

VEGETABLES  
*for the*  
GOURMET  
GARDENER



A Practical Resource from  
the Garden to the Table

SIMON AKEROYD

*Vegetables for the  
Gourmet Gardener*

*A Practical Resource  
from the Garden to the Table*

By Simon Akeroyd

The rise of the slow food movement and the return to home gardens mean cooks are donning gardening gloves as often as oven mitts. Modern cooking is heading back to its roots, with home cooks embracing local ingredients and down-to-earth recipes. With more and more of us discovering the delight of preparing and eating freshly harvested food, *Vegetables for the Gourmet Gardener* is the indispensable guide to what to grow, cook, and eat.

A feast for the eyes and the table, this user-friendly resource traverses

the realms of both the garden and the kitchen, addressing the cultivation, storage, and preparation of nearly seventy useful vegetables. Practical growing tips, fascinating histories, nutritional information, and classic recipes appear alongside botanical illustrations drawn from the Royal Horticultural Society's cherished collection. With both familiar varieties and novel options, *Vegetables for the Gourmet Gardener* will inspire you to create a world of new shapes, colors, and tastes.

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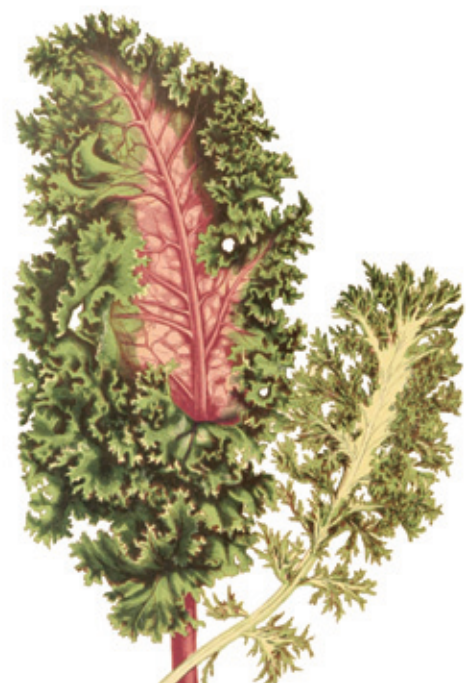
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**LEFT:** One of the most common vegetables in medieval Europe, curly kale (*Brassica oleracea* Acephala Group) dropped out of fashion until it was repopularized during the “Dig for Victory” campaign in World War Two.

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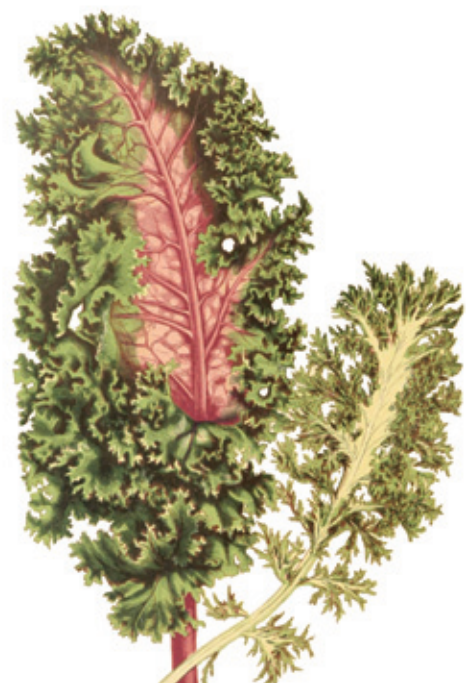
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# Introduction

Growing your own gourmet vegetables is guaranteed to take you on a life-absorbing adventure where the action occurs just a few feet from your back door. You will discover a range of new skills touching on geology, botany, horticulture, and cooking, and you will learn to read the weather like a meteorologist and unearth incredible stories associated with historic and ancient varieties only found listed at the back of esoteric seed catalogs. Many such varieties have a long, exciting history that subsequently brought them to be common in our gardens and on our kitchen tables.



LEFT: 19<sup>th</sup>-century artwork for a series of adverts for a Parisian seed company, illustrating vegetables available at the time. The collection was finally published as *Album Vilmorin (Les Plantes Potageres)*. This image dates from 1891.

## HISTORY OF THE HUMAN DIET

Mankind has toiled in the soil for thousands of years to produce its food. Growing vegetables was one of the first building blocks to creating ancient civilizations and societies, prior to which humans had been hunter gatherers, traveling around as they foraged for plants and animals. The ability to grow crops enabled them to settle down near fertile soil, cultivate land, and build houses, villages, and towns in the area. Following on from the building of houses, the next obvious transition was to create gardens where vegetables could be grown close to where they were to be cooked and consumed.

Many of the ancient techniques such as digging, sowing, and weeding remain the same now as they did for our forefathers. In addition, the plants' requirements have not changed either—they still need the basic natural elements of sunlight, water, and nutrients in the soil. But the one thing that has changed is the huge rise in popularity of kitchen gardening and allotments as people clamber to grow their own food.

Vegetables are packed full of healthy nutrients and goodness including potassium, folic acid, and vitamins. Evidence shows they can reduce risks of heart disease, strokes, obesity, type 2 diabetes, and cancer, to name a few. Because vegetables are naturally low in fat and calories and they do not contain cholesterol, they provide nutritional food to improve people's health and well-being.

With simply thousands of different vegetables to choose from, it should not be too hard to find even just a handful of vegetables that you enjoy eating regularly as part of a healthy, balanced diet for life.

## BECOMING A GOURMET GARDENER

As you gain experience, you will develop practical arts ranging from crop rotation basics to how to create a seed drill with the edge of your draw hoe. You will do battle with slugs, snails, and tiny pests such as the carrot fly. Before too long you will start to treat your vegetable plot like a wine connoisseur treats his vineyard or cellar. You will find the subtle nuances of your plot, know which areas have the best soil or receive the most sun. You will recognize which crops to pick small and young to savor the best flavors, and which vegetables need time to mature like a fine wine. You will understand the best time to harvest and the optimum moment for storage to maximize the complex flavors.

In the kitchen, this book will show you how to transform these home-grown crops into delicious and sumptuous dishes. You will be able to hone your skills down to a fine art, and like a conjurer you will be able to magic up blue roast potatoes or purple carrots. Impress yourself by growing lettuce leaves in winter and Brussels sprouts that do not taste bitter.

A gourmet gardener always has half their eye on the weather, with a brow to match the crooked furrow made by the rake in the soil. They know that all their hard work will always be in the hands of mother nature. Armed with fleeces and cloches in



ABOVE: 1879 artwork from the series of illustrations called *Album Vilmorin (Les Plantes Potageres)* from a Parisian seed company, Vilmorin-Andrieux & Co. The volume only survives in a few libraries today.

the fall and spring, and watering cans and shade netting in summer, the gourmet gardener becomes a master at adapting to the outside environment.

Whether you want the perfect recipe for making a cake mix or a compost mix, this book has it all. Once you start growing your own gourmet vegetables in the garden, it will take you on a learning journey that will become a rewarding hobby that will last a lifetime. And this healthy exercise and eating can only contribute to a longer and more rewarding life. So what are you waiting for? Grab your gum boots and start sowing.



