

Vegetable planner

GWF419
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Whatever size your veg plot, it makes sense to get as much produce out of it as possible. Use the winter months to plan your crops for the following season.

Sow at the right time

Use the planner overleaf to plan sowing times. Sort seed packets by month of sowing as a reminder. With most veg, you can get a head start by sowing in pots. Keep them sheltered and protected from pests. Plant out when weather and conditions are suitable.

Sow little and often

This helps to spread the harvest and avoid gluts. Instead of sowing one long row, sow short rows every two weeks. Lettuce, spinach, early carrots, beetroot, dwarf beans, early peas, radish and spring onions are prime candidates. Also try calabrese and summer cauliflower.

Two crops a year

Use each piece of the plot most efficiently by combining early and late or overwintered crops.

Early veg that you can start off under glass, or sow direct under cloches, help extend the season. Choose hardy types of veg like lettuce, carrots and spring onions.

Early croppers like overwintered onions, broad beans, new potatoes and early cauliflowers are ready to harvest in late May or June, so allowing a second crop. These can be followed by tender crops such as tomatoes, sweetcorn, French beans and courgettes started early in pots.

Late starters that can be sown or planted later in the summer are useful gap fillers as summer crops are harvested. Leeks, sprouting broccoli and winter cauliflowers are good for July sowing, and

Chinese cabbage and other oriental brassicas can be sown into August.

Having an empty veg plot over winter is inefficient and you'll miss out on a whole range of fresh vegetables that could supply you through to the following spring. Brussels sprouts, sprouting broccoli, leeks and winter cauliflowers (in milder areas) should be well established by the autumn. They can be joined later by spring cabbage. Autumn-planted onion sets and garlic, as well as autumn-sown peas and beans, will give you an earlier crop than spring sowings.

Space fillers

Some crops such as Brussels sprouts can be slow to fill their allotted space. Others like sweetcorn, never completely cover the soil. Use quick-maturing bonus crops to prevent weeds from spreading. Any of the 'sow little and often' crops (above) will fit the bill. Use related crops, if possible. Try turnip, radish or kohlrabi with larger brassicas. Leafy vegetables such as spinach or lettuce will crop under sweetcorn; early peas should crop before the runner beans need the space.

Rotation plan

Growing crops together makes sense, especially in a large veg plot. Related crops need similar soil treatment, and it helps prevent pests and diseases building up.

A three-year rotation is most suitable for small plots:

- Year 1 Cabbage family
- Year 2 Peas/beans/onions
- Year 3 Potatoes/root crops

For larger plots, use a four-year rotation:

- Year 1 Potatoes
- Year 2 Peas/beans
- Year 3 Cabbage family
- Year 4 Onions/root crops

Vegetable groups

Cabbage family Includes Brussels sprouts, broccoli, calabrese, cabbages, cauliflowers, Chinese cabbage, kale, kohlrabi, swedes and turnips. Closely related plants such as radish should also be included. **Soil:** lime acid soil and add plenty of fertiliser. Water when near maturity.

Potato family Also includes tomatoes, peppers and aubergines. **Soil:** no lime, plenty of fertiliser and organic matter.

Onion family Includes all kinds of onion, garlic, leeks and shallots. **Soil:** needs organic matter and moderate amounts of fertiliser.

Peas and beans Includes garden and mangetout peas, broad, French and runner beans and many green-manure crops like lupins and vetches. **Soil:** add plenty of organic matter and not much fertiliser. Water when pods are being produced.

Root crops Covers carrots, parsnips and parsley. Beetroot and spinach are often grouped with the roots, but are not related. **Soil:** no fresh organic matter, moderate fertiliser and little water.

Crops not mentioned, such as cucumbers and marrows, celery, lettuce and sweetcorn can be grown with any of the rotation groups, as convenient.

