

Vegetable Container Gardening

French Beans

French beans can be grown successfully in containers, but as they are not an indigenous European species just a little more care may be needed to get a good result. The tasty beans are picked while still small and when cooked that size they taste out of this world. I don't think British gardeners give this vegetable the praise it deserves, it still seems that runner beans are more popular with gardeners, I don't know why! French beans can be grown as a bush, which grows between twelve to twenty inches tall depending upon the variety you decide to grow. There are also climbing varieties that grow in a similar way to runner beans, these varieties grow up to seven feet tall.

Soil Preparation

The soil is best prepared in the spring mixing in well-rotted compost or leaf mold. It is essential that you don't grow crops in the same soil twice as French beans in particular are prone to disease if grown in the same place year after year.

Sowing and Planting

Seeds can be sown outdoors in May and June. Or they can be started indoors somewhat earlier, and introduced cautiously to the outside world. The seeds of beans generally are quite large - so extremely easy to plant. Seeds should be sown at a depth of two inches, four to five inches apart. French beans like most vegetables enjoy growing in a rich fertile soil. You may also decide to sow an early crop in April under cloches. Sow in the same way as you do with the main sown beans just a little earlier and with some protection from colder weathers. The beans can also be sown under glass with the young plants transplanted after the last frost.

Looking After the Plants

If a late frost is expected you must protect your French beans from this cold weather as just a touch of frost can kill beans instantly. While the plants are still small slugs may be a problem and protection may be needed. Some support will be required to, for bush varieties you can use pea sticks and string, for the larger climbing varieties you should use a network of stakes and canes. Keep the plants well watered throughout the season as water is essential to make the flowers set and the beans to grow.



BRIDPORT AND DISTRICT ALLOTMENTS SOCIETY



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Growing Vegetables in Containers

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Growing your own fresh, organic vegetables is so easy to do - and freshly harvested vegetables taste fabulous! Anyone can grow them and there is no need to have a large garden. Even if you only have a window box you can grow cut and come again salad leaves, radishes, salad onions and if you have room for a hanging basket then tumbling tomatoes to go with your salad!

If you are growing vegetables on your patio, then any container or pot will do, as long as it is at least 25cms (10 inches) in diameter and approximately 12 inches deep. Plastic pots are better than terracotta as the compost doesn't dry out as fast, however, black ones can heat-up in the Sun and scorch the roots. It is important that all pots and containers have drainage holes.

There is no need to buy new pots - recycle where you can. Potatoes can be grown in buckets; simply plant one seed potato per bucket. You will tip out a great harvest of lovely, clean potatoes!

Fill your containers with a good sterile

compost which can be mixed with top soil, to aid water retention, but not garden soil - as this can contain diseases. Putting a good layer of well rotted manure in the bottom of the containers not only acts as an organic fertilizer but also helps with water retention. If you have really deep containers you can place a thick layer of polystyrene in the bottom first. This will mean that you don't use as much compost filling the containers up. Put copper tape around the top of the pots to stop slugs and snails (it gives them an electric shock!) or use bird friendly slug pellets.

Remember that container grown vegetables will need watering properly, and once every two weeks will require feeding with a good organic general purpose fertilizer. Try to give them a sunny spot with a south or south west facing position.

The list of vegetables that you can successfully grow in containers is endless. To grow tomatoes in hanging baskets, one plant per basket, try *Tumbling Tom* or *Balconi Yellow*. Grow standard tomato plants in pots or grow bags - *Bloody Butcher* is an excellent tasting, heirloom tomato. One plant per pot or two plants in a grow bag with a cane stick for support. Dwarf runner beans, *Hestia*; dwarf French beans,

Purple Teepee and *Kenyan Safari* are great in pots and need no support. You could grow a climbing French bean. *Blue Lake* is good, and use either cane sticks or an obelisk to support the plants. The more you pick the beans, the more they grow!

Courgettes and squashes can be grown and left to scramble across the patio; or try *Trombocino* courgettes and *Festival* squash which will both climb. These would look stunning growing up an obelisk. *Defender* is a good courgette variety that never fails to deliver tasty courgettes.

There are carrot varieties especially bred for growing in containers. *Parmex* is a round carrot and *Little Finger* is a small baby carrot. Give *Pak Choi* and beetroot a try. These are both easy to grow plus the beetroot leaves can be cooked like spinach. One thing that you mustn't forget is cut and come again salad leaves and salad onions. Buy a mixed selection of salad leaf seeds so you are guaranteed a colourful and tasty side salad.

Brassicas generally do not do well in containers - as they like deep solid ground.

Remember to water and feed the vegetables, enjoy growing them but most of all enjoy eating your own grown, organic vegetables!!