

## PERENNIAL CROPS



**GLOBE ARTICHOKE:** Given full sunlight and enough moisture, these grand thistle relatives can crop reliably for 10 years or more. The mature plants have a height and spread of up to 90cm, so they do need space. Plants may disappear in winter and re-emerge in April, cropping through to July. Harvest flowerheads just before they open (above), then cut off the old stems to encourage further cropping by September.

**ASPARAGUS:** Asparagus needs a permanent position but little attention once established. For ease of growing, buy one-year-old crowns and plant them in March or April in a sheltered, sunny spot. Dig the soil well, remove perennial weed roots and add plenty of

organic matter. Create a ridge about 10cm high, along the centre. Place the crowns on top, 30-45cm apart, with their roots straddling the peak. Cover the roots with soil, leaving the bud tips just visible. Water thoroughly, then cover with a 5cm mulch of well-rotted manure or compost. Keep asparagus beds free from weeds, add an organic general fertiliser in spring and top up the mulch in late autumn/early spring. Cut the yellowed foliage down to 2.5cm in autumn.

The asparagus season lasts from mid-April to mid-June but don't harvest your asparagus for the first two years. Cut individual spears in May with a sharp knife, when they are 10-18cm tall. Aim to harvest spears every two to three days to maintain a good crop.



## PEAS

Like beans, peas need plenty of soil moisture, so dig a trench in autumn and fill it with garden compost. Top off the trench with soil a fortnight before sowing or planting out to give the contents time to settle. They prefer an alkaline to neutral soil (so add lime if your soil is acidic). Water well during dry periods especially when the pods are developing. Peas can be grown in pots, but do not let the compost dry out.



## WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Vegetable seeds
- Pots/seed trays
- Fork & spade
- Hoe
- Compost/organic matter
- Plastic/fleece
- Canes
- Mulch
- Watering can with rose
- Stakes
- General and/or controlled-release fertiliser
- Liquid feed

For more information:  
[www.rhs.org.uk/advice](http://www.rhs.org.uk/advice)  
[www.plantforlife.info](http://www.plantforlife.info)

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## THE EASY GUIDE TO

# GROWING HARDY VEGETABLES



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## INTRODUCTION

Hardy vegetables are crops that prefer cool growing conditions and include brassicas (broccoli, brussels sprouts, cabbage and spinach), bulbous vegetables (garlic, onions, shallots and leeks) and perennial artichokes and asparagus. (For information on root crops such as potatoes, carrots, parsnips, swedes, radish and turnips, see *The Easy Guide to Growing Root Vegetables*; and on warm-weather edible crops including beans, corn, courgettes, marrow, pumpkins and squash, see *The Easy Guide to Growing Tender Vegetables*.)

## SEED-SOWING TECHNIQUES

Sow vegetable crops in April as the soil warms up and dries out - once weed seedlings start to germinate.

Soils that are still cold and wet can be covered with cloches or clear plastic for a few weeks. Once you have sown seeds or planted out seedlings, keep the protection in place until the weather warms up.

To extend the harvest period and keep your vegetable garden fully productive, grow plants both indoors and out, and sow shorter rows at 10-14 day intervals.

**OUTDOORS:** Plan carefully where you are going to sow, as it's best to follow a rotation system to prevent a build-up of soil-borne pests and diseases. Ideally, the same vegetables should not be grown in the same place for at least three years.

Sow hardy vegetables directly into the soil where they are to grow. Make a shallow trench (a drill) with a cane, then sow the seed straight into the drill. Always sow evenly and thinly to avoid thinning out the crop afterwards. Cover with soil, lightly firm it down, then water.

**INDOORS:** To extend the growing season, many vegetables can be pre-sown in pots and cell trays in spring in the greenhouse or on a windowsill for planting out when the soil is ready. When seedlings have sufficient roots to bind the compost, transplant them into prepared beds. Cover your vegetables loosely with fleece or plastic to prevent pests reaching the plants.



## BRASSICAS

Brassicas prefer a rich soil that contains some lime; use a pH tester and if your soil is acidic add lime before sowing or planting.