# WHY GROW YOUR OWN?

To the lover of gourmet vegetables nothing beats growing food from your own garden. Anyone who has grown their own food knows how much better it tastes than anything bought from a store. Nothing rivals tasting a tomato warmed in the summer sun and picked fresh from the vine. And once tasted, who can forget the tender succulent flavor of asparagus harvested from the vegetable plot in the early morning dew and lightly steamed with butter for a breakfast treat? This is the experience that only a gourmet gardener can enjoy and embrace.

**BELOW:** Vegetables, such as these onions, come in many shapes and sizes. Growing your own enables you to cook with a range of flavors and colors not found in the store.



“In a world where we are becoming increasingly alienated from what we eat, growing our own vegetables is a fundamental way to reassert the connection between ourselves and our food.”

*RHS Grow Your Own Veg, Carol Klein (2007)*

## WIDER CHOICE

The vast range of vegetables available from seed companies cannot be matched on the shelves of the stores. Walk into a store and there is a choice of about two varieties of onions. Open up a seed catalog and there are often 15 or 20 varieties coming in all shapes, sizes, and colors.

Suddenly there is a whole new world of exciting new vegetables to try which are almost impossible to buy in the store. How often will you find blue potatoes or purple carrots, or be able to try the early spring hosta shoots as they unfurl from the ground or enjoy the subtle asparagus flavor from the asparagus pea? Only by growing these unique crops will a gourmet cook be able to embrace the full range of ingredients needed to make great food.

## MAGICAL EXPERIENCE—FROM PLOT TO PLATE

Feeling part of the rhythms of life and embracing the seasons can only be felt outdoors. Feeling the soil in your hands and the sun on your back as seeds are sown and crops are harvested becomes an intoxicating experience. Growing food with the distinct flavor of the minerals and nutrients from your own soil gives the gourmet gardener magical

ingredients that make the food produced completely unique to that location. Like alchemy, once in the kitchen those exclusive gourmet crops are transformed into great-tasting dishes that cannot be replicated anywhere else in the world.

## HEALTHIER

For those with environmental concerns, there are of course no air miles involved with bringing your “plot to plate.” As a gardener you have complete control over whether it is treated with chemicals or fertilizers or not. The physical exertion of growing gourmet vegetables is better than any gym workout, and will make your muscles ache in a good way.

It is considered by many that home-grown vegetables have a higher nutritional value, far better for you than the produce of commercial farming practices that have squeezed the health and nutritional benefits out of the plants in a quest for uniformity and long-term storage benefits.

## KEEPING OUR RICH HERITAGE ALIVE

If variety is the spice of life then growing your own gourmet crops is a must for anybody interested in growing and cooking food. Without that passion, all of those unique flavors, colors, and varieties—many of which have wonderful historic stories attached to them—will be lost. The lover of gourmet food will be foraging back in the grocery stores with a choice of just a handful of uniform and often bland-tasting vegetables.

**RIGHT:** Growing your own food promises crops of exciting vegetables to grow all year round.

## HISTORY FROM THE VEGETABLE PATCH

Some of the older and quirkier vegetables have unique flavors, colors, shapes, and textures that are no longer in existence in the modern commercial vegetable world. By growing these gourmet crops you will help to keep them and the stories behind them alive. Often referred to as heritage or Heirloom varieties, the French call them by the evocative name *les légumes oubliés*, the “forgotten vegetables.”

There are some wonderful stories attached to some of these historic vegetables. For instance, the French bean “Cherokee Trail of Tears” commemorates the 1838 march of the displaced Native American Cherokee nation, who are said to have carried these seeds on the journey to their new homeland.

When Howard Carter excavated the tomb of the Egyptian boy king Tutankhamen in 1922, pea seeds were among the treasures he unearthed. Today the archeologically minded gardener can grow *Pisum sativum* “Tutankhamen,” which originates from the English Highclere Castle estate of Carter’s patron Lord Carnarvon.



# Garlic

*Allium sativum*

**Common names:** Garlic, garlick, rocambole

**Type:** Bulb

**Climate:** Hardy, average winter

**Size:** Up to 12in (30cm)

**Origin:** Central Asia

**History:** The word “garlic” comes from the Anglo Saxon word *garleac* (*gar* meaning “spear” and *leac* meaning “leek.” It has a similar history to the leek and onion and can be dated back over 7,000 years to Central Asia. The Egyptians worshipped garlic and placed models of garlic bulbs made out of clay in the tomb of Tutankhamen. The Romans believed that garlic held properties of strength and courage and fed it to their soldiers to give them the best start in battle.

**Cultivation:** Garlic requires a well-drained soil in full sun. It is fully hardy and its individual cloves are best planted in late fall as the cold winter promotes bulb development, although it can be planted anytime through winter until early spring.

**Storage:** Leave bulbs out in the sun for a few days if the weather is dry, before collecting them



up and storing them in a frost-free, dry place. They will store for 6 months or more.

**Preparation:** When choosing garlic it is important to look for bulbs that are hard and firm. The less papery the skin, the more moist the cloves will be. The papery skin should be removed and the cloves prized apart. The smooth skin surrounding individual cloves comes off more easily if gently crushed.

**G**arlic is one of the more pungent ingredients in the vegetable world, and just a tiny crushed clove is enough to flavor an entire dish. Anyone who has cooked with it will know how hard the smell can be to eradicate from the skin; it remains with the cook for hours afterward. Popular in both Asian and Mediterranean cooking, garlic is a member of the onion family and is simply a bulb made up of usually between 8 and 12 individual cloves. The papery skin that

**LEFT AND ABOVE:** Garlic is a popular bulb vegetable, closely related to onions, and with a pungent, aromatic flavor. It is used in a range of culinary dishes from around the world.

## NUTRITION

Garlic contains high levels of potassium, iron, calcium, magnesium, manganese, zinc, and selenium, which are essential for optimum health. Garlic also contains health-promoting substances that have proven benefits against coronary artery diseases, infections, and cancers.



**ABOVE:** A colored engraving of a peasant woman c.1735 by Martin Engelbrecht illustrating a peasant lady with a variety of pink and white garlic bulbs attached around her waist.

surrounds the bulb is usually white but there are attractive pink- and purple-tinged varieties too.

Vampires might not be fond of this pungent bulb, but garlic is probably one of the most popular vegetables, with people from around the globe using it to impart exciting flavors to otherwise bland dishes.

Garlic cloves are usually crushed or sliced in cooking, but they can be cooked whole. To provide a real punch of the garlic flavor, they can be added raw to salads, but breath mints will be required for hours afterward if you do not want to upset your friends, family, and work colleagues. For a milder garlic flavor, the stem or scapes can be harvested and cooked in stir-fries.



## TASTING NOTES

### *Perfectly pickled garlic*

Pickling reduces the powerful bite of garlic in its raw state, leaving a mellow and sweeter flavor. The result is great when used in sandwiches or with antipastas and salads.

**Preparation time:** 5 minutes

**Cooking time:** 10 minutes

**Serves:** makes a 1/2l (1lb) jar

- 48 garlic cloves, peeled
- 6fl oz (170ml) water
- 3fl oz (85ml) white or red vinegar
- 2oz (56g) sugar
- 1 1/4 tsp kosher salt
- 1/2 tsp whole black peppercorns
- 1/2 tsp mustard seeds
- 1/2 tsp fennel seeds
- 1/2 tsp red pepper, crushed

Bring a small saucepan of water to a boil over high heat. Add garlic and cook for 3 minutes.

Drain and place the garlic in a sterilized, heatproof, glass jar with a tight-fitting lid.

