

Grow your own vegetables



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From a few pots on the doorstep to raised beds of vegetables, growing your own is empowering. It connects you directly with soil and plants and the seasonal rhythms of nature as well as providing (however small!) nutritious food to support health & well-being.

If you do not have a garden, lots of vegetables thrive well in pots on a balcony or doorstep or you could share an allotment, and there are many community food growing projects to join.

Today, particularly for those in urban areas, we have lost contact with microbial rich soil and the benefits the connection brings. Recent research concludes that working with healthy soil along with eating the food it produces is a key element in supporting the health of our gut microbiome.¹

When you grow your own food it's easy to ensure no pesticides are used. These chemicals are linked to a range of serious illnesses and diseases. ²

Vegetables grown without the use of chemicals have a greater volume of naturally occurring compounds known as phytonutrients.³ Phytonutrients increase the capacity of plants to withstand external challenges from pests and diseases and an increasing number of them are known to promote human health and prevent disease. Organically grown vegetables will have 10–50% more phytonutrients than non-organic vegetables. ⁴

Polyphenols are a specific group of phytonutrients that are found in many vegetables and fruits. They are powerful antioxidants that help to keep free radicals under control. Free radicals are formed naturally in the body and play an important role in many normal cellular processes, but at high concentrations, free radicals can be hazardous to the body and play a role in the development of many illnesses.

Only about 5-10% of polyphenols are directly absorbed in the small intestine. The rest make their way to the colon where they act as a prebiotic.

Prebiotics are non-digestible complex carbohydrates fermented by beneficial bacteria in the colon producing short chained fatty acids. These support a healthy gut wall, regulate the immune system and provide energy for the host.

Growing your own vegetables provides gentle exercise, low cost nutritious food and reconnects you to the source of our food - soil.

Fruit

If space allows you could grow fruit as well as vegetables. The easiest fruit tree to grow is probably an apple, of which there are thousands of different varieties. The ideal position for an apple tree is a sunny sheltered site. Avoid frost pockets, poorly drained or shallow soils.

If there is no space to grow a fruit tree you could join a community orchard - discover more <https://www.theorchardproject.org.uk>

Buy a tree -

<https://www.organiccatalogue.com>

<https://www.walcotnursery.co.uk>

If you are short of space consider soft fruits. Many like gooseberries, strawberries, blackcurrants & redcurrants grow well in containers.



How to get started growing your own vegetables.

Seed packets will give you sowing instructions and if you opt for plants they generally come with planting guidelines.

Choose your spot. Vegetables like sun, though lettuce, kale and chard will tolerate partial shade.

Prepare your soil with well-rotted compost. A healthy soil will ensure you have nutritious vegetables.

Try no dig gardening, a method that supports healthy soil micro-organisms. <https://charlesdowding.co.uk>

Design your growing area and order seeds in plenty of time.

Quick to mature vegetables like dwarf green beans, radish, spinach and salad greens can be sown in situ and are ideal if you have nowhere to raise seeds.

Bypass growing from seed and buy young plants instead.
<https://www.organiccatalogue.com>

Short of time? stick to low maintenance crops like beetroot, squash and kale.

Start simple with ½ dozen vegetables you love to eat.

Match vegetables to space you have available.

Good patio vegetables include tomatoes, chillies, peppers, salad leaves, beetroot, spinach, mange tout and beans.

Plant a Three Sisters Garden - it makes good use of a small area.
www.rhs.org.uk/advice/grow-your-own/features/three-sisters

Install a water butt for easy water access.

Unplanned plants like dandelion, chickweed and nettles can all be eaten.

Talk to local gardeners. They will have valuable experience of local soils and weather.



Here are a few suggestions of phytonutrient rich, gut-friendly, immunity-strengthening vegetables to enjoy growing.

RUNNER BEANS

Runner beans are an easy to grow garden staple. They are climbing plants, so they will need some support – garden canes made into a wigwam shape are perfect. You can start runner beans off in pots, or plant the seeds straight into their growing site. Harvest the pods about 4 months after sowing when they are still young and tender. Green beans are a good source of potassium, calcium and magnesium plus dietary fibre which supports a healthy gut microbiome.

