

Growing Vegetable Seedlings

The best way to put fresh and tasty vegetables on your table is to plant some wholesome varieties and nurture them with lots of T.L.C. Nothing beats the flavour and freshness of vegetables picked from your own garden.

At a glance

Position: Most vegetables need full sun and, perhaps, shelter from wind.

Height: Dependent on variety.

Width: Dependent on variety.

* The label should indicate size and planting distances.

Other Uses

If you have no room for a vegetable plot, grow some tomatoes, radishes, capsicum or lettuce in pots in a sunny position. They will look good as well as being useful. Try some mixed lettuce in a window-box or grow cherry tomatoes in a hanging basket.

Selection

Vegetable seedlings come in varying forms. Most are available in punnets. Some come singly in pots. Your Garden Centre can advise on the most suitable varieties for your needs but remember to consider your family's particular favourites!

When to plant

Variations in planting time can occur depending on the climate in your area. Ask your Garden Centre staff for further local advice.

Where to plant

An open, sunny site is a must – at least four to five hours direct sunlight each day. A level site is also best. Cold winds slow down growth and dry winds evaporate enormous amounts of moisture from the soil and plants so position your bed accordingly. Keep clear of shade from nearby trees and of competing root systems.

Soil Preparation

Turn over your soil with a spade, digging down at least to the depth of the spade head. Break up any lumps as you go. Add some **Planting Compost** and turn the soil to mix it in thoroughly.

Drainage of the vegetable area is very important. It is a good idea to heap up the soil a little to create a raised bed. It's easy to do this while turning the bed over with your spade. You can build a timber frame around the bed to hold your soil in place if you are really keen. Raising the bed will help ensure the roots of your plants do not become waterlogged.

For container growing, use the best possible potting mix. It will provide the correct drainage as well as optimum water retention. Garden soil in pots is unsuitable for vegetables.

Having raised the garden bed, smooth the surface with a rake. You can use the rake handle to make straight rows if you wish. Pots should be filled with potting mix and the surface smoothed out.

Planting

Water the seedlings thoroughly a few hours before planting. The garden bed can also be watered. Mark out the positions for each seedling. Carefully remove seedlings from the punnet and separate only as you plant them. Keep as much soil around the tiny roots as possible. Dig a hole slightly larger than the root ball and set the seedling in place at the same level or slightly deeper than it was in the punnet. Carefully firm the soil around the roots. Gently water the plant in. A little **Plant Starter** added to the watering can will help them establish. Mulch around the plants with some compost or old animal manure.

In hot weather, plant in the cool of the evening. If the weather is really hot, give your plants a little shade for a few days until they settle in. Young seedlings are very attractive to snails and slugs so add a little snail bait around them.

Watering

After planting, seedlings should be watered frequently until established and the new growth has started. Sprinklers with a slow application rate and fine droplets are best for vegetables. We recommend a weekly watering with **Plant Starter** for the first three to four weeks to really get your plants off to a good start.

Pests and diseases

The best way to prevent pests is to grow healthy plants. They will have a better resistance to problems. To prevent the spread of pests and diseases, crops should be rotated. Snails and slugs are the main pests so use a little snail bait or Eucalyptus spray which is very safe. If you are unsure, ask the friendly Garden Centre staff.

Feeding

It is best to apply **All Purpose Plant Food** to the soil prior to planting each crop. Dig it well into the soil. Root crops will need additional feeding as they grow. Most other vegetables and fruits will benefit from a side dressing of mixed fertiliser. Leafy vegetables need liquid feeding with **Liquid Food** as well while they are growing.

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