



# GROW YOUR FOOD

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## Tips on Buying Plants and Seeds

When you're growing your own food, you'll typically start by investing in seeds. However, you could also invest in small plants that have already grown a little to save time. Whichever type you opt for, there are some important things to consider before you buy.

Here, we'll discuss what to look for when buying seeds and plants to grow your own food.

### **Make Sure You Check the Label**

The first thing you'll want to do when buying seeds is check the label. What growing conditions do the seeds need? What time of year do they need planting? The labels should tell you everything you need to know about growing the specific plants you're considering.

You need to make sure that you have the requirements to grow the seeds before you buy them. Make sure you have the right type of soil and level of sunlight needed. This allows you to find the best seeds to match your needs.

### **Buy More Than You Actually Need**

While you don't want to go overboard and buy a surplus of seeds, you do need some additional ones. This is because not every seed you sow is going to turn into a plant. There will be some level of waste, so it's worth planting a few more seeds than you think you need.

However, beware of planting too many. The seeds are going to need a certain level of space to grow. If they don't have it, your seeds will fail, and you'll have simply wasted your money.

### **Choose Local Seeds Where Possible**

A great tip is to buy locally-grown seeds where possible. That way, you'll know you have the right conditions to grow them in. If you purchase seeds which have been shipped in from abroad, you'll find them a lot trickier to grow as you might not have the best conditions to grow them in. They can also get damaged during shipping.

Similarly, you'll also want to consider buying organically grown seeds. This ensures the seeds you plant are healthy, and won't require anything overly specific to help them grow.

### **Look Out for F1 Varieties**

You'll find there are a number of different types of seeds you can invest in. The best ones to look out for are the F1 varieties. These have been created from two seed lines, so they tend to be the most reliable. The plants themselves can turn out much stronger too.

The only downside is these seeds are a little more expensive. However, the added cost makes up for the quality of the food you'll be able to grow. It also ensures you don't waste money on unreliable seeds.

These are some of the main factors to consider when buying seeds and plants. You really need to check the label to see what growing conditions are required. This will help you to choose the right seeds for your garden to match your requirements.

## Factors to Consider When Figuring Out How Much to Grow

Once you've decided to grow your own food, the main question is how much you should grow. How much space are you going to need to provide food for the family?

There is a lot to learn when it comes to growing your own produce. Having said that, there are some factors to consider that can help you determine how much you'll need to grow. Here, we'll look at the main factors to take into account when deciding how much land and food you're going to need.

### **How Much Space Is Recommended?**

Research on how much space is needed for growing enough food to sustain yourself, was carried out back in the 1970s. The Ecology Action Organization and John Jeavons discovered that each person would need approximately 4,000 square feet of growing space to live on a vegetarian diet for a year. So, if you wanted to provide food for a full year for a family of four, you'd need approximately 16,000 square feet of land.

Now, obviously most of us don't have this level of space. Even if you do, growing that much food by yourself would become almost like a full-time job. So, you don't have to focus on growing all of your own food. Anything that you can grow yourself will benefit you and the environment. Simply look at how much space you realistically have and can afford, then work out how much food you can grow from there.

### **What Are You Going to Be Growing?**

What you want to grow will make a big difference to how much of it you'll need. Think about the produce you currently eat a lot of. Potatoes can be a great example here. When you buy potatoes from the grocery store, how much do you typically consume in

a week? If you get through 5lbs of potatoes in a week, you're going to need 260lbs per year.

Here are some examples on how much space and produce is required for different types of vegetable or fruit you grow:

- Carrots – Each person will require 15-65lbs of carrots per harvest. This means you'd need around 10-15 feet of growing space and around 6-10 carrot plants.
- Potatoes – Each person will need around 75-200lbs of potatoes per harvest. The rows will need to measure between 75-100 feet with around 85 plants required.
- Tomatoes – Each person will need around 15-65lbs per harvest. For this, you'd need 10-15-foot rows with 6-10 plants.