GLOBE ARTICHOKE

Globe artichokes are magnificent, perennial, architectural plants (lasting up to 10 years). You can grow from seed but buying a plant is probably easier for a first-time grower. Plant in the garden in a sunny position in deep rich fertile soil. Cynarin, a polyphenol found in globe artichokes, has a long history of use to stimulate bile flow and support the liver. When liver function is impaired, toxins can build up detrimentally affecting health. The anti-inflammatory polyphenols quercetin and rutin are also found in globe artichokes. Globe artichokes are a good source of inulin which acts as a prebiotic, feeding beneficial gut bacterium.

BEETROOT

Beetroot is usually dark red in colour but there are also white, golden, and two-tone varieties. They are an extremely nutritious, easy to grow vegetable. Because beets are high in iron and silicic acids including them in your diet will assist regeneration of new blood cells. Both beetroot roots and tops help the liver and gall bladder to function properly.

Beetroot can be sown directly into shallow drills in the soil, and while you are waiting to harvest the root, you can include a few of the leaves in salads.

CHARD

This slightly bitter vegetable has large, distinctive green leaves and an array of different coloured stalks, depending on the variety. Colours range from white (commonly known as Swiss chard) through to yellow, pink, and red. Chard happily grows in dappled shade and doesn't bolt in hot weather; the leaves can be harvested continuously until a hard freeze. Chard is packed full of minerals and vitamins and is a rich source of various phytonutrients.

ONION

Onions are one of the world's oldest cultivated plants, used as food and medicine for thousands of years. Onions are an excellent source of phytonutrients, including quercetin. Onions are a good source of biotin, manganese, vitamin B6, B1, copper, vitamin C, phosphorus, potassium, folate, and fibre. You can grow onions from seed, but it's much easier and quicker to grow them from sets (small onions). Plant these in autumn or spring, 10-15cm apart, in well-prepared, moisture-retentive, fertile soil in full sun.

PURSLANE

The succulent, slightly sour and salty leaves of purslane add a crunchy texture to dishes and are a good source of antioxidants, B vitamins, magnesium, iron, calcium, and potassium. Purslane also contains pectin, a water-soluble fibre that supports gut health and the leaves contain more alpha-linolenic acid an omega-3 fatty acid – than any other leaf. 5 It is easy to grow and the perfect cut and come again plant providing you with fresh nutritious leaves from May to October.

RADISH

There are an enormous number of different varieties of radish in all shapes, sizes and colours. Easy and quick to grow, the high content of vitamin C together with phytonutrients helps to support the immune system and control the development of harmful free radicals. You can use radishes to make a delicious kimchi which will have the added benefit of probiotics - beneficial gut bacteria.

COMPOST

Why compost?

Composting transforms your kitchen waste into a nutrient rich food for the soil.

Compost improves soil structure, so better quality vegetables are grown.

Compost helps to retain soil moisture – so it helps save water.

Home composting avoids transport.

Composting connects us to the life cycle of food, to compost and back to soil.

Many councils offer food waste collections which is then recycled as compost, (alternatively it is used to make energy). There are also brilliant initiatives offering alternative food waste collections. Check out this brilliant one in Lewes <https://www.compostclub.online>

Different methods of composting

Garden compost heap

If you have garden space you can build a compost heap. This could be a bit of a learning curve to begin with but there are loads of resources on the internet or seek advice from local growers.

Vermiculture

Vermiculture takes place in a wormery; in return for food the worms create nutrient rich worm casts. A wormery works well in a small place, but there is an initial financial investment.

Bokashi

With bokashi all your waste - vegetables, dairy, meat, fish, raw or cooked, can all be used to make compost in the kitchen. Easy to use (doesn't smell other than a faint fermenting whiff) but requires an initial investment and the continuous use of specialised products like an inoculated bran.

