

Growing your Ingredients

Simple garden recipes to sow, grow and harvest crops for cooking in schools

Tops Crops for Schools

Growing in schools is a great way of showing children where their food comes from, giving them the experience of picking and tasting fresh ingredients and learning about the seasonality of fruit and vegetables.

Timing of sowings

Success in school growing is all about timing – if crops are sown too late then the harvest will be in the summer holidays.

Use the **Crop Planner** to plan your sowing dates counting backwards from the time you want to harvest them. Remember the Easter and Whitsun break and plan to sow or plant out crops just before or after these holidays so watering is less of a problem.

Successful growing in your school plot or pots

Whether you have a school 'allotment' plot, or simple pots, the same growing recipe applies for successful plant growth: warmth, sunlight, shelter and fertile, well-drained soil with an adequate water supply. The site should be open, but not exposed, nor overshadowed.

Starting crops indoors

Most crops can be started in small pots or modules and then planted out in their final growing place – this can increase the success rate of crops and speed up time to harvest. With tender crops such as tomatoes it is often essential, since by the time you have waited for frosts to pass there is not enough time to sow seed outside to then grow on to harvest in time. Root crops do not transplant well however and are best sown directly.

You can use old yogurt pots, toilet rolls, home made paper pots and food packaging as pots and modules, remember to make drainage holes.

Sow seeds in modules or small pots, water well and leave to germinate in light conditions. Classroom windowsills are ok but may be too warm and dark. A cold



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frame or greenhouse with some frost protection is best. Once seedlings are large enough to plant out, acclimatise to outside temperatures ('harden off') by leaving door of greenhouse/coldframe open for 10 days. Wait until end of May to plant out tender crops such as tomatoes, courgettes and French beans.

Potatoes are started inside as early as January in cool (but frost free) light conditions. Potatoes are grown from 'seed' potatoes – these are actually potatoes rather than seeds. Small sturdy shoots appear from the surface of the potatoes and the potatoes are planted out in mid to late March (before Easter holidays). They are frost tender though, so new growth is protected by mounding up the soil around the new shoots or covering with a fleece material that keeps frost at bay.

Plots

Prepare ground in spring, by removing weeds, and digging in organic matter, raking level and covering with plastic to warm the ground. If possible create narrow beds – 1.2m wide with paths either side. Children can garden without treading on the soil and crops. Edging these beds with wood can help build up the soil level.

Pots

Large pots and containers are best. Use recycled containers can be fun but make sure there is drainage and line tyres with plastic to avoid any leaching of chemicals from the rubber. Salad crops can be grown in old mushroom trays and other fruit boxes, – lined with plastic. Polystyrene broccoli boxes are also good. Deep pots - at least 45cms deep are essential for root crops, especially potatoes and carrots. Use a loam (soil) based compost – this will retain moisture and nutrients well. Regular watering – daily in height of summer and feeding once a week will ensure healthy harvests. Set up watering monitors.

Looking after your crops

Often the sowing or planting is the easiest part of gardening– looking after the crops throughout their growing season does require some simple points to remember:

Weeding

Weeds compete for space, taking valuable light, weather and nutrients from your growing crops – especially in the first few weeks of growth. Remember to weed along the row and between the rows of seedlings in the first 4 weeks.

Pests Alert



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Slugs, pigeons and aphids are the chief enemies of young plants. Make slug traps to capture slugs, cover crops such as peas and strawberries with netting to keep pigeons off. Watch out for aphids, wash off or encourage ladybirds and other beneficial insects.

Watering

All crops need water to grow well. Water at least once a week thoroughly. Small pots and containers may need daily watering. Avoid watering leaves in day light as this can lead to leaf scorch and most water is lost through evaporation so water the soil surface or sink a container next to the plant to act as a reservoir.



Plant supports

Remember crops such as peas and climbing beans require some support to grow up. Sticks, canes and netting need to be in place early so that the young plants can grow quickly up the support system. Children enjoy building these supports using flexible willow and hazel or bamboo stick and string.

Harvest time

Remember to harvest your crops at the correct time – allowing peas to become too large in the pod will transform their flavour from sweet and crispy to woody and starchy!

Use scissors allows children to snip off pea and bean pods, salad leaves without damaging the crop.

Water root crops well before harvesting, then they are easy to pull up.

Salad Bar workshop

Salad leaves and herbs are used as garnishes and to add flavour and colour to other recipes. They are easy to grow.

Seeds can be sown in small recycled containers such as lemonade bottles cut in half or blue mushroom trays.

Seeds are sown at differing rates depending on the age at which they are to be harvested



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1. Micro greens are harvested as seedlings at about 7 to 14 days old. These are sown densely and can even be sown on paper towel or vermiculite rather than compost. Cut off seedlings with scissors. They will not re-grow.
2. Baby Leaves are harvested at about 3 - 4 weeks and are sown at a rate of 10mm apart. Cut leaves at base using scissors – new leaves will re-grow after 3 to 4 weeks for a second harvest.

Fill with compost and level. Sow seeds fairly close together and sieve over a fine layer of compost.

Remember to keep moist.

For suitable lettuce varieties to sow see the RHS Top Crop Sheets: http://apps.rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening/uploads/documents/lettuce_salad-wl_478.pdf

Pizza Garden Recipe

It is too early in February to plant out a pizza garden but you can get planning and start it after Whitsun break.

A circular design helps make the link to the Pizza this can be marked out in a bed or create a pizza garden using an old circular paddling pool. There is also a circular raised bed kit you can buy from. Or use a large circular container.

Divide circle into slices using sand or canes and sow and plant each slice with a different pizza ingredient!

Ingredients:

Onion sets, garlic gloves, (planted in February), basil and marjoram seed or plants. Bush or tumbling tomato plants either grown from seed or buy plants after Easter break. Sow wheat to demonstrate where flour comes from.