This is a very basic guide and again, it will depend upon how much of each produce you typically eat. You'll need to do some research to determine how much space you'll need for each type of food, depending upon how much you consume.

## **Accounting for Loss**

When you're working out how much you'll need to grow, don't forget to take waste into account. Some of the food you'll grow could be hit by pests or disease. So, always plant a little more than what you actually need to accommodate for any waste.

It's not always easy determining how much you'll need to grow when providing your own food. However, the above is a brief guide and the key thing to take away is that you can grow your own food in any space that you have available. So, even if you just grow your own potatoes, you'll still be helping the environment.

## [How to Store Your Food](#)

Achieving a great harvest when you're growing your own food can be a proud and exciting time. However, if you don't have a great place to store it, your hard work could end up being for nothing.

Here, you'll discover some great tips for storing your harvest. The earlier you plan your storage, the better.

## **Cleaning the Harvest**

Before you store your freshly-picked produce, you're going to want to clean it. You won't necessarily need to do this step if you've chosen to preserve it for later use. However, for produce you plan on eating within the week, you'll want to clean it in cold water.

If you are preserving it for later use, cleaning it now would allow moisture into the produce, causing it to start rotting.

## **Understanding Your Storage Options**

There are a number of ways to store your harvest. For produce that you'll be consuming within the week, you can simply store it in the refrigerator. Herbs are a great example here. You can place them in a sealed plastic bag after wrapping them in a paper towel. The towel will absorb any moisture, keeping them fresh for up to seven days.

Produce such as potatoes needs to be stored in a cool, dark place. They can usually last a couple of months when stored using this method. Other storage options include dehydrating, canning and pickling the foods. You'll want to research these methods before choosing the right option.

## **Know which Produce You Can Leave in the Ground**

Did you know you can leave some produce in the ground until you're ready to eat it? Root vegetables are extremely hardy, and they can last in the ground for quite some time if it's done correctly.

You'll need to apply an additional layer of mulch if you plan on leaving them in the ground a while. Then, simply dig them up when you want to use them. You can do this for carrots, potatoes and parsnips.

## **The Importance of Doing Your Research**

You'll find that different types of fruits and vegetables require slightly different storage techniques. Tomatoes, for example, will need to be picked when they are green before the first frost of the year begins. They can then be left to ripen in the home.

Apples, on the other hand, need to be stored separately. They also need to be kept in dark, cool areas that are slightly moist. You may need to wrap each individual apple to store it, ensuring it doesn't touch the others. The reason apples need to be stored so they don't touch each other is because they can bruise very easily. Also, if one starts to rot, it can quickly spread to the others. So, wrapping them protects the harvest.

Researching how to store the different types of produce you grow is important. If you don't follow the correct storage guidelines, you could end up losing your entire harvest and all of your hard work will have been for nothing.

## How to Grow Without a Garden

Growing your own food is great if you have a garden. But what if you don't have much in the way of outdoor space? The good news is, there are ways to grow your own food even without a garden.

Here, we'll look at some of the best tips you can follow if you want to grow your own food without a garden.

### **Grow Your Produce on a Sunny Window Ledge**

While some fruits and vegetables don't need a lot of light to grow, the majority do. This means you're going to need to grow the plants on a sunny window ledge. Try to choose the window ledge that gets the most sun throughout the day. If you have a balcony, you can also consider adding a container and growing the plants there.

Many types of plants, such as herbs and tomatoes, can grow easily on a sunny window ledge.

### **Make Use of Grow Bags**

For foods that don't require a lot of light to grow, you can take advantage of grow bags. These are specifically designed for veg like potatoes and carrots. You simply put the veg plants in the bag, then water them and top them up with compost as and when it's needed.

With grow bags, you don't need to find space to plant the veg. They are compact enough to use anywhere in the home.

