



## Grow Your Own Veg Top Tips from Christine Walkden

### Preparing the ground

- Soil should be dug (one spades depth) each year and double dug (two spades depth) every 5 years. When digging the soil each spade full should be completely inverted. This will allow any unwanted pest to be eaten by birds and any soil born diseases to be exposed. Leave the soil as rough as possible. The frost and cold weather will break down the soil.
  - Dig heavy soils (e.g. clay / silt) in the autumn
  - Dig lighter soils (e.g. sandy) in January



### Preparing to sow seeds

- Soil should first be forked to loosen the soil and then the soft shoe shuffle should be carried out. This simply involves shuffling up and down your plot to break up large lumps of soil. Be careful to shuffle not stamp, otherwise you will compact the soil.
- Next rake the plot to achieve a fine and even soil consistency. Make sure the soil passes through the rake rather than being dragged around the plot. Raking the soil should achieve a flat even finish which is essential for successful seedling growth. The smaller the seeds the finer the seed bed should be.
- The same process should be carried out for raised beds, but without walking on them.

### Where to grow veg



- You don't need a large vegetable patch; any container can be used to sow seeds as long as it's clean and has drainage holes (e.g. tubs, pots, seed trays, grow bags, window boxes and hanging baskets).
- In a grow bag or window box you could sow a row each of spring onions, radishes, stunted carrots, pok choi and salad leaves.
- In a large container at the same time you could grow: six runner beans and then a quarter each with carrots, radishes, spring onions and salad leaves.
- You can even grow vegetable in your flower garden: stunted carrots and fine leaf beetroots wouldn't look out of place.

### Sowing seeds

- Sow seeds in seed and cutting compost, as it has a lower nutrient content, and don't use fertiliser on seedlings or young plants. Seeds and seedlings are like babies; their digestive systems aren't able to cope with rich, complex foods!
- If sowing black seeds roll them in talcum powder so they stand out against the dark soil to make sure you get your spacing right.
- You don't need to use an entire pack of seeds in one go; use a quarter or half a pack and keep the rest for another time. Store seeds in a Tupperware box with a bit of silicon gel in a



cool (not freezing) and dark place – the ideal place is the salad tray of your fridge!



- Use a firming board to make sure you have a firm and even surface in a seed tray. Using a sieve will help you to get an even fine coverage. Seeds need approx 2-2.5 times their diameter in soil coverage.
- If making holes for seeds in a seed tray allow 40 holes per tray (8 x 5). To ensure even spacing put a hole in each extreme and then work inwards.
- When growing seeds on a window ledge place a mirror (or cardboard covered in foil) behind the seeds to reflect the sunlight and stop the seedlings growing towards the window.
- Sowing at intervals will stop you from having too many vegetables to harvest at once. Split your row into three and stagger sowing of each third by 7 to 10 days (if quick growing) or 21 to 28 days (if slow growing).

### Soil pH

- The ideal pH is 6.5 to 7.0 for growing vegetables as all the trace elements will be available to the plant. Use lime and sulphur to achieve this desired pH.

### When to sow seeds

- Do not sow seeds/seedlings outside until the clocks have changed and the nights are between 8-9 °C. When you see new weeds coming through you'll know it's the right time. It's better to sow later than earlier in the season.

### Seed spacing

- Determine spacing within rows by considering how large the vegetable will eventually grow to. If you want smaller vegetables plant them closer together, larger ones further apart. Remember to leave sufficient space to tend to crops between the rows e.g. 12-18 inches (30-42cm).
- Thin out seedlings if they are too close together – some vegetables can be transplanted (e.g. brussel sprouts and cabbages) but other can't.



### Watering



- Water a lot infrequently than a little frequently - as watering alters the temperature of the soil. Use lukewarm water when watering to reduce the effect on the soil.
- It is better to water first thing in the morning or last thing at night, and is preferable to water in the morning; as the water will evaporate during the day but at night it is less likely to and can encourage fungal spores to develop. Never water in the middle of the day as it will all evaporate.
- Make sure you water sufficiently. One gallon of water is sufficient for 2 seed trays - watered over 5 passes or leave in a tray of water to soak for two hours. When watering seed trays use the watering can rose facing upwards. Start the watering can off away from the food tray until an even flow is produced.

- Suggested watering regimes:
  - Leafy vegetables, tomatoes, celery - need to be water throughout the life of crop.
  - Peas and beans – water until established and then don't water until they flower. Water 5 gallons per meter row once a week through flowering period until the end of crop.
  - Sweet corn – water to establish then don't water again until tassels develop (when the hair comes out of the cob). Then water 5 gallons per meter row twice a week for two weeks then stop (i.e. 4 times).
  - Pumpkins /Squash – water throughout their life
  - Salad crops – water throughout their life
- Put a few drops of washing liquid on peat free compost to retain moisture.
- Use old washing sponges to line hanging baskets to retain moisture.

### **Crop rotation**

- Draw a plan of your vegetable patch showing what has been planted where so the next year you can alternate crops.

### **Pest and disease control**

- To avoid carrot fly - sow just before cow parsley comes into flower and sow again once the flowers begin to fade.
- When you start to see butterflies check your lettuce/cabbage leaves for caterpillars.
- Grow flowers around the outside of the vegetable patch to attract birds and insects into the garden to eat the pests.
- To eradicate earwigs, weevils – put an upside down plant pot, with crunched up paper inside, on a bamboo stick and leave over night. In the morning take the pot off the stick and you will find the pests hiding in the paper.
- If you use pesticides stick to the instructions and make sure you apply it on the affected area – normally the underside of the leaf.
- Keep pots, trays and tools clean – wash with Milton solution to remove any soil borne diseases.
- Avoid planting diseased plants into your plot; be careful when accepting donated plants!
- Don't walk on your plot with the same foot wear which may have been in contact with diseased soil. Keep a pair of boots which you only ever use in your garden.
- Any seeds labelled Avon varieties will likely to have disease resistance of some form.