Combine the water, vinegar, sugar, salt, peppercorns, mustard seeds, fennel seeds, and red pepper in a saucepan. Bring to a boil, stirring until the sugar and salt are dissolved.

Pour the hot pickling solution into the jar.

When cool, cover and refrigerate for at least 8 hours. Refrigerate for up to 1 month.

Garlic should be planted between late fall and midwinter, ideally before Christmas. It is fully hardy and in fact requires a cold period of between 32–43°F to encourage the bulb to develop.

Garlic requires a sheltered, sunny site with well-drained soil. They struggle to grow on damp ground and will require plenty of grit or sand to be added if this is the case. Remove the papery covering from around the bulb and gently prize apart the individual cloves. These segments should

then be pushed into the ground at 6in apart ensuring that the basal plate (the flat section) is at the bottom. The tip of the clove should just be below the surface. Rows should be 12in apart. Choose only the fat, plump bulbs for planting and discard any withered or thin ones. A net or fleece may need to be placed over them if birds are attracted to the bulbs after planting. Avoid planting cloves bought from the grocery store as they may not be virus-free or suitable for the climate.

### HARDNECKS OR SOFTNECKS

Garlic is divided into two categories, hardnecks and softnecks, referring to the stem of the plant.

**Hardnecks**—the hardiest garlic, often producing a flower stem that can be cooked. They are usually planted out in the fall although they can also be planted in early spring. They generally have more complex flavors than the softnecks and a shorter shelf life, only lasting until midwinter time in storage. Varieties include “Chesnok Wight” and “Lautrec Wight.”

**Softneck**—this garlic contains more cloves, which are more tightly packed. They will last until late winter or early spring if stored correctly.

Varieties include “Early Wight” and “Solent Wight.”

The soft stem produced is useful for plaiting for storage



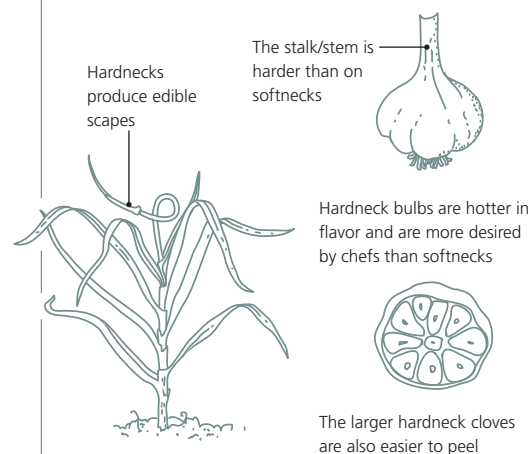
Softneck bulbs have a milder flavor



The bulb below ground stores for longer than hardnecks, which is why they are more common in grocery stores



Softnecks do not produce scapes, hence their earlier bulb production



### PLANTING GARLIC IN MODULES

When the soil is heavy and wet, garlic can benefit from being planted out in modules in late fall, left in a cold frame, and planted out in early spring. Fill the modules up with multipurpose compost and push a clove into each individual cell, ensuring the tip is just below the surface. Place them in a cold frame, but ensure that the vents are open as garlic needs a cold period, and keep them moist.

After planting, water the bulbs during dry periods only—if overwatered, the bulbs may begin to rot. Regularly weed between the rows during the growing season as they are very susceptible to competition from weeds, and weak foliage is a sign of this. Remove any flower stems that may emerge from the bulb. Once the foliage turns yellow about midsummer, the bulbs are ready for harvesting. Unlike onion bulbs, garlic forms below the surface of the soil. Dig them up gently with a fork before the foliage dies down—otherwise it is next to impossible to know where they are in the soil—and leave them to dry in the sun for a few days.

Garlic can be stored in various ways for use during fall and winter, including in net bags or by plaiting their stems together as you would a string of onions, leaving them to hang in a cool, dry place.



**ABOVE:** Garlic scapes are the “flower stalks” of hardneck garlic plants that are often removed as they divert energy from bulb production, but can be added to dishes as they taste delicious.

The simplest and by far the most effective method is to thread a stiff wire through the base of the dry stem, adding one on top of another. They can then be hung up until needed. Avoid storing them in the kitchen as temperatures are often too warm.

“I must tell you that I have had a whole field of garlic planted for your benefit, so that when you come, we may be able to have plenty of your favorite dishes.”

Beatrice D’Este, Letter to her sister Isabella (1491)



# Swiss chard

*Beta vulgaris* subsp. *cicla* var. *flavescens*

**Common name:** Spinach beet, sea kale beet, chard, perpetual spinach, silverbeet; red-stemmed types are called rhubarb, red or ruby chard; mixed colors are known as rainbow chard

**Type:** Annual

**Climate:** Half-hardy, mild winter

**Size:** 14in (35cm)

**Origin:** Sicily

**History:** Swiss chard does not, as its name suggests, originate in Switzerland but was named by the Swiss botanist Koch in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to distinguish chard from French spinach varieties. Its actual origins lie farther south in the Mediterranean in Sicily. The ancient Greeks, and later the Romans, honored chard for its medicinal properties rather than its culinary ones.

**Cultivation:** Sow in spring in a sunny and sheltered site in fertile soil. Leaves and stems should be ready for harvesting during summer and fall. Alternatively, late summer sowings will provide harvests the following spring.

**Storage:** Like most leaf crops, they do not last long after being picked, so harvest as needed from the vegetable plot. The stems can be chopped and frozen but will be mushy when defrosted so can only be useful for flavoring spinach-type dishes.



**RIGHT:** Swiss chard is a popular leafy vegetable with edible stems and foliage, and is a useful substitute for spinach, hence its common name, spinach beet.

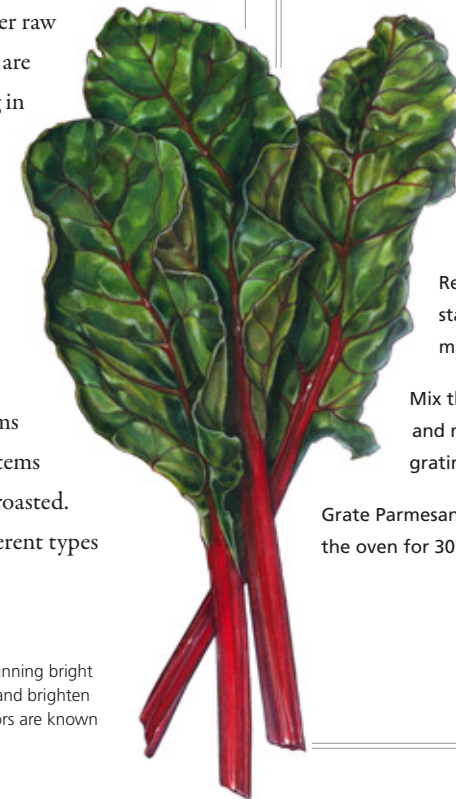
## NUTRITION

Swiss chard is an excellent source of vitamins K, A, and C, as well as a good source of magnesium, potassium, iron, and dietary fiber. It also contains phytonutrients (shown in the vibrant colors of chard) which are known to provide antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and detoxification support.

**Preparation:** Stems should be separated from the leaves. Young leaves simply need washing and can be added whole or chopped to brighten up salads. Do not soak leaves as this will result in loss of water-soluble nutrients to the water. Remove any brown or slimy parts of the leaves and any damage. The stalks should then be trimmed. If they are too fibrous then simply make incisions, as you would with celery, near the base of the stalk and peel away the fibers. Mature chard is tougher and should be typically cooked or sautéed.

