

BROAD BEANS

"Broad beans are one of those hero plants that veg growers love to have on their plot. They are easy to grow and give high yields for the space they occupy making them ideal for smaller plots"

Essential Kit:

- 7cm Square Pots
- Fish, Blood & Bone Fertiliser
- Full Size Tray & Lid
- Sulphate of Potash Fertiliser
- Split Bamboo Canes



WHEN TO PLANT

Many gardeners will start sowing broad beans under cover in February and March or sow directly outside in March through to May. Some varieties are particularly hardy and can be planted, quite happily, in September and October.

The obvious advantage here is that they help to give an earlier crop than those planted in the spring. I have had great success with 'Bunyards Exhibition' when planted in the spring, and 'Super Aquadulce' as my winter sown crop.

Plants grown under glass can be planted out 6-8 weeks after sowing in the spring. The are best sown in to deep root trainers to avoid disturbing the roots when they are planted out. The important thing when planting out is to make sure you acclimatise them by hardening off first to avoid shock. Sowing batches of seeds a couple do weeks apart will help to extend the season for you and ensure a steady supply of tender young pods.

THE IDEAL LOCATION

Broad beans are happiest planted in a rich and fertile soil which can be conditioned a couple of weeks before planting. Prepare the bed by raking in a good organic fertiliser such as fish blood and bone. The prefer full sun that is sheltered from strong winds so think about their location to maximise your growing conditions.

One last point to make is that if your soil is heavy clay then start them off in pots rather than direct sowing. This gives a strong root system time to develop first and avoid the risk of rotting in waterlogged soil.

SPACING YOUR PLANTS

Sow your beans in a straight row to maximise space. The beans should be planted 5cm deep and at 20cm intervals, with multiple rows being 25cm apart.

If you are sowing into a container then three

plants in a 30 litre pot will be enough. Broad beans don't have tendrils to help them climb supports, instead their stalks grow straight up. When grown together they are quite sturdy but they may still benefit from some additional support.

A stake in each corner of the bed with some twine wrapped around it to enclose the row should be sufficient to hold everything in place.

READY TO HARVEST

Broad beans take around 15 weeks to mature when sown the spring, and around 30 weeks for autumn sown plants. The pods are ready to pick when the seeds inside have visibly swollen to reveal their bumpy outline. By picking them regularly you can keep them flowering a cropping for a good 6 weeks.

If you like your broad beans super tender then try picking the pods when they are about three inches long. At this stage of their development they can be eaten like mange tout and are fantastic in stir fry's.

Over wintered beans should be ready to crop two or three weeks ahead of those planted in the spring and so help to extend the growing season.

COMMON PROBLEMS WITH BROAD BEANS

Chocolate spot is an easy to see and looks just as its name suggests with brown spots on the tops of leaves. This fungal disease thrives in moist conditions so removing and burning leaves can help control the problem.

In severe cases then remove the affected plants to stop the spread by creating a 'fire-break' between plants. The beans will get most of the nutrients they need from the soil so avoid feeding them as encouraging extra growth can worsen the problem by restricting airflow.

Black Bean Aphid (blackfly) can be a common problem between April right through until

August. This pest can also affect other bean varieties as wells a nasturtiums and dahlias to name but a few. The are evident as they form dense colonies and on tender new plant growth. If left unchecked the plant may exhibit stunted growth and give a poor yield. Using your fingers to squash the colonies can help control the numbers.

Another effective method is to encourage aphid predators such as ladybirds and earwigs. Pyrethrum is an organic pest control derived from chrysanthemums and which treats a whole host of garden pests.

If you didn't know already mice love broad beans. Should this is a problem for you then grow them under glass first before planting out when they are less appealing to mice. Direct sowing the seed a little deeper can also deter them and maybe consider sowing some extra plants at the end of the row.

Need to know:



SOW:

January to April



PLANT:

March to April



HARVEST:

May to August



SPACING:

20cm



LOCATION:

Plant in full sun