



A Beginner's Guide to Growing Your Own Food



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Grow & Eat

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Have you always wanted to grow your own food but didn't know where to start?



Start right here!

Growing food has always been an **integral part of the human experience.**

After years of being disconnected from how our food is produced, now there is a growing need to start reclaiming the timeless art of growing our own food. But what if we don't know how or what to grow?

Fret not! This guide will give you an easy introduction to the super satisfying world of growing your own!

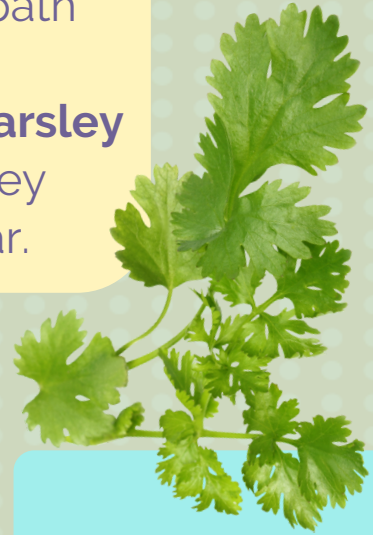
Because nothing is more satisfying than eating fresh something you just picked from your garden or a pot!



#1: Start small - Herbs!

For the novice food grower, herbs are a **great starting point** to get you on the path of growing your own food.

Some of the more familiar herbs, like **parsley and coriander, are annual**, meaning they have to be started from seed every year.



Other herbs such as **rosemary, thyme, marjoram, sage and oregano, are perennial or evergreen**, which means, that once you have them in the garden, they're there forever!

Perennial or evergreen herbs can be grown outside all year long, as they are hardy (which means they will survive the cold winter).

Herbs are small but mighty!

Topping up a store-bought salad with a bunch of herbs you grew yourself **will provide lots of vitamins and minerals** as well as a wonderfully fresh and complex flavour.



#2: Use the space you have!

One of the main obstacles faced by people who want to start growing food is the lack of space. Food growing may seem like it requires acres of land, but in reality, **you can fit a lot of plants even in small spaces**, especially when you start **using the vertical**.

How about fixing a trellis along a sunny wall, to hang pots with herbs, strawberries or tomatoes?

Or put a few canes in a big pot and **grow a beautiful climbing edible, like a pumpkin or beans** instead of ornamental flowers?

If you don't want to sacrifice the flowers, **plant nasturtiums or marigolds next to your veg**, which will help **bring in the pollinators and keep the pests at bay**.



If you have no outdoor space, think outside the box. **Do you have a sunny room or a sunny windowsill to grow some salad leaves, chillies or herbs?** If you want to go bigger, ask a friend, neighbour or relative about using some of their space to grow plants!

Or, **how about setting up a community group?** Identify a space and get in touch with the local council to see if you could use it to grow some food.



#3: Plants, plants, plants!

Procurement of plants can be another barrier to growing your own food. **Sometimes the cost can be prohibitive.**



Again, it's time to think outside the box. If you have time and patience, you can always start by **sowing seeds** which are much cheaper than nursery-grown plants and will give you a lot more for your money.

If you grow more than you need, you could exchange your surplus plants for plants you don't have, or even sell some on, especially if you've grown something rare or difficult to grow from seed.

There are lots of groups out there, with people who want to share plants, so **why don't you have a look at what is out there and join one of these groups today?**



#4: Materials and equipment



A **takeaway container** with some holes at the bottom makes a decent little seed tray. **Transparent food bags** can keep those seedlings warm as they grow. **Yoghurt tubs** make great pots for plants like chillies or parsley and you can find plastic pots for free in online communities and garden centres which recycle them.

When you are starting out, it can be daunting thinking how many different things you need to get started: **trowels, seed trays, pots, compost, plant food, supports** and so on. The list is endless!

However, a lot of these things, although nice to have, are **easily substituted with things you may have just lying round the house** or that you can find for free.



