

Vegetable planner

Whatever the size of your vegetable 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 using this guide and the [Vegetable Planting Calendar](#) to inform you. Use the [Jobs for the Month](#) guide to inspire you with jobs to keep you busy each month.

Sow at the right time

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

Sow little and often

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

Two crops a year

Use each area of the plot most efficiently by combining early and late overwintering crops.

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

Early croppers like overwintered onions, broad beans, new potatoes and early cauliflowers are ready to harvest in late May or June, thereby allowing a second crop. These can be followed by tender crops such as tomatoes, 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 broad 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 invading. Any of the 'sow little and often' crops (see 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 and early peas should crop before runner beans crowd them out.

Rotation plan

Growing crops together makes sense, especially in a larger veg plot. Related crops need similar soil treatment, and growing them together helps prevent pest and disease build 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, cabbage, cauliflower, 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 water. Water when near maturity.

Potato family also includes tomatoes, peppers and aubergine.

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 include garden and mange tout peas, broad, French and runner beans and many green manure crops like lupins and vetches.

Soil: add plenty of organic matter and little 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.