MAIN SOWING	GOOD YIELD per 1m row	BETWEEN ROWS	BETWEEN PLANTS	SOWN IN POTS [1]	PLANT OUTDOORS	SOW DIRECT	CLOCHE PROTECTION [2]	HARVEST	SOW IN SUCCESSION
Bean, broad	3kg	45cm	10cm	Feb	Mar-Apr	Mar-Apr	May-Jul	Jul -Aug	
Bean, French (dwarf)	1.5kg	45cm	10cm	Feb-Apr	Apr-May	May-Jul	Apr-May	Aug-Oct	Yes
Bean, runner	6kg	60cm	15cm	Mar-Apr	Apr-May	May-Jun	Apr-May	Aug-Oct	
Beetroot	2.5kg	15cm	2.5cm			Feb-Jul	Feb-Apr	May-Sep	Yes
Broccoli, sprouting	1kg	60cm	60cm	Apr-May	Jun-Jul			Mar-May	
Brussels sprouts	2kg	75cm	75cm	Feb-Apr	May-Jun			Sep-Mar	
Cabbage, summer	3kg	45cm	45cm	Feb-Apr	Apr-May			Jul-Sep	
Cabbage, autumn	3kg	45cm	45cm	May	Jun			Sep-Nov	
Cabbage, winter	4kg	45cm	45cm	May	Jun			Nov-Feb	
Cabbage, spring	3kg	30cm	30cm	Jul-Aug	Sep-Oct			Mar-May	
Calabrese	2kg	30cm	15cm	Feb-Aug	Apr-Sep	Apr-Aug		Jul-Dec	Yes
Carrot, early	1.5kg	15cm	2.5cm			Feb-Aug	Feb-Apr	Jun-Oct	Yes
Carrot, main crop	3kg	15cm	2.5cm			Apr		Sep-Dec	
Cauliflower, summer	2kg	50cm	50cm	Feb-Apr	Mar-Jun	Mar-Aug		Jul-Oct	Yes
Cauliflower, autumn	2kg	50cm	50cm	Apr-May	May-Jun			Sep-Dec	
Cauliflower, winter	2.5kg	75cm	75cm	May	Jul			Dec-Mar	
Celery, self-blanching	1.5kg	23cm	23cm	Mar-Apr	Apr-May			Jul-Oct	
Chinese cabbage	3 heads	45cm	30cm	Jun-Jul	Aug	Jul-Aug		Sep-Nov	
Courgette	15 per plant	90cm	90cm	Apr-May	May-Jun		May	Jun-Oct	
Garlic	10 bulbs	20cm	10cm		Oct-Nov			Jun-Jul	
Kale	2kg	45cm	45cm	Apr-May	Jul			Nov-Apr	
Leek	3kg	30cm	15cm	Feb-Apr	May-Jul			Sep-Apr	
Lettuce	3-4 heads	30cm	30cm	Feb-Mar	Mar-Apr	Mar-Aug	Mar-Apr	May-Oct	Yes
Marrow	3kg	90cm	90cm	Apr-May	May-Jun		May	Aug-Oct	
Onion, from seed	2.5kg	25cm	5cm	Feb-Mar	Apr-May	Mar-Apr		Aug-Oct	
Onion, from sets	2.5kg	25cm	5cm		Apr			Aug-Oct	
Onion, overwinter sets	2.5kg	25cm	5cm		Oct			Jun-Jul	
Onion, spring	2 bunches	15cm	[3]			Feb-Aug		Jun-Oct	Yes
Parsnip	3kg	25cm	15cm			Mar-Apr		Oct-Apr	
Pea	2kg	60cm	5cm			Feb-Jul	Feb-Apr	Jul-Oct	Yes
Pea, mangetout	2kg	60cm	5cm			Feb-Jul	Feb-Apr	Jul-Oct	Yes
Potato, early	2kg	60cm	38cm		Mar-Apr		Mar-May	Jul	
Potato, maincrop	4kg	75cm	38cm		Apr-May			Aug-Oct	
Radish	2 bunches	15cm	[3]			Feb-Aug	Mar-Apr	Jul-Oct	Yes
Shallot	1.5kg	30cm	23cm		Apr-May			Jun-Jul	
Spinach/Leaf beet	1kg	30cm	5cm			Mar-Jul	Mar-Apr	Jul-Sep	Yes
Squash	4kg	90cm	90cm	Apr-May	May-Jun		May	Sep-Oct	
Swede	2kg	30cm	23cm			Apr-Jun		Sep-Mar	
Sweetcorn	4 cobs	35cm	35cm	Apr-May	May-Jun		May	Aug-Oct	
Tomato, outdoor	3kg	45cm	45cm	Mar-Apr	May-Jun		May	Aug-Oct	
Turnip	2kg	15cm	15cm			Mar-Aug	Mar-Apr	Aug-Dec	Yes

Footnotes

[1] An alternative for leeks and brassicas is to sow in a seed bed and transplant the seedlings

[2] Exact timing depends on the last frost in your area

[3] Sow thinly in bands