#4: Materials and equipment

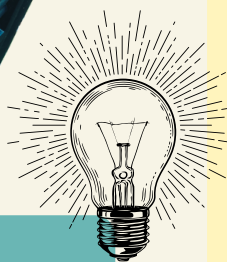
Plant food: Chop up Comfrey leaves or seaweed and place them in a bucket, covered with water and leave to stand for a month. **Free plant food!**

Equipment: Ask friends or family or community garden members if they have any spares or doubles they can pass on. Gardeners love buying tools so they often have more than one!



Compost can be harder to find for free or cheap, but again it's worth asking around to see if anyone has some compost or soil they can spare for someone just starting out.

If you or a friend have some space to set up a **compost bin**, this would be ideal, as it means that you **save tons of organic waste from going to landfill** and all this waste becomes a valuable resource for your plants.

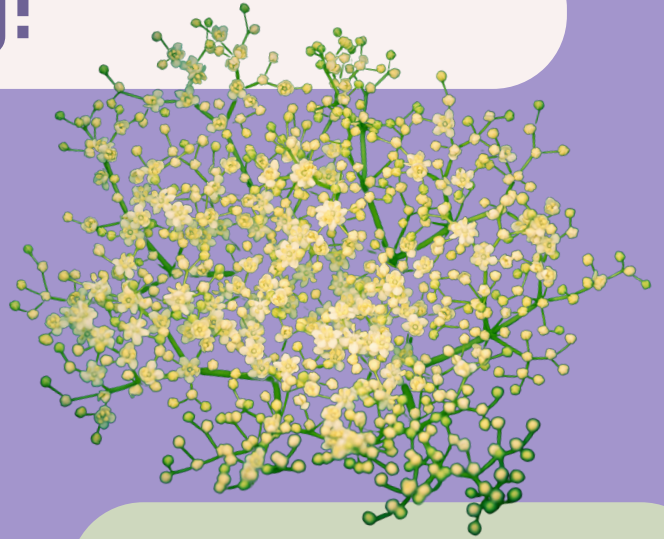


#5: Go foraging!

If you still feel that growing food is hard or not accessible to you, how about joining in the revived ancient art of foraging? Going out in search for and gathering the food that nature provides.



Of course, when it comes to taking resources from nature, there are **certain guidelines to be followed** for your own safety and to avoid the resource getting depleted.



Some very good examples of **things to forage include wild** garlic that you can use as a herb or make pesto with, **dandelion flowers** that make excellent fritters, **elderflower heads** to make syrup or elderflower champagne from, blackberries from brambles and apples or cherries from trees in public spaces that would otherwise get wasted.





Resources for further reading

- www.voda.org.uk/grow-eat
- herbsociety.org.uk/information/gardening-with-herbs/mediterranean-herbs/
- www.facebook.com/groups/415869868618476/?mibextid=zpN4Kr - **Vertical Veg North East**
Facebook group with lots of ideas and advice on growing produce vertically.
- www.facebook.com/groups/allotmentne/?mibextid=zpN4Kr - **Allotment & Garden North East**
- Local Facebook peer support group with lots of info on food growing.
- www.thespruce.com/companion-planting-with-chart-5025124
- www.voda.org.uk/support-for-groups/
- twitter.com/seedsocial_





Resources for further reading

- uk.freecycle.org/ - Great website where you can find a variety of things for free
- www.rhs.org.uk/soil-composts-mulches/composting
- www.bbcgoodfood.com/howto/guide/foraging
- www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/visiting-woods/things-to-do/foraging
- www.bbcgoodfood.com/howto/guide/elderflowers
- www.learningherbs.com/remedies-recipes/dandelion-fritters
- www.youtube.com/channel/UCeaKRrrpWiQFJJmiuon2WoQ - **Huw Richards** - YouTube channel full of practical advice for novice and experienced gardeners.
- www.gardenersworld.com/plants/your-seed-sowing-year
- www.freepermaculture.com/onlinecourse





A Beginner's Guide to Growing Your Own Food



A Grow & Eat guide on how to start growing your own food, starting with what you have. Short and practical tips to get you growing without breaking the bank.

Written by Vicky Batsioudi.



If you've been inspired by the ideas in this booklet, why don't you take a look at the "Resources" page or contact the Grow & Eat officer at **Vicky.batsioudi@voda.org.uk** or call **0191 6432626** to find out about the growing opportunities in your area.

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