

Getting Started with Vegetable growing

I try to dig my vegetable patch over the winter when the weather permits and then whenever I can in the spring I get 3 or 4 trailer loads of stable manure. There is very little farming in the Rhondda Valley so farmyard manure is scarce. I get well-rotted manure and rotavate it into the top 6 inches of soil along with about 4 ounces of Blood, Fish & Bone per square yard. This could be anytime in early April weather permitting.



There are many things to consider when you begin growing vegetables but one of the most important is knowing your local climatic conditions. In my own case, I live about 800 ft above sea level at the top of the Rhondda Valley in south Wales. While there is a lot going for my garden. It's in the southern part of the UK and south facing but of course the height above sea level makes it a late garden compared to others no more than 20 miles from here.

Although I am now retired, I worked at a horticultural college just 18 miles from home. I came in contact with gardeners from all around the area. I got to know some vegetable growers near the south Wales coast and I compared sowing times with them. In my garden I wouldn't dream of planting seed potatoes until 25th April, in 2012 one variety (Valor) poked their heads up around 5th May and we had quite a hard frost. The stems got blackened and although they re-shot from lower down and seemed none the worse for it, when harvesting time arrived I realised that this was the poorest crop of Valor I had ever

lifted. I was just thankful that the other varieties hadn't come through when the frost hit. Meanwhile the coastal growers planted more than a month earlier than me and never got their potatoes frosted. I notice that potato blight usually arrives in my garden around the 3rd week of July but in the coastal area it will arrive at least two weeks earlier because the night temperatures near the coast is warmer and therefore blight will arrive earlier. What we can deduce here is that it's safer to plant potatoes earlier nearer the coast where its milder and at sea level. And growers should take advantage of this because potato blight is likely to strike earlier there. It's all about getting the maximum amount of growth before potato blight arrives and stops them growing.

Something I always do is to allow 2ft 6inches (45cm) between the rows so that they can have generous earthing up to prevent blight spores getting to the tubers.



In my late garden, overwintering Broad Beans is problematic. It's not just the frosts but also the rain; by all accounts I live in the wettest urban area in the UK at over 100 inches of rainfall per year. I get around this by sowing seeds in a plantpak 15 insert (that's 15 cells per standard seed tray) I sow around the end of March and the plants get to about four inches high by the end of April. The main thing here is to get them planted before they get pot bound. I like the dwarf varieties because it saves having to tie them to supports and they don't shade the crops growing next to them. I usually grow 'The Sutton', this year I'm trying 'Robin Hood' as well.



My wife Margaret particularly likes garden peas picked fresh from the garden. I like growing them because we never waste any because they freeze quite well. I usually sow some around the end of April but the sowing made in mid-May gives the biggest crop. My favourite is 'Hurst Greenshaft'. They are great, the pods are borne in pairs and there's around 9-10 peas per pod, it's a good healthy grower and not too tall at around 4ft. I open two drills with a draw hoe a foot apart and sow my seeds about an inch apart. Then I can use the Dutch hoe between the row and up both sides as soon as the peas germinate. It's important to eliminate weed seedlings before the peas produce tendrils because once they grab the weeds you've got problems. When I worked at the horticultural college we had an organic vegetable grower next to us. John Roberts and Yvonne grew about 12 acres of vegetables on their 40 acres of land. Once when I visited them I noticed a lovely compact sugar snap pea called Sugar Ann. I sow just the last four foot of each row of peas that I grow with Sugar Ann. You can't freeze it successfully, so you need to eat them fresh and because they are best eaten half full when they are tender, you'll get about 3 or 4 pickings off them before the Greenshaft are ready. They give a good crop because you eat the pods too. We like them steamed. For staking I simply push in several iron bars in the middle of the row and attach a 4ft net for support.