### **Look out for “Baby” or “Mini” Veggies**

Many types of vegetable plants need a lot of room to grow. So, if you don't have a garden, it's going to be better to invest in baby or mini veggie plants. These take up a lot less space and can easily be grown on a window ledge, for example.

When space is an issue, avoid deep-rooted vegetables. Things such as radishes, herbs and small-rooted carrots are the types of plants to focus on when growing them indoors.

### **Focus on Salads and Herbs**

Other types of plants you'll want to focus on are salads and herbs. These are by far the easiest to grow when you don't have a garden. They can be grown on the window ledge or in a container. As long as they get a good level of sunlight each day, they'll thrive indoors.

## **Avoid Over-Watering Them**

As the plants aren't outside, you will need to water them regularly. However, it's important to avoid over-watering them. If you do, it can stop oxygen from getting to the plant's roots. You'll also want to make sure you feed them frequently. You can purchase liquid feed which will enhance their growth rate and ensure they get the nutrients they need.

Having a garden definitely helps when it comes to growing your own food. However, it isn't a strict requirement. You can grow some types of fruits and vegetables indoors. The above are just some of the tips you can follow when growing your own food without a garden.

## Getting the Most from Your Harvest

If you're looking to develop an eco-friendly sustainable garden, you're going to want to avoid using chemical products. The trouble is, chemical fertilizers are often responsible for growing impressive crops. While there are eco-friendly alternatives out there, they don't always produce the best results.

Here, we'll look at some of the best tips you can follow to achieve the best harvest with eco-friendly practices.

## **Avoid Using Plastic Plant Pots and Containers**

The most popular way to grow plants is to place them in plastic plant pots or containers. However, these are rarely recycled so they aren't great for the environment. If you want to run a truly sustainable garden, it's best to use recycled packaging.

You can use egg boxes, jars, yoghurt pots and ice cream tubs to start growing seeds. Provided you make sure there's enough drainage and you water them regularly, the plants should grow well in recycled packaging.

## **Create Your Own Compost**

In order to grow healthily, your fruit and veg will need to have nutrient-rich soil. While store-bought compost is convenient, making your own is the best option for the environment. It's also much better for your plants too.

Creating your own compost is easy. You can also use your leftover plant-based food to add nutrients to the compost. If you have a larger garden, you could start a compost pile. Or, for smaller gardens or homes with no gardens, you can invest in a compost bin.

It's worth researching into how to create the perfect compost. Using your own can greatly cut down on your carbon footprint.

## **Use Organic Pest Control Methods**

You're going to face issues with pests when you're growing your own food. While chemical pesticides are effective, they are extremely damaging to the environment. So, you'll want to invest in organic pest control methods.

There are a lot of natural pest control techniques you can follow. Introducing beneficial insects, creating repellents and barriers, and using soaps and oils can all prove useful in deterring and eliminating pests.

## **Grow Native Plants**

If you want to lower your carbon footprint and increase your harvest, you'll want to grow native plants. These are basically plants that thrive in your country or area. As they are used to the climate and growing conditions, you won't need to do a lot to produce healthy produce. This also makes them much easier to grow for beginners.

## **Collect Rainwater**

Finally, another way to get the best harvest with eco-friendly practices is to collect rainwater. You can place a water butt in the yard to collect rainwater, then use it to water your plants. The great thing about using rainwater is that it doesn't contain any chemicals. This is much better for your plants and it also saves you money as you won't be using as much tap water.

The above are some of the best tips you can follow to achieve the best harvest with eco-friendly practices. As you can see, you don't need to spend hours maintaining your produce in order to benefit from a sustainable garden.

## [Growing the Most Cost-Effective Way](#)

Want to grow your own food but you're worried about the cost? The good news is, there are lots of foods that are cheaper to grow yourself than buy at the grocery store.

If you're working with a tight budget, below you'll discover the most cost-effective foods to grow in a sustainable garden.