Chard is a popular leaf salad crop that comes in a range of bright colors that can brighten up the duller of days on the allotment or vegetable plot. Both the stems and the leaves can be eaten and are popular either raw or steamed. The young leaves are particularly suitable for using in salads, whereas the more mature leaves and stems are steamed or sautéed to reduce their bitterness. Their flavor is reminiscent of cooked spinach. Leaves should be boiled or steamed for two or three minutes, stems a couple of minutes longer. Stems can also be stir-fried or even roasted. There are generally three different types of Swiss chard.

**RIGHT:** Chard comes in a range of stunning bright colors that look great in the garden, and brighten up many salad dishes. The mixed colors are known as rainbow chard.



## TASTING NOTES

### *Cheesy chard gratin*

This side dish is a quick and tasty recipe using chard leaves and stems. It can be garnished with colorful stems of rainbow or red-stemmed chard.

**Preparation time:** 10 minutes

**Cooking time:** 30 minutes

**Serves:** 6 people (as side dish)

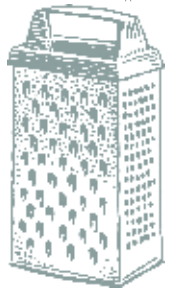
- 11oz (340g) chard
- ¼ pint (150ml) double cream
- 1 tbsp wholegrain mustard
- 5oz (140g) strong flavored cheese such as mature cheddar or Gruyère, coarsely grated
- 2 tbsp Parmesan, finely grated

Preheat a conventional oven to 400°F (200°C/ gas mark 6 / fan 180°C).

Remove the leaves from the stalks and chop the stems into matchstick-thick strips.

Mix the cream, cheddar or Gruyère, and mustard with the chard in a gratin dish.

Grate Parmesan into the dish and place in the oven for 30 minutes.





First, there are the popular brightly colored stems known as rainbow chard, which is not a single variety but a mix of colored types, and second there are the red-stemmed varieties known as ruby, red, and rhubarb chard. Finally, there are the standard green glossy-leaved chards held aloft on attractive white stems. All of them add a wonderful splash of color to the kitchen garden. Just to complicate things further, there is perpetual

**BELOW:** This historic, colorful illustration, dated pre-1400 from the *Tacuinum Sanitatis*, a medieval health handbook, depicts a woman harvesting chard from a kitchen garden.



spinach, which is very similar to Swiss chard but has slightly thinner stems and is an excellent alternative to standard spinach. All of them are grown in exactly the same way, though chard is often preferred by gardeners as, unlike true spinach, it does not run to seed at the first hint of drought.

Chard likes a warm, sunny, and sheltered site. Dig in lots of organic material in the fall before planting and sow the seeds directly into the soil in spring. Use the edge of a draw hoe to create a shallow drill about ½in deep and sow every 15½in. Rows should also be 15½in apart. Keep the plants well watered and regularly weed between them.

A late summer sowing can also be made for a spring crop, but this will need protection in cold areas with a fleece during the colder period, although in milder areas it is tough enough to survive without.

Harvest as and when required during summer and fall. Chard is a bit like large cut-and-come-again plants, whereby stems and leaves can be harvested when needed and yet they will keep producing stems. Use a sharp knife to cut the stems at the base of the plant. They are fairly fast growing and are usually ready for picking about 10 weeks after sowing, although the sweet-flavored baby leaves can be picked after 4 to 6 weeks.

## Beetroot

### *Beta vulgaris*

**Common name:** Beetroot, table beet, garden beet, red beet, golden beet, or beet

**Type:** Annual

**Climate:** Half-hardy, mild winter

**Size:** 14in (35cm)

**Origin:** Mediterranean

**History:** The beetroot evolved from wild sea beet, which is native along the coastlines from India to Britain. This would explain why at first it was only the leaves that were used for cooking purposes. Generally used for medicinal rather than culinary purposes, it helped aid digestion and was used to cure ailments of the blood. Around 800 BC beetroot was mentioned in an Assyrian text as growing in the Hanging Gardens of Babylon and was even presented to the sun god Apollo at his temple in Delphi. The beetroot also began to appear in Roman recipes, being cooked with honey and wine, but it was not until the 18<sup>th</sup> century that the beet actually became widely used in central and eastern Europe, where most of the recipes used today come from.

**Cultivation:** Sow beetroot from early spring and harvest during summer and fall. It prefers fertile, well-drained soil. Sow every two or three weeks if you want to harvest a continual supply of mini beets for their tender, succulent flavor.



**ABOVE:** Beetroot has a rich and historic horticultural past and is even thought to have been one of the vegetables growing in the legendary Hanging Gardens of Babylon.

**Storage:** Beetroot can be left in the ground until needed, except in very cold areas where it should be lifted and placed in trays of moist sand. Small beetroots can be pickled in jars of malt vinegar after boiling and peeling them.

**Preparation:** Twist off the stalks about an inch above the roots and wash the beetroot. Take care not to pierce the skin or juices will bleed into your cooking water. Beetroot can be boiled in salted water until soft, which can take up to 1½ hours for a large beetroot, or alternatively baked in the oven at 355°F for 2–3 hours. It can be peeled and sliced and served hot in melted butter or cold in salads. If adding to salads, it is important to add it at the last minute or the juice can bleed into the other ingredients.

# Kale

## *Brassica oleracea* Acephala Group

**Common name:** Kale, borecole

**Type:** Annual or Biennial

**Climate:** Hardy, cold winter

**Size:** 14in (35cm)

**Origin:** Asia, Mediterranean

**History:** Kale has been cultivated for over 2,000 years and is a descendent of the wild cabbage, a plant thought to have been brought to Europe around 600 BC by groups of Celtic wanderers. In much of Europe it was the most widely eaten green vegetable until the Middle Ages when cabbages became more popular.

During World War Two, the cultivation of kale in the UK was encouraged by the 'Dig for Victory' campaign. The vegetable was easy to grow and so provided important nutrients to supplement those missing from a normal diet because of food rationing.

**Cultivation:** Kale should be sown directly outdoors into shallow drills. When they reach a height of 4in they can be transplanted to their final planting position, 18in apart. Leaves are ready for harvesting from fall until spring.

**Storage:** Kale is winter hardy so can remain in the ground until needed in the kitchen. Once picked, cook it within a day or two.



**ABOVE:** Kale is a member of the cabbage family grown for its healthy leaves. It makes an attractive addition to the garden during the winter months with its strong structure and texture.

Alternatively, cook it in dishes and freeze for eating later.

**Preparation:** Snap off the stalks; wash the kale thoroughly in cold salted water and drain. The leaves can be cooked whole or chopped up.

Kale leaves are enjoying something of a renaissance among chefs and gourmets, who admire the versatility of this leafy member of the cabbage family. It goes well with fish and meat, and is usually boiled or steamed but is equally good when used in stir-fries and casseroles. Some people may find the flavor slightly bitter, but when cooked well it provides a wonderful background flavor in soups and stews. Combined with cheese, onion, and eggs to make a delicious winter warming filo pastry pie.

Gardeners also appreciate this previously underrated vegetable for a number of reasons. First, it is fully winter hardy and fills a gap in the late



**ABOVE:** There are lots of different varieties of kale but they all have attractive foliage ranging from crinkly red-leaved varieties through to dark narrow-leaved types such as "Nero di Toscana."



