and is useful in our diets to add flavour. Many home-made sprays can be made with garlic to help with pests in the garden, too. Its pungent smell & taste discourages most chewing insects; but sprays need to be used regularly for best results. See our pest & disease recipe sheet on our website.



Growing Garlic

'Seed Garlic' is actually cloves of garlic reserved from previous crops. Make sure individual cloves are separated from each other, not soft or diseased, and plant about 20 – 25cms apart. Garlic isn't particularly fussy over soil types – but will benefit from being planted in friable soil which has previously been improved for growing hungry crops. Often no additional fertiliser is required throughout the growing season.

If choosing garlic cloves to grow, make sure it is locally grown (organic if possible) as imported garlic is treated and may not grow. Garlic is usually planted in Autumn – March or April; and harvested in Spring/early Summer once tops yellow. Brush off dirt, and allow to hang or dry in a spot with good airflow.

Garlic is not usually susceptible to many pests and diseases; although there are some aphids and thrips that can be difficult to treat. Healthy garlic, grown in full sun, seems to be less affected.

Using Garlic

Provided they are in a dark, well ventilated, cool spot; garlic will keep for many months. Any that begin to shoot can be planted back out in the garden. Excess garlic can be pickled or chopped and stored in oil in the fridge for later use.

Garlic is used as a foundation flavour for many dishes, and is delicious roasted.

In the garden, garlic is often used as a companion plant to help with pest control. It can be interspersed among your roses, is great with potatoes, brassicas (cabbage, kale, broccoli, cauliflower), carrots, eggplant, capsicum & chilli. Avoid planting near peas and beans.

Onions

People have expressed the opinion to me that Onions are not worth growing; as they are usually cheap to buy in the shops. That may be true, but Onions commercially grown are also exposed to several treatments of herbicide and fungicide during their growth period; so at least if you grow your own you know EXACTLY how they've been treated. If you're concerned about lowering your chemical exposure, then it's definitely worth growing your own.



Growing Onions

Onions are relatively easy to grow, but do take a fair while to mature. They can be grown from seed or seedling, and are relatively pest & disease free, although young plants may be susceptible to thrips, slugs and snails. Plants should be kept well weeded as weed competition with young plants will cause them to struggle. Crops normally take at least 6 months to reach full size.

Onion crops should be planted into improved, friable soil. Too many rocks and large chunks in the soil can affect bulb formation. Avoid using additional fertilisers during the growth period that are high in nitrogen – this will encourage leaf growth rather than bulbs to form. Small amounts of balanced fertiliser are OK, but are often not required providing the soil was well prepared prior to planting.

While Onions are best grown in cooler months in Perth, don't forget to plant spring onions all year round! They are versatile and a very worthwhile crop to grow – even growing happily in containers.

Onions should be planted about 20cms apart. If growing from seed, you may be required to thin weaker seedlings to allow space for larger bulbs to form. The general rule is the larger the onion variety, the more space it will need to itself.

Onions can be harvested at any time. Traditionally, they are left to form larger bulbs and once tops begin to bend over and turn yellow, harvested and allowed to dry in a shady, well ventilated spot for use over the next months.

There are many varieties of onions – brown/yellow, white to red/purple – which generally have a milder taste and are great for salads. All parts of the onion are edible – tops can be picked and used like Spring Onions at any time. (Don't over pick from the same plants though, as leaves are required for the bulb to grow normally.)

Using Onions

Provided they are in a dark, well ventilated, cool spot; onions will keep for many months. Any that begin to shoot can be planted back out in the garden.

As a basic ingredient for many dishes, onions may not be exciting but are a staple part of our vegetable diet.

A tip to avoid crying from onion fumes when chopping them is to chill your onions before use. The colder the onion, the longer it takes for the volatile plant chemicals to be released into the air. Just don't freeze your raw onions as the texture will be compromised.

Peas (& Snow Peas)

While all Peas are closely related, there are some major differences between varieties. Traditional Green Peas are eaten shelled (because mature pods are tough and unpalatable); while Snow Peas (the flat kind) are eaten shell and all; and Sugar-Snap Peas (which are rounded pods and look more like Green Peas) are also eaten pod and all.