## **Lettuce**

Lettuce is one of the most popular foods to grow yourself and it isn't hard to see why. Not only are lettuces easy to grow, they're also really affordable. It's estimated that just one pack of lettuce seeds can provide enough lettuce for five months.

When you consider the cost of buying lettuce each week, you soon realize just how much money you could be saving by growing your own.

## **Tomatoes**

As they don't need much space to grow, tomatoes are a popular choice for everyone looking to grow their own fruit and veg. They are also extremely easy to grow and the amount of money they can save you is impressive.

It usually takes around 12 weeks for tomato plants to be ready to harvest. Once grown, they can produce fresh tomatoes every single day for up to six years. This easily makes them one of the most affordable foods to grow yourself.

## **Green Beans**

Each green bean plant can produce dozens of beans. In fact, it is estimated that each plant will produce six pounds of produce. At the grocery store, this would cost you approximately \$29.52. However, three plants could produce the same amount, costing you just \$5.25. This makes an impressive saving and you'll find green beans tend to grow quite quickly too.

## **Berries**

Berries are the hardest foods to grow on this list. However, if you make the effort, they can save you a small fortune on your grocery bill. Berries are really good for you, but they are also expensive to buy. So, growing your own can help you really cut back your grocery budget.

You'll need approximately three bushes in order for them to cross-contaminate. Having three bushes will roughly produce 5-7 pints of berries each year. They will continue to produce fruits for years so the amount you could save here is huge.

## **Asparagus**

Although you'll need to be patient when you grow asparagus, it will pay off financially. The plants can take two years to grow and harvest. However, each plant can produce asparagus for up to 20 years. So, you need to think about the long-term cost benefits here.

As asparagus is a little trickier to grow, it's only recommended trying this as a beginner if you eat a lot of it. If you don't, you could be wasting a lot of time and effort.

These are some of the most cost-effective foods you can grow yourself. Think about the foods you mostly consume. If you grow the things you eat the most of, you'll generally save the most money. Some of the plants featured provide cost-cutting benefits in the long term. So, if you're looking for initial money-saving foods to grow yourself, focus on things such as lettuce and tomatoes.

## Sustainable Gardens: What Foods Are Easiest to Grow?

Growing your own food comes with a lot of awesome benefits. However, it can also be really challenging, especially for beginners. Having said that, some foods are much easier to grow than others. So, if you are just getting started, it's worth researching to see which produce you should start with.

Here, we'll look at some of the easiest food to grow in a sustainable garden. This should give you an idea of which foods to start with.

### **Tomatoes**

You'll find most people who grow their own food started off with tomato plants. This is because tomatoes are by far one of the easiest foods to grow yourself. Cherry tomatoes are particularly popular as they tend to produce fruit fairly quickly. They are really easy to grow in containers too, given that they grow vertically.

There are lots of varieties of tomatoes you can grow. To start with, you'll be better off with a bush variety such as the Romello tomato. These types don't need any training; they simply need to be fed and watered in order to see them grow.

### **Salad Leaves**

Salad leaves are another super-easy food to grow yourself. What's great about these plants is that they produce a lot of salad leaves in one crop.

From seeds, many salad leaves take around three weeks to grow. Look out for seed mixes which advertise themselves as "speedy salad leaves". This means they'll grow extra quickly. They can also last year upon year, giving you fresh salad leaves each summer.

### **Potatoes**

You don't need as much space as you might think to grow your own potatoes. You can purchase special potato growing bags that you part-fill with compost. When the green shoots start to show above the compost, simply top it up a little to cover them. You'll continue this process until the bag is full.

You just need to remember to water the plants for around 10 to 20 weeks. By that point, the foliage should be a yellow color. Tip everything out of the bag and rummage around to find the potatoes.

## **Garlic**

Herbs are generally really easy to grow and garlic is no exception. All you'll need is a wide, deep container to grow the bulbs in. They will need a lot of sunshine, but apart from that they require very little maintenance. Adding garlic to your meals adds so much flavor, and growing it yourself can save you a lot of money in the long term.