**BROCCOLI:** White and purple sprouting broccoli are overwintered for harvest in spring. Sow in April and May (March in mild regions; June for late varieties). Sow thinly, 13mm deep in a seed bed in rows 15cm apart, then thin the seedlings to 7.5cm apart. For a succession of crops, sow some seeds indoors in module trays. Calabrese is best sown where it is to crop and thinned to 30cm apart. It is harvested in autumn.

When broccoli plants reach 10-15cm high, transplant to their growing positions, 45cm apart. Water plants well before lifting, after transplanting and in dry weather. Conserve soil moisture with a mulch and give occasional summer feeding with a liquid fertiliser. Net plants from the birds.

Harvest when the flower shoots (spears) are well formed but before individual flowers begin to open. First cut the central spear then pick the sideshoots regularly over four to six weeks.

**BRUSSELS SPROUTS:** sprouts are one of the most cold-hardy garden vegetables - a frost improves their flavour. Firm, water-retentive soil is important for good crops.

For an early crop sow under glass in module trays in February, otherwise sow March to April in a

seed bed. Follow sowing and transplanting instructions as for broccoli but leave 75cm between the plants' final growing positions. Cover plants with fleece to deter birds and caterpillars.

Pick the lower sprouts when they are the size of a walnut and still firm and tightly closed. Snap them off with a downward tug.

**CABBAGES:** Sow thinly, 13mm deep in a seed bed in rows 15cm apart, and thin to 7.5cm. Cabbages are divided into three types:

- Spring cabbage - sow in July/August, transplant in Sept/Oct;
  - Summer cabbage - sow in late Feb/early March under cover, transplant in May/June;
  - Winter cabbage - sow in April/May; transplant in late June/July.
- Move the young plants to their growing position when plants have five or six true leaves. Water well before lifting, after transplanting and in dry weather.

Plant compact varieties 30cm apart and larger varieties up to 45cm apart. Growing the plants under fleece will help prevent against rootfly attack and prevent cabbage white caterpillars and pigeons getting at the crop.

Harvest cabbages by cutting through the stem just above ground level with a sharp knife. Cut a 13mm deep cross in the stump of spring and summer cabbages and they will provide a second crop of smaller cabbages.



## BULBOUS VEGETABLES

Alliums including garlic, onions, shallots and leeks are generally easy to grow and can help confuse pests, such as carrot and parsnip root flies and protect leafy crops from slugs. Alliums enjoy a long growing season in well-cultivated soil with plenty of rich, organic matter such as home-made compost or well-rotted manure.

**GARLIC:** For best results, plant in a sunny spot from October as the cloves need a cold spell to grow properly. Separate the bulbs into individual cloves and plant just below the soil surface roughly 15cm apart, in rows 30cm apart. Remove weeds regularly and keep the bulbs well watered. Pick off any flowers to concentrate the plant's energy on forming bulbs.

**ONIONS AND SHALLOTS:** are best grown from sets (immature bulbs) although they can be raised from seed. Plant onions 10cm apart in rows 10cm apart from March to April and shallots 15cm apart in rows 23cm apart from February to March. Gently push the sets into the soil so the tip is just showing. Onion sets develop into one large bulb; shallot sets develop several new shallots from the central one. Water in dry conditions, mulch the soil to conserve moisture and hoe around the bulbs to keep weeds down. Remove any flower heads that develop. Once the bulbs have swollen to maturity, remove any mulch to expose them to the sun and stop watering so they dry out.

**HARVESTING:** Garlic, onion and shallots are ready to harvest from July, when the leaves have yellowed. Choose a sunny day, gently pull the bulbs from the ground and lay them out to dry in the sun. Then store in a cool, dry place.

**LEEKs:** Sow seed in March or April either in a seed bed or in their final growing positions. Sow seeds thinly in pre-watered drills 0.5cm deep, and cover with a fine layer of soil. Thin seedlings to 5cm apart. When the plants are 20cm high and pencil thick transplant them to their final position. Use a dibber or trowel to make holes 15cm deep and 15cm apart, in rows 30cm apart. Water after transplanting and also in dry conditions. Keep the area weed free. Blanch leeks in August by pushing 5cm soil up around the plants to increase the size of the edible part of the plant. Old toilet roll holders will give the same effect. Harvest leeks from mid autumn to late spring. Gently lever them out with a spade or a fork, taking the larger ones first and leaving the smaller ones to continue growing.