Thankfully, they have the same requirements for growing; regardless of which kind you want to try.

Growing Peas

Peas grow really well from seed. For best results, soak them in warm water (not hot) for a couple of hours then plant directly into garden beds; with plants spaced about 20-30cms apart. You can plant as close together as 10cms but be aware you may need to do some thinning later to allow enough space and airflow between plants. Once you have planted the peas into damp soil, don't water again until plants have emerged. Too much watering will rot the seed in the ground.

Peas are a relatively quick crop – you should be able to harvest 10-12 weeks from planting, and harvests are on-going for a couple of months. Once peas start coming, harvest pods regularly. Leaving them on the plant will make them less sweet, more tough, and slow the plant down from setting more flowers (and making more peas!).

Kids (of all ages!) like to harvest peas from the garden and most won't make it inside the house; so make sure you plant plenty for a good crop. Successive plantings every 4 weeks will encourage a great supply over the season.

Peas do need a trellis to climb on. Height will vary between bush and telephone varieties – the latter growing to 2m tall. Growing with a trellis will allow more light and air for the plants; meaning healthier growth.

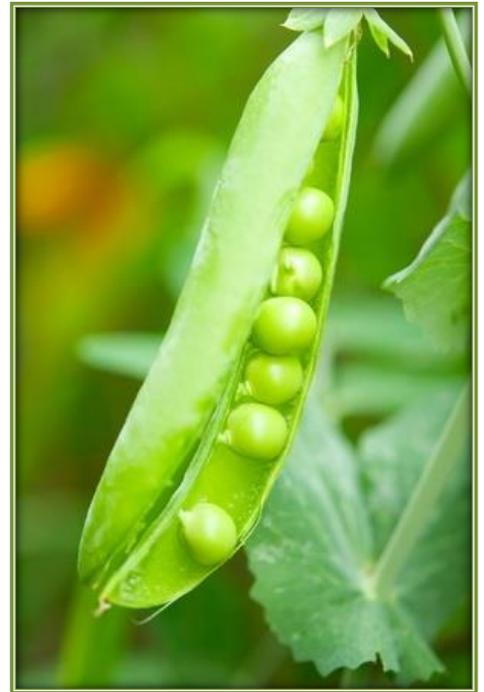
Good airflow is essential, as peas can be prone to fungal leaf spot disease. Remove any affected plant material and dispose of. Once peas have reached the end of their life, similar to tomatoes, the plants look terrible! But keep on harvesting as long as peas are produced, then (providing the plants are disease free) mulch or compost the plants to return nutrients to the soil. If peas succumb to mildew or fungal problems, it is best to sacrifice the worst affected plant(s) early rather than allow it to spread. Preventative sprays with a milk solution (1 part full cream milk to 9 parts water) weekly may be helpful.

Using Peas

Delicious fresh from the garden – peas are often steamed but can be eaten raw – especially Snow Peas with their sweet, crunchy goodness!

Excess peas can be blanched and frozen. Store them in the fridge until you have collected enough to do a batch.

If you choose to save some for seed, select from the healthiest plants and store in a cool, dry place.



Potatoes

Most home gardeners LOVE growing their own potatoes. Over recent years, there have been more varieties available to the home grower, and with potentially every seed potato generating 10 new potatoes to harvest, they are a worthwhile, prolific crop.

Growing Potatoes

There are a multitude of ways you can grow spuds; depending on the space you have available and your personal preference.

Traditionally, they are grown in rows in the ground. But you can grow Potatoes in vertical towers, planter bags, etc. Google it and you will be astounded by the ingenuity of some growers!

Old tyres can be used; although is controversial as some studies show heavy metals in the tyres can leach into soil. Other studies refute this; so it is a matter of personal choice. But the methodology of growing tyres is similar to vertical cages – ie. You grow UP rather than along the ground, saving space.