## **Beetroot**

Finally, another easy food to grow yourself is beetroot. The great thing about beetroot is that it can grow in practically any climate and soil type. The container used to grow it in should be at least ten inches in depth. The plants will also require a good level of sunlight. However, they don't require a lot of maintenance; simply water them as required until they grow.

So, there you have it – some of the easiest foods to grow yourself in a sustainable garden. All of the foods listed above are extremely simple to grow for beginners. So, pick one type to get started and see just how easy it is to grow your own produce.

## [Planning Ahead with Your Garden](#)

If you've decided to give growing your own food a go, there's some planning tips you'll want to follow. Growing your own produce is rewarding and beneficial to the environment, but it does require a bit of a learning curve to get it right.

Here, we'll look at some of the best planning tips to follow this year and beyond to achieve the perfect harvest.

### **Start Off Small**

If you are going to start growing your own food, it's best to start off small. This is especially true if you're completely new to gardening.

Some fruits and vegetables can take a lot of knowledge and effort to grow. Remember too, that the more produce you plant, the more hours you'll need to spend tending to them. It's much better to start by trying to grow a particular type of produce. Once you've mastered that, you can branch out into other produce.

### **Ensure You Use Rich Soil**

In order to grow healthy, thriving produce, you're going to need to make sure they have rich soil. Ideally, you'll want to choose organic soil. However, you can also use your own compost if you make it ahead of planting the produce. Adding compost to the soil every year helps to add plenty of nutrients to the plants.

## **Don't Forget to Rotate Your Crops**

When growing vegetables, it's important to remember to rotate your crops. This means changing their position each year. There are a few reasons why this is important. Mostly, it helps with pest control. Pests can target vegetable crops year after year once they know where they are. The plants will also be exposed to disease and they can zap nutrients from the soil.

By rotating them annually, you won't need to use as much natural pesticide, plus you'll be able to ensure the vegetables receive good soil nutrition.

## **Compost Leftovers for Soil Nutrition**

If you want your produce to thrive, you'll want to make sure you place leftover food in a compost pile. You can add vegetable peelings and fruit cores to compost to add nutrients. This will help to really boost the health of the plants you're growing, resulting in much better harvests.

It's important to remember here that you can't place animal products into the compost. You'll find it useful to research more about creating your own compost and the items that can and cannot go into it.

## **Create Your Own Back Yard Ecosystem**

To achieve great harvests year after year, why not consider setting up your own little back yard ecosystem? This basically means adding trees and flowers to enhance local wildlife. The right insects can keep pests at bay. Read up on creating an ecosystem in your garden and see if it's a viable solution for you.

These are some of the best tips you can follow when planning your sustainable garden. It's possible to grow your own fruit and vegetables no matter how little space you have available. The key is to plan ahead and research as much as you can about sustainable gardening.

## [Benefitting the Planet With Your Garden](#)

Have you considered growing your own food? If not, you might want to start thinking about it now.

Growing your own food delivers a lot of benefits. Not only is it better for your health and cheaper than buying it from the grocery store, but it does wonders for the environment too. Here, we'll look at just some of the ways growing your own food benefits the planet.

## **Reducing Waste and Carbon Emissions**

One of the biggest environmental benefits of growing your own food is that it reduces waste and carbon emissions. If you were to look into the actual impact the food industry has on the environment, you'd be surprised.

According to some experts, produce tends to travel for around 1500 miles before it reaches your plate. Produce is typically transported in semi-trucks with around 34,000 pounds worth of cargo, which can do around 5.5 miles per gallon. For every gallon of diesel burnt, it releases 22.38 pounds of carbon dioxide. So, if you were to break it down, every pound of food transported releases 0.18 pounds of carbon dioxide. This is simply the figures for the pollution released during transportation.