### TASTING NOTES

#### *Kale with roasted peppers and olives*

This quick and easy kale recipe makes for a very healthy snack or side dish.

**Preparation time:** 10 minutes

**Cooking time:** 25 minutes

**Serves:** 4 people

- 2 large bunches kale
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
- 2froz (60ml) water
- 2 tsp sugar
- 1 tsp salt
- 12 Kalamata olives, pitted and chopped
- 4oz (120g) jar of roasted red peppers
- 2 tbsp aged balsamic vinegar

Cut the kale into bite-size pieces, removing any tough stems. Rinse and shake dry.

Heat the oil and brown the garlic in a pan.

Add the kale and stir-fry for 5 minutes.

Pour in the water, cover, and cook for 8–10 minutes, or until tender.

Spoon in the sugar, salt, olives, and peppers.

Cook over medium-high heat until the liquid has evaporated.

Plate up; scatter the garlic over the top and drizzle with balsamic vinegar.



winter and early spring culinary calendar when there is little else available on the plot. Second, it is more tolerant than most of the other brassica plants to poor soil and wet conditions. Kale is also valued for its fantastic-tasting and nutritionally packed leaves, and in the garden the different colors and forms can provide a beautiful tapestry of textures. In fact, they give a wonderful display when used to edge borders, which is unsurpassed by other ornamental plants in the depth of winter. Varieties such as “Red Russian” have attractive crinkly red leaves, while the dark narrow-leaved variety “Nero

**LEFT:** Kale is grown for its tasty foliage and there are many ornamental varieties to choose from. These can also be used to provide evergreen structure in herbaceous borders and flower beds.



di Toscana” (also called palm tree cabbage) provides an attractive visual depth to any vegetable bed.

Kale requires a fertile soil in full sun. Prior to sowing, the site should be thoroughly dug over and lots of organic matter added, such as garden compost or well-rotted manure. Seed should be sown in late spring either in pots or directly outside into shallow drills that are ½in deep. Rows should be 8in apart. When they reach a height of about 4in high they can be transplanted to their final planting position, at spacings of 18–24in, depending on the variety, in rows 24in apart. Keep the plants well watered during summer, and weed between the rows and around the plants each week to prevent any competition for nutrients and water from these hungry vegetable plants.

Kale is extremely hardy and the plants will remain resolutely outside in the freezing cold weather. When harvesting, it is best just to take a few leaves from each plant as required rather than stripping an entire plant at once as it may not recover. Harvest the lower leaves first, before using the leaves higher up later in the season.

#### NUTRITION

Kale is high in iron which is essential for good health, since iron is used in the formation of hemoglobin to transport oxygen to various parts of the body, cell growth, and liver function. It is also high in vitamins A, C, and K, which help to maintain a healthy body and immune system. It is also recommended for detoxing as it is filled with fiber and sulfur.

# Cabbage

## *Brassica oleracea* Capitata Group

**Common name:** Cabbage, cabbage leaf, green cabbage

**Type:** Annual

**Climate:** Hardy, average to cold winter

**Size:** 16in (40cm)

**Origin:** Europe

**History:** The word “cabbage” is an Anglicized form of the French *caboché*, meaning “head,” referring to its round bulbous shape. In addition the word *Brassica* comes from the Celtic word *bresic*, meaning “cabbage.” Cabbage has been cultivated for more than 4,000 years and domesticated for over 2,500 years. Since cabbage grows well in cool climates, yields large harvests, and stores well during winter, it soon became a major crop in northern Europe.

**Cultivation:** Cabbages require a fertile soil with plenty of added organic matter in full sun. Sow in modules or in nursery beds to transplant into its final position later. Sowing times depend on when the cabbage is to be harvested during the year.

**Storage:** Most cabbages are hardy and can remain in place until required in the kitchen. On harvest, they can be stored in a cool place for several weeks or longer, depending on type.



**ABOVE:** The illustration above is a chromolithograph of cabbage varieties taken from the *Album Benary*, illustrated by Ernst Benary, and dates from 1876. The album contains 28 color plates of different vegetable varieties, named in English, German, French, and Russian.

**Preparation:** Remove the outer leaves first and cut the cabbage in half. Cut out and discard the center stalk, then wash and cut the leaves as required. Cabbage can be shredded for using raw in salads; for cooking it can be cut into thick wedges; alternatively the center can be stuffed. Shredded red cabbage is best braised.

# SMALL SPACES

Vegetable growing is possible in the tiniest of spaces. If space is restricted, then it makes sense to only grow the vegetables that you really love and cannot buy in the store. In many ways, growing in a small space is better as it helps concentrate your efforts on the vegetables you really want to grow, it avoid gluts, and, for people who are time-poor, maintenance and management is far easier. Vegetables can be grown anywhere including roof gardens, balconies, and small courtyard gardens.

## GROWING IN SHADE

In many urban gardens, shade is a problem as there are lots of buildings casting their shadows over all or part of the garden. This can initially make it appear tricky for vegetable growing, but there are many crops that will tolerate shade. They generally tend to be the leafy crops, such as lettuces, spinach, Swiss chard, and cut-and-come-again crops, as they produce more leaf when light levels are lower. Plants that produce fruits, such as tomatoes, eggplants, squashes, and zucchinis should be avoided. The cabbage family, such as sprouts, broccoli, kohlrabi, and kale will only tolerate light shade. Most of the root family including carrots, beetroot, turnips, and potatoes require at least half a day of sun.

Rhubarb thrives in shady conditions, needs hardly any attention, and will smother out any weeds.



**ABOVE:** Rhubarb will tolerate shade, making it ideal for growing at the base of north-facing walls and fences, or in the shade of a shed or house.

## VERTICAL WALLS

Structures can be attached to walls with irrigation systems, enabling vegetable plants to be grown on vertical structures. It is important to ensure that the vegetables are either shade tolerant or are not casting shade over each other. Careful monitoring of their watering requirements is also needed.

## CONTAINERS

Vegetables can be grown in almost any container, so long as there is enough space for the roots to develop and they have a drainage hole in the bottom. Vegetables grown in containers will require much more watering and feeding than if they were grown in the ground. In warm weather they may need watering as often

**LEFT:** Vegetables can be grown in almost any type of container. Even an old gardening boot with a drainage hole is suitable.

“The possessor of an acre, or a smaller portion, may receive a real pleasure, from observing the progress of vegetation ... A very limited tract, properly attended to, will furnish ample employment for an individual.”

*Essays Moral and Literary (1778) Vicesimus Knox*

as once or twice a day and feeding once a week with a liquid fertilizer during the growing season. One of the benefits of growing in a container is that they can be moved into the shade if the heat gets too much. Containers may also benefit from being turned during the day so that all sides of the container receive the sun.

## RAISED BEDS

If your back or front garden is covered in concrete or patio slabs, then do not despair. Raised beds could be the answer. Growing vegetables in this manner is low maintenance, allows for easy weeding, and saves on all that back-bending work. Vegetables in raised beds usually have better drainage and ripen earlier as the soil within them warms up more quickly. The raised beds should be filled with the very best, loam-based compost, meaning the vegetables have the greatest possible growing conditions.