Potatoes can be grown in Perth year-round, but are easiest to grow over the cooler months. In Autumn, seed potatoes become available to purchase. These are small, disease-free potatoes selected for propagating new crops. You CAN use any potato you have in the cupboard to grow from – providing it is healthy. New potato plants grow from 'eyes' in the skin of a potato; if you've ever had old potatoes in the cupboard starting to sprout, you'll know what this looks like. This process can be deliberately done with your seed potatoes. Put them somewhere with a bit of diffused light and leave them for a week or so. They will soon start to sprout. This process is known as 'chitting' and leads to faster plant growth once sown into the garden. Large potatoes that are sprouting can be cut into sections – but it is best to allow the cut surfaces to dry out in a well ventilated spot for a couple of days. Otherwise, cut potatoes may well just rot away in the ground.

Plant into well prepared soil (ideally, prepare it several weeks in advance). Growing potatoes amongst fresh manure and compost may cause the tuber to rot. Plant tubers about 30cms apart. As the tops emerge, mound up soil around them. Potatoes will continue to produce more tubers from UP the stem – providing it is underground, so mounding several times during the growth period will help you get a larger crop.

This is the reason Potato towers work so well. In a wire cage (or tyres) plant your potatoes, and as the tops grow, cover all but the very top bit of greenery with more soil or straw. Keep doing this and by the time the plant is mature and dying back; if the tops are at the top of the tower you should have tubers the whole way down the tower to harvest! A good size for a potato tower is approx. 50cms across and at least 60-80cms high. Plant about 4 seed potatoes in this area.

Using Potatoes

Different varieties are better suited to various types of cooking. Depending on how you like to cook, do your research and find out what will be the best kind to grow. Once harvested, brush dirt off the potatoes (don't wash them until you're ready to use them) and allow them to dry off in a dark, well ventilated spot. Store away from sunlight and do check on them regularly – any spuds going soft or 'bad' will cause others to rot; so dispose of them quickly.



Silverbeet (and Spinach)

Silverbeet and Chard are closely related to beetroot. Perennial Spinach is slightly different again. Silverbeet is a distant cousin to Spinach; but we tend to grow and use them all in a similar way.

Crops are easy to grow in our mild winters in Perth, but Silverbeet (or Chard) is a winner for being SO productive and long lasting – plants can produce for 2 years or so under the right conditions. Perennial Spinach may last even longer; hence its name – but we have found it is still worthwhile replacing plants every year or so for best results.

An excellent choice if you don't have much space; as just one or two Silverbeet plants will be plenty to keep you going, and can easily be grown in containers.



Growing Silverbeet/Spinach

Plants can be grown from seed or seedlings, and love fertile soil. Being leafy plants, they benefit from regular liquid feeding throughout their growth season – every week or 2nd week with a light dose is great. Hungry plants will be slower growing and produce smaller leaves. Feed them for lush growth.

Silverbeet should be spaced about 30cms between plants; spinach can be more densely planted – about 10-20cms. Harvesting leaves can begin as soon as they reach your desired size – but don't take too many until the plant has a chance to mature. Usually starting to pick the odd leaf around 4 weeks (from transplanted seedlings) is about right.

Plants are relatively pest & disease free – but watch out for slugs and snails, and slater damage on very young plants may be an issue.

Part shade is good for leafy greens – they will tend to produce larger leaves when grown in shade.

There are some fantastic varieties to grow – A packet of Rainbow Chard seeds will produce plants with pink, yellow and white stems – they look gorgeous (photo above). Ruby chard has rich, dark red stems and veins, which contrast with the deep green foliage. Fordhook Giant is a large growing, traditional silverbeet and will give you the biggest 'bang for your buck'.

Spinach comes in several varieties too – but generally leaves are smaller, and plants are more tender. They love a sheltered spot and lots of moisture to do well.

Using Silverbeet/Spinach

Spinach is very versatile – great to eat in salads, throw on top of pizza, and to steam as a veggie. Young silverbeet leaves can also be eaten raw, but older leaves are less pleasant and are better cooked.

Any excess spinach/silverbeet can be blanched and frozen. It is also an excellent way to provide chooks with fresh greens – grow a few plants just for the girls!

Our Products to Help YOU grow a Better Garden this Autumn:

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 – perfect solution for small spaces

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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