RECIPES

Stuffed Globe Artichokes

serves 6

6 medium artichokes

juice of 1/2 lemon

225g chestnut mushrooms

2 garlic cloves

2 medium red onions

2 tablespoons olive

200g fresh breadcrumbs

zest of 1 lemon

1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme

2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley

50g lightly toasted pine kernels

4 tablespoons olive oil

100ml stock

Oven 180°C

Rinse the artichokes well. Cut off the stem so the artichokes sit flat. Place the artichoke upside down and push firmly on the stem side to slightly open the leaves making room to catch the stuffing. Using scissors cut the tip of each leaf straight across. To remove the hair and choke cut around the choke with a sharp knife and scoop out with a teaspoon. As each artichoke is prepared place in a bowl with enough water to cover with the lemon juice.

Finely chop the mushrooms, garlic and onion and gently cook in 2 tablespoons of olive oil. Remove from the heat and stir in the remaining stuffing ingredients.

Stuff each artichoke pushing the stuffing into the middle and between the leaves.

Oil the base of a large deep lidded dish. Place the artichokes into the dish and pour the stock around the artichokes. Pour the remaining oil over each artichoke. Cover and bake for 40 -50 minutes. When they're ready, a leaf should come off easily and the fleshy base of the leaf will feel tender when bitten.

Salad leaves with pickled radishes & shallots

serves 1

handful of salad leaves

6 radishes

1 shallot

1 dessert spoon ume plum seasoning

black pepper

1 dessert spoon olive oil

Finely slice the radishes and shallots. Toss with ume plum seasoning. Pick over salad leaves and pile into a bowl. Season the radishes well with pepper. Mix in olive oil and pile on top of the leaves.

Beetroot & pear salad with horseradish hemp cream

serves 4

450g beetroot

1 shallot finely chopped

salt & pepper

juice and zest of 1 orange

4 tablespoons walnut oil

2 tablespoons olive oil

2 pears

4 handfuls of mixed salad leaves

2 teaspoons grated horseradish

75g shelled hemp seed

chives -snipped finely

Oven 180°C

Trim away the beetroot greens and save for another dish. Wash the beetroot well and place in a small oiled baking tray with ½" water. Cover and bake until tender, about 45 minutes. Remove and cool. Mix the shallots, salt, pepper, juice and zest of the orange and the oils together.

When the beetroot are cool, peel and cut into wedges.

Peel, quarter and core the pears. Cut each quarter in half and toss in half the dressing.

Toss the frisee or salad leaves with the remaining dressing and arrange on four plates. Place the pears and then the beetroot on top of the salad leaves. Blitz the hemp seeds with 150ml water. Stir the horseradish into the hemp cream and put a dollop on the top of each salad and finish with a scattering of chives.

Optimal human health comes from eating nutrient dense foods produced and processed in ways that maximise both the quality and quantity of nutrition.

Ecological health is integral to human health. Food grown using nature based, regenerative farming practices, manage sustainably the complex interactions between water, energy and food, thus protecting and enhancing the environment whilst producing nutritious food.

- buy organic food whenever you can
- eat seasonally
- source your food as locally as possible
- join a box scheme
- grow your own (garden, allotment or community garden)
- support food & farming campaigning organisations

Resources

1. www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6780873/
2. https://www.pan-uk.org/resources/#pesticides_and_health
3. pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/20359265/
4. Brandt K. and Mølgaard JP, 2001, 'Organic agriculture: does it enhance or reduce the nutritional value of plant foods?', *Journal of the Science of Food and Agriculture* 81, p 924–931
5. www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/PMC3934766/
6. pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/20591206/

Start out no dig

<https://bit.ly/3k4Hcmx>

Seeds

www.seedcooperative.org.uk

<https://tamarorganics.co.uk>

<https://www.organiccatalogue.com>

Daphne Lambert is an eco-nutritionist focusing on the interactions between agriculture, ecology and human nutrition.

Greencuisine Trust works to bring about a transformation in the way we eat. Through practical food experiences the Trust highlights the connections between our well-being, natural resources, the environment, and our planet.



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