## USING RECYCLED MATERIALS

Potatoes can be grown in an old trash can or in a stack of old car tires, with more types and soil simply added to the stack as the foliage grows. They can also be grown in large builder's bags, simply unrolling the bag and topping up with more compost as they grow.

Plants such as zucchinis, pumpkins, and squashes can also be grown on the top of builder's bags filled with compost.

## PLANTS SUITABLE FOR WINDOW BOXES

A window box just outside the kitchen is ideal for growing leaves. They are easy to maintain and regular sowings can be made every few weeks to ensure there is always a plentiful supply.

Most vegetables can be grown in containers, but some are better than others for window boxes as they are more compact and require a shallow root area. Tall plants will block the view from your window.

Here are some of the best vegetables to grow in a window box:

Lettuce, radish, beetroot, arugula, mizuna, scallion, chives, spinach, carrot (such as globe types or dwarf chantenay types), watercress in damp soil, and trailing tomatoes.

**BELOW:** Pumpkins and squashes are hungry feeders and have traditionally been grown directly on compost heaps, an ideal space-saving solution.







# Pepper and chilli

## *Capsicum annuum* Longum and Grossum Groups

**Common name:** Pepper and chilli, chilli pepper, capsicum

**Type:** Annual

**Climate:** Tender, warm-temperate glasshouse

**Size:** Between 10in–3¼ft (25cm–1m)

**Origin:** South and Central America

**History:** Chilli peppers were perhaps one of the first plants to be domesticated in Central America, where there is evidence that they were consumed in 7500 BC. They were introduced to South Asia in the 1500s and have come to dominate the world spice trade. India is now the largest producer of chillies in the world.

**Cultivation:** They should be sown indoors in late winter or early spring and then grown under glass in cold areas. Growing tips should be pinched out when the plants reach about 8in to encourage a bushier plant. Outdoors they can be planted directly into fertile, free-draining soil or in grow bags or containers in a warm, sunny location in more favorable climates.

**LEFT:** Chillies require a long season for them to fully develop their spicy flavors, so seeds should be sown early on in the year under cover.

**RIGHT:** Peppers have a wonderful ornamental quality and develop into an array of different colors, including green, yellow, orange, red, and purple.

**Storage:** Peppers unfortunately go mushy if frozen, although chillies tend to fare better. Peppers will keep for a couple of weeks in the fridge. The best way to preserve chillies is to dry them in the sun on a wire mesh, such as chicken wire, or to hang them from strings and allow them to dry. Another alternative is to use them to infuse cooking oil.

**Preparation:** Chilli peppers contain oils that can burn your skin and especially your eyes, so it is important to be very careful when handling them. It is a good idea to wear gloves when preparing hot chillies and, whatever you do, do not rub your eyes. Slice chillies in half lengthwise and remove the seeds before chopping them

finely. Cut out the core from peppers and slice or dice.





## TASTING NOTES

### *Sticky chilli jam*

This chilli jam is the perfect accompaniment to cheese and crackers or can simply be spread on crusty French bread.

**Preparation time:** 10 minutes

**Cooking time:** 1 hour

**Serves:** makes 1lb (3–4 ½l) jars

- 13oz (400g) cherry tomatoes
- 9 red peppers
- 10 red chillies
- 7 garlic cloves, peeled
- 1½in (4cm / thumb length) of root ginger, peeled and chopped
- 1½lb (750g) sugar
- 8fl oz (250ml) red wine vinegar

Place the tomatoes, peppers, chillies, garlic, and ginger into a food processor and whizz until finely chopped.

In a pan, dissolve the sugar in the vinegar over a low heat.

Add the tomatoes, peppers, chillies, garlic, and ginger mix and simmer for about 40 minutes, or until the liquid has reduced and it has a thick, sticky consistency.

Once the jam is becoming sticky, cook for 10–15 mins more, stirring frequently.

Cool slightly, then transfer into sterilized jars.

Once reopened, it will keep for about 1 month in the fridge.



**ABOVE:** Peppers should be grown indoors in cooler climates. In a warm and sheltered spot they can be grown outside in full sun.

Some like them hot and spicy, others like them sweet and crunchy; whatever your taste there is a chilli or pepper for everyone. The two types are very closely related; peppers are milder and larger while chillies are usually hotter, although there are varieties that are gentler on the taste buds. The popularity of chillies has grown thanks to the increase in popularity of Indian, Thai, Chinese, and Mexican dishes over the last few decades. Mediterranean food is also often flavored with both peppers and chillies as well as the spicy paprika powder that is extracted from this plant once it has dried out. It is mainly the pith that provides the knockout fiery punch, so wash and remove the seeds if you want something milder.

Peppers and chillies require a warm, sunny position outdoors in mild areas. In cooler regions they may have to be grown in an unheated polythene tunnel, glasshouse, or conservatory.

They need a well-drained but moist soil, which should ideally be slightly acidic. Lots of organic matter should be added to the soil as this helps to retain the moisture. Most people however, do not grow these plants directly in the ground, but instead grow them in containers filled with general-purpose compost or growing bags. If using the latter, then no more than two plants should be planted per bag.

Sowing takes place indoors in pots in a heated propagator or a warm and sunny windowsill. Chillies need a longer growing season to achieve their heat so should be sown in late winter. Peppers can be sown a few weeks later. They should be transplanted into 3½in pots when they have produced their first two true leaves. Once the risk of frost is over, they should be hardened off in a cold frame for a few days before being planted out at 18in apart. When the growing tips reach about

**BELOW:** Chilli peppers were one of the first crops to be cultivated in Central America. Chillies get hotter as they mature. Peppers get sweeter the longer they stay unpicked.



## THE SCOVILLE HEAT SCALE

The Scoville heat scale measures the compound called capsaicin, which gives chillies their heat. The hotter the chilli, the higher it scores in the scale. It was developed by Wilbur Scoville in 1912. Prior to this scale, the heat of chillies was simply determined by taste.

The Guinness World Record holder for the hottest chilli is currently Smokin Ed's "Carolina Reaper," grown by The PuckerButt Pepper Company of South Carolina, which rates at an average of 1,569,300 Scoville Heat Units (SHU).

As an idea of scale, a Scotch Bonnet scores between 100,000 and 300,000; a Tabasco pepper between 30,00 and 50,000; a Hungarian wax pepper 3,500 to 8,000; a pimento between 100 and 900; and a bell pepper scores 0.

8in they should be pinched out to encourage a bushy plant, which in turn will produce a larger crop. Plants will require regular watering, although avoid overwatering chillies too close to harvest time as it can dilute the heat.

You can expect to get up to 5–10 peppers per plant, whereas chillies will produce a few dozen depending on variety and growing conditions. Fruits should be harvested when they are green to encourage the plant to produce more. They will change color if left on the plant, with peppers turning red, yellow, orange, and purple and becoming sweeter, while chillies will become hotter.

They are usually ready for harvesting outdoors from August and will continue to crop in a favorable location until the fall.



# Dahlia tuber (yam)

*Dahlia*

**Common name:** Dahlia, yam

**Type:** Tuberous perennial

**Climate:** Tender to half-hardy, cool glasshouse or mild winter

**Size:** 4ft (1.2m)

**Origin:** Mexico

**History:** In 1525 the Spaniards reported finding dahlias growing in Mexico, but the earliest known description is by Francisco Hernández, physician to the Spanish King Philip II, who was ordered to visit Mexico in 1570 to study the “natural products of that country.” They were used as a source of food by the indigenous peoples, and were both gathered in the wild and cultivated. It is believed that the Aztecs used them to treat epilepsy. The Plants were taken back to Europe by Spanish adventurers. During the 1800s the popularity of dahlias surged; thousands of ornamental varieties emerged and were documented. Dahlia tubers were used as a food crop to supplement potatoes, but after a brief time it was decided that they were better suited to decoration than food.

