

Apr 2020

# REPTON GREEN FINGERS

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Link to video: <https://youtu.be/TY63mDYWnCY>

## GROWING VEGETABLES

April is a great time to start growing vegetables. There is nothing quite like the taste of something you have grown yourself.

This year it feels especially important to grow something to eat.

## GETTING STARTED

First of all, grow vegetables that you like to eat. Start with some easy veg and grow them well

Most vegetables grow best in a sunny position in good rich soil. If you haven't got a veg area consider growing in containers or create a space from the flower beds or the lawn. A final option is to grow some vegetables in your flower borders.

## WHAT YOU'LL NEED

You'll need some seeds - the seed companies are still doing online orders but have been very busy and are running out of some seeds. The postage on seed orders is usually very reasonable. If you have seeds left over from a previous year most will last a few years except for parsnips, carrots, sweetcorn and parsley. Brassicas (cabbage family) and beans last very well from year to year.

You don't need any special tools for growing vegetables. A garden fork and a hoe would be good and also a trowel for planting.



## PLANNING

As boring as it sounds a little bit of planning goes a long way. Ideally you want to have a continuous supply of the vegetables that you are growing. If you sow the full packet of summer broccoli you could have 150 plants - that a lot of broccoli to eat. How much better to grow 20 today and 20 more in 6 weeks time - this is known as succession planting. Some crops finish quite early like broad beans and give you the opportunity to grow something like leeks afterwards. So I like to have some plants in pots waiting in the wings ready to plant out.

Another thing to think about is the weather, some vegetables such as sweetcorn, courgettes and beans will not stand any frost so need to be started in a frost-free position such as a greenhouse before planting out in the garden at the end of May.

Some plants like carrots and parsnips are better sown into the ground so there is a lot to think about.



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## EASY VEG TO GROW FROM SEED BY DIRECT SOWING (HARDY VEGETABLES)

The easiest vegetable to grow is radish, it germinates very fast and is ready in a few weeks. Salad leaf mixes are good early in the season and are quick too, you can harvest them by cutting off the tops with a pair of scissors, they will then regrow - you can do this several times. (Also good for containers). If your soil is light and fairly stone-free carrots and parsnips will do well for you.



## EASY VEG TO GROW FROM PLANTS

Some vegetables give better results if you start with little plants grown in potting compost in the greenhouse, a sheltered spot or the windowsill.

I usually grow the cabbage family in pots to start with, leeks too. It is partly so I can get going earlier before the outside conditions are suitable.

The other plants we usually start off indoors are sweetcorn, courgettes and some beans.

## WHEN TO START

Most hardy vegetables will germinate at a soil temperature of around 6 degrees but 8 degrees will give a better germination rate. On March 29th, this year our veg patch was at 9 degrees. Although a soil thermometer is useful with a little experience, you'll soon know when to sow, the soil will no longer feel really cold..

## PREPARATION

Start off by removing weeds, then it really depends on the state of your plot. In an established plot all you **have** to do is rake over the surface but a lot of vegetable gardeners swear by deep digging every year (not us). It really depends on what you are growing, tiny seeds like carrots want a really fine (smooth and level) surface but large beans will fight up through large lumps of soil. If your soil is really horrid then make a channel where you want to sow seed and put some potting compost or better soil in it. I remember when we first grew vegetables here it was like digging in concrete.

Jobs to do in April in the garden  
[HTTPS://HUB.SUTTONS.CO.UK/  
 GARDENING-ADVICE/IN-  
 YOUR-GARDEN-APRIL](https://hub.suttons.co.uk/gardening-advice/in-your-garden-april)

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## HOW TO SOW THE SEED

Before you start write a label with the variety and the date. Read the details on the packet which will tell you how far apart the rows should be, how deep to sow the seed and how many seeds there are in the packet. Make a seed drill by using a stick drawn alongside the handle of a hoe. You are ready, so open the packet of seeds being careful not to scatter them to the four winds and to leave the seed packet intact with the name of the seed still legible for later. Put a pinch of seed into the palm of your left hand and with your right hand take some of the seed and using a twisting movement sprinkle it along the row. If the seed is large like spinach or beetroot you can sow them at equal distance apart. Now cover the seed with a little bit of soil, for very fine seeds like carrots you can sieve some soil on top. If rain is expected there is no need to water, conversely if the soil is very dry then water with a fine spray watering can. This year our soil is quite wet underneath from the winter rains but the top is fast drying out. After a very dry winter you might think about watering the soil **before** sowing the seed.

## GROWING POTATOES

Every child should grow potatoes at some point in their life, They are really easy to grow in pots and so rewarding. To start off the potatoes you need to chit them by putting them pointy end up in egg boxes or trays in a cool, light but frost free position. After a week or two you will see little green shoots coming up from the eyes. You may need to turn the potato over if lots of the eyes are at the bottom. We let the sprouts get to an inch or so long, any longer and they are very vulnerable to being snapped off when planted.

## POTATO VARIETIES

We have tried so many varieties over the years but without doubt you should start with Charlotte. If your supermarket potatoes are sprouting you could use those. however the official line is that you should buy seed potatoes to reduce the chance of disease. Use an 8 inch (20cms) pot with drainage holes in the bottom to grow 3 potatoes and expect a delicious meal for the family. If you want lots more, growing them in the garden is easier. Put a couple of inches of compost in the bottom of the pot and lay the potatoes on top, cover with an inch of two of soil. When the little green shoots appear top up with some more soil, repeat, until the pot is full. Potatoes are hungry and thirsty so water regularly and feed after about 5 weeks with whatever you have eg growmore, blood fish and bone or nettle stew. Flowers on the potato are the first sign that the potatoes may be ready but wait a little longer for a bigger harvest. Once the tops start to die back get in there and start harvesting if you can wait that long!