When you grow your own food, it doesn't have to travel anywhere. So, you'll be drastically cutting down your own carbon footprint. Of course, it also reduces waste. You'll only be growing enough to feed you and your family, so there will be a lot less waste than there is with commercially-grown food.

## **Reducing Harmful Fertilizers and Pesticides**

Another way that growing your own food benefits the environment is that it reduces harmful fertilizers and pesticides. While many farmers have switched to more environmentally-friendly products, chemical fertilizers and pesticides are still used heavily in the industry.

Not only are these chemicals bad for the environment, they are also bad for your health. The chemicals seep into the surrounding soil and water supplies. When you grow your own food, you can ensure no harmful chemical products are used to grow them.

## **Eliminating the Need for Packaging**

Packaging has become an important talking point in the bid to reduce global warming. When you buy food from the grocery store, it often comes in plastic packaging. This is known to have a severe impact on the environment. In contrast, when you grow your own food, you don't need to use any packaging.

If everyone were to grow at least a portion of their own food, it would drastically cut back on harmful packaging.

## **Reducing Monocropping Practices**

Finally, did you know monocropping is a common practice for US farmers? It basically means growing one type of crop through government support. They rely a lot upon chemical fertilizers and chemicals, and it greatly reduces biodiversity. Genetically engineered seeds are also frequently used, which can reduce the nutrients within the soil. By growing your own food, you'll reduce the need for these monocropping practices, in turn benefitting the environment.

As you can see, there are a lot of environmental benefits that can come from growing your own food. So, if you care about your eco footprint, switching to growing your own produce can make a huge difference to the planet.

## Processing Your Harvest: Canning, Freeze-Drying and Drying

Growing your own food is great and there are lots of ways you can ensure it stays good enough to eat. While freshly-picked produce isn't going to last long, you can naturally preserve it to last months if needed.

Here, we'll look at three different methods you can use to enjoy your produce all year round. Discover below how canning, drying and freezing can help you to get the most out of your harvest this year.

### **Canning Your Food**

The process of canning food is done to kill off microorganisms that would otherwise cause the food to start spoiling. It involves sealing the produce in jars, then adding heat to kill the microorganisms.

The easiest way to do this at home is to use boiling water from the kettle. After placing the produce in jars, seal them and submerge them in boiling water until they reach a temperature of 212 degrees. This technique is best used for tomatoes and pickled foods.

A good tip here is to only can produce that is at its freshest. You'll also want to use glass jars and ensure you follow the instructions for canning based upon the food you're storing.

### **Drying It**

Another option you have is to dry out the food. This is the oldest method used for preservation and originally it was completely done by hand. These days, however, you can purchase dehydrating machines. An electric dehydrator will speed up and simplify the process.

The best way to dry out your harvest is:

- Prepare it by cleaning the produce and removing any excess moisture. Cut off any stems and bad bits of the produce and cut veggies such as peppers into slices.
- For vegetables, make sure you blanch them by cooling them in ice cold water and then draining them and leaving them to dry. Skip this step if you're drying out fruits or herbs.
- Place the produce into your electric dehydrator. Follow the instructions that came with the dehydrator, or ensure you've researched how long each piece of produce should be dried for.

This is the basic way to dry out your produce. Remember, the drying process does change the taste and texture of the food. You'll also need to keep an eye on it while it's drying as it can easily burn.

## **How to Freeze Fresh Produce**

The most common way of preserving home-grown produce is to freeze it. You'll find this process to be the easiest one to follow too. Make sure you blanch your vegetables prior to freezing and place them in the freezer as quickly as you can after harvesting them.

Make sure that the produce you are freezing is suitable. Not all vegetables and fruits can be frozen.

As you can see, preserving your produce is easy once you know how. You can choose from a variety of different methods. Freezing and storing food in the refrigerator won't affect the taste as much as drying and canning. However, it's worth researching everything you can about the storing methods relating to the specific produce you're growing. This will help you to identify the best way to preserve your home-grown food.