**Cultivation:** Plant tubers 4in deep in the soil in the spring. If growing them to harvest tubers later in the year, most of the flowerheads should be removed to allow the energy to be channeled into the

root system. Harvest the tubers in fall when the first frosts have blackened the foliage.

**Storage:** Dahlias will store over winter if kept in a cool, dark, frost-free place. Cut back the stems and place the remainder of the plant in storage in boxes of sand or compost until ready to plant out again in spring. Check them over regularly for rot and remove those affected immediately.

**Preparation:** Wash and peel the tubers, then dice. To cook, simply place in salted boiling water for about 20 minutes or until tender. They can also be roasted, baked, or fried like ordinary potatoes.

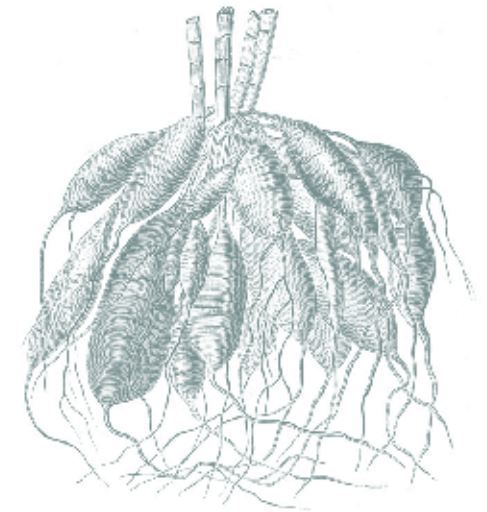
**BELOW:** Dahlias originate from South America and were introduced to Europe originally as a possible blight-resistant alternative to the humble potato.



Putting the yum into yam, dahlias can be cooked just like a potato or a sweet potato to make sumptuous dishes. Considered by most gardeners to be a solely ornamental plant suitable for bedding displays or the herbaceous border, dahlia species were originally cultivated by the Aztecs for their tubers as an edible and nutritional food source. The dahlia species was introduced to the Western world by the 18<sup>th</sup>-century botanist Anders Dahl (hence the name dahlia), who considered the possibility that it would supersede the potato as part of the staple diet. Nowadays, dahlias are more of a curiosity than an edible treat and make a fantastic talking point at the dinner table. Of course, dahlias that are bought from garden centers and seed catalogs have been bred for their flowering ability, and not for their taste. Therefore, not surprisingly, many varieties of tubers can often be small, watery, and lacking in flavor. However, some of the older heritage varieties are closer to the original South American yam and are well worth growing.

Flavors vary and are often described as being nutty and similar to a water chestnut and the texture is slightly crunchier than a standard potato. They can be baked simply by being scrubbed and placed in the oven. If they taste bland, they can be livened up with creamy and garlic sauces or sliced and made into gratins. They can be made into chips or fries or roasted.

**RIGHT:** The edible part of the dahlias are the tubers of the root system. These should be dug up in fall, when the plumper ones can be removed for cooking.



**ABOVE:** Dahlia tubers that are not to be eaten should be stored in a cool, dark, and frost-free place and replanted outside in spring once the risk of frosts is over.

If you suffer from potato blight each year in the garden, then this could be the tuber for you. Avoid eating dahlia tubers that have been bought that year from the garden center as they will probably have been chemically treated. Tubers should be planted in spring after the risk of fall frosts is over. They require a fertile soil in full sun. Add lots of organic matter prior to planting and as the plants grow they may need support with stakes to prevent them

blowing over. Tubers should be harvested in fall when the foliage starts to die back. Dig the plants up carefully with a fork and remove about one third of the firmer, plumper tubers. Cut back the foliage and stems to about 4in away from the root system. Place unused tubers upside down in sand and store them in a frost-free place over winter. Plant them out the following spring.

# Jerusalem artichoke

*Helianthus tuberosus*

**Common names:** Jerusalem artichoke, sunroot, earth apple, sunchoke

**Type:** Tuberous perennial

**Climate:** Fully hardy

**Size:** Up to 8ft (2.5m)

**Origin:** North America

**History** First cultivated by Native Americans, the French explorer Samuel de Champlain discovered plants cultivated at Cape Cod in 1605 and brought some back to France.

## MYSTERIOUS NAME

Bizarrely, the Jerusalem artichoke has nothing to do with globe artichokes. The name is attributed to the French explorer Samuel de

Champlain, who sent plant samples back to France during his travels in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, noting they had a similar flavor to globe artichokes. The vegetable also has nothing to do with Jerusalem. One theory behind its name is that it is a corrupted form of *girasole*,

the Italian name for sunflower, to which it is closely related, as used by Italian settlers in North America.



By the mid 1600s, the Jerusalem artichoke had become a very common vegetable in Europe and reached its peak of popularity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**Cultivation:** Plant tubers 2–4in deep in fertile, well-drained soil. Harvest in fall and winter as required.

**Storage:** Keep in the ground until ready to use. Avoid freezing as the texture deteriorates unless it's going to be puréed. After harvesting, store the tubers in a cool, dark, frost-free place, such as a fridge or shed during winter until ready for cooking.

**Preparation:** Par-boil the tubers before attempting to peel them as this makes the skin come off more easily. The flesh rapidly discolors when exposed to air, so immediately place them in water with a dash of lemon juice after peeling or chopping.

Closely related to sunflowers, this impressive perennial vegetable provides a dazzling display of attractive, tall yellow flowers, yet its real treat lies buried below the surface. Its knobbly, reddish-brown tuber is a gourmet delight in the kitchen. It is expensive to buy in stores and yet is probably one of the easiest vegetables to grow in the kitchen garden. If you have a tendency toward



**RIGHT:** Jerusalem artichoke enriches both the garden and the vegetable plot thanks to its striking yellow flowers, which appear from midsummer.



medicine along with other plants such as aloe vera, ajwain, okra, fennel, and nightshade (for ear infections).

Mooli is very closely related to the much smaller and more commonly grown red radish that is so popular through the summer months in salads. However, this has a different season of interest, being ready for harvesting as the first fall frosts



**LEFT:** *The Daikon and the Baby* by Helen Hyde (1903) depicts radishes being used in ancient China around 800 BC where long white daikon is a major food crop.

arrive in the garden. It gives the gourmet gardener an exciting ingredient to harvest from the vegetable patch that is not one of the stalwart winter crops such as leeks, kale, and parsnips. Mooli is far larger than the traditional radish and can be used in a wide range of cuisine. It can be eaten raw but also cooked and is perfect for adding spicy flavors to stir-fries. It can be sliced raw and used as a radish substitute in salad—alternatively, the root can be grated and used as an ingredient in rostitis. It is one of the key ingredients in Kimchi, the Korean fermented pickle, but is also often added to Indian curries and Chinese dishes and is a key ingredient for Dim Sum. The most commonly grown color of mooli is white but there are lots of other colors to try too.

Like the usual summer radishes, mooli do not like rich soil, too much fertilizer, or to have been recently manured, as this causes an excess of leaves to sprout and roots to become distorted and forked. However, due to the larger size of the root they need a much deeper soil than standard radishes, which will happily grow in just a few inches of top soil. Before planting, dig over the soil thoroughly, breaking up any hard pans just below the surface. Add some grit or sand to ensure there will be a decent root run for them. Rake the soil level and then sow the seeds at about 8in apart between each plant and between each row. Seeds should be sown in later summer because if they are sown too early they will bolt and quickly turn to seed. After sowing keep the seedlings free from weeds and keep them well watered.



#### TASTING NOTES

##### *Chinese pickled mooli*

Mooli is not as hot as the traditional radish, but its natural crunch makes it a great ingredient for pickling and using as a relish.

**Preparation time:** 5 minutes, 30 minutes soaking, 8 hours pickling

**Serves:** 2 people

- 6oz (175g) chopped mooli
- $\frac{3}{4}$  tsp salt
- 1 tbsp rice vinegar
- $\frac{1}{4}$  tsp freshly ground black pepper

In a mixing bowl, toss the mooli with salt. Cover and refrigerate for about 30 minutes.

Drain and rinse, to remove the salt.

Pat dry with a paper towel, and return to bowl.

Stir in rice vinegar and pepper. Cover and refrigerate for at least 8 hours.

## Rhubarb

### *Rheum × hybridum*

**Common name:** Rhubarb

**Type:** Perennial

**Climate:** Hardy, average winter

**Size:** 3ft (1m)

**Origin:** China

**History:** Rhubarb was first cultivated in Siberia around 2700 BC. It was the dried root of Chinese rhubarb that was highly prized for its medicinal qualities. It was not until the 13<sup>th</sup> century that Marco Polo brought the root to Europe but little is known of it in Britain until the 14<sup>th</sup> century. At this time, the price of rhubarb root commanded even more than opium.

**Cultivation:** Rhubarb can be grown from seed but is easier from crowns or from established plants bought from the garden center. It needs a rich, fertile

soil and shouldn't be harvested the first year after planting. Keep the plant well watered and mulch around its base each year, being careful not to cover up the crown as this can cause it to rot.

**Storage:** Stems will last for a few days in the fridge but it is best to keep picking them during the season as and when they are required. It can be cooked and then frozen to use in dishes later in the year.

**Preparation:** Rhubarb is always cooked for eating and can be used in pies, fools, desserts, and jams. The leaves must not be eaten as they are poisonous. Cut off the leaves, then wash in cold water and chop the stems into cubes. Just eat the red or white parts of the stems—the greener parts of the stem are much tarter.

**BELOW:** The emerging shoots of forced rhubarb are a real treat in early spring. The crowns are covered over during winter to encourage them into growth early on in the year.

#### NUTRITION

The stems of the plant contain multiple vitamins and minerals. Rhubarb is a nondairy source of calcium and promotes healthy bones and teeth. Vitamins A, C, E, and K are also present in high levels, helping the body repair and protect its immune system and develop and repair tissues.



# STORING VEGETABLES

**F**east or famine is a common problem for vegetable growers, but by careful planning it should be possible to fill the periods of famine on the plot with vegetables that have been stored during the peak harvest season.

Gluts of fresh vegetables during harvest time are a lovely problem to have on the vegetable plot, but it is not necessary to sling them on the compost heap. One obvious solution is to swap them with friends and family for crops that you may not have grown yourself. Alternatively there are various methods of storing them until ready to use later in the kitchen.

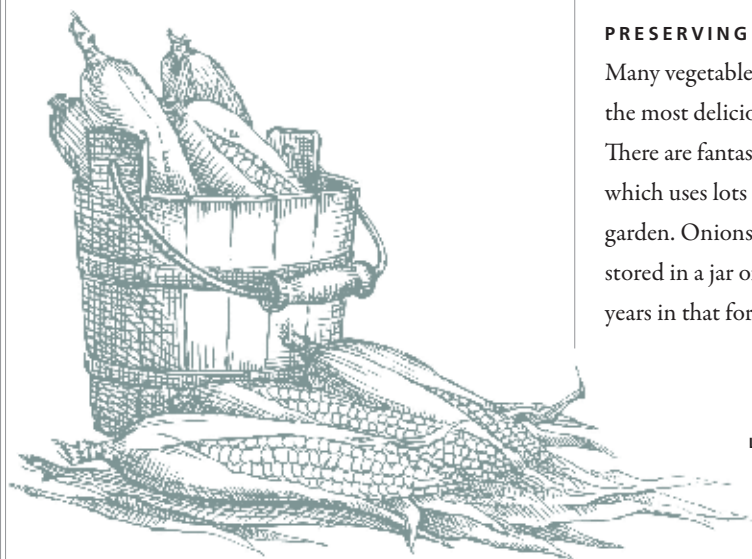
## FREEZING

Chest freezers are almost essential for vegetable gardeners these days as there are so many crops that can be frozen. Although most vegetables taste better fresh, some crops such as peas actually taste sweeter when they have been frozen as the freezing process ruptures their cells, imparting more flavor. In addition to freezing vegetables, cooked vegetable dishes can also be placed in the freezer for a delicious instant meal later in the year. Save up plastic boxes and bags so that there are plenty of containers to freeze the vegetables in, and label them clearly.

## PRESERVING

Many vegetables can be preserved and made into the most delicious chutneys and pickles (see box). There are fantastic, simple recipes such as picallilli, which uses lots of vegetable ingredients from the garden. Onions and beetroot taste delicious when stored in a jar of quality vinegar and will keep for years in that form.

**LEFT:** Most vegetables are best eaten fresh, such as corn on the cob. Sweetcorn also freezes easily, once separated from the cob.



“It is a very good idea to string onions with baler or binder twine. Then hang them in a cool airy place. In many peasant communities the tradition is to hang them against the wall under the eaves of the house.”

*The Complete Book of Self-sufficiency, John Seymour (1975)*

## DRYING

This old traditional method is ideal for preserving chillies and herbs. They can simply be left hanging on strings indoors, with plenty of air circulation, to dry out and be used later in the year in dishes.

Onions and garlic also benefit from being dried out before using. They can be plaited or tied together and left in a dry, rodent-free place for months before using. Alternatively they can be stored in a stocking and hung up on a peg in the garage or shed.



**ABOVE:** Hardneck garlic does not store for as long as softneck types. Both types can have their stems plaited together and kept in a dry, frost-free place for a few months.

## STERILIZING JARS

- First wash the jars and lids in soapy water and rinse in clean, warm water.
- Allow to drip dry, upside-down on a rack in the oven heated at 275°F (140°C / gas mark 1 / fan 120°C) for about 30 minutes.
- Remove by holding with oven gloves.
- Fill with your preserve and cover with lid while still hot.

## STORED IN THE DARK OR EVEN THE SOIL

Most vegetables will last longer if stored in a dark cool place, such as a cellar, or a building in the shade. Potatoes will keep for longer if kept in a dark cupboard in paper bags.

Some plants can be stored in the ground over winter until they are needed. This is a common method for storing carrots, often called a carrot clamp. A hole is dug in the ground; the carrots are placed in the center and are then covered over with soil. They are then dug up as and when required. Other root vegetables such as parsnips and salsify can also be stored using this method.

**BELOW:** Winter squashes, gourds, and pumpkins will store for a few months after harvesting if their skin has been cured by leaving to dry in the sunshine for a few days before harvesting.

