



## Small space gardening: Plant your leafy greens

**The long days at home, due to the self-isolation during COVID-19, are a great excuse to get into the garden and either start a veggie patch, or tend to your unloved veggie garden.**

**Gardening is a great way to relax and gain a sense of wellbeing and peace during these difficult times, but can also provide fresh food at the same time.**

### Getting started

If you are reviving a sad and abandoned veggie patch, or indeed starting anew, the first step is to pull out all the weeds and dig over your soil. You can leave the soil in its current state, but a bit of lime can be added, or compost and blood and bone to really lift the quality of the soil. Then all you have to do is add your seeds or seedlings.

#### **Its time for leafy greens!**

March/April is a great time to plant leafy greens and brassicas. Planting foods such as spinach will be ready to eat within a couple of weeks if you keep it well watered - watering is the most important step!

If you are planting seeds, sow them haphazardly, and thin out the plants as they come up, leave the stronger ones in and you've got a long term feed.

Another tip is to mix veggies with herbs and flowers. Autumn is a great time for growing flowers in your patch. Mixing these together can create a lovely randomness of colour and texture.

To plant a mixture of leafy greens, gather together seeds of lettuce, rocket, radicchio, mustard and dill - mix all the seeds together then broadcast them over the soil and likely rake them in. Ensure to keep them moist as they start to germinate. You have an instant mixed salad!

### Suggestions for what to plant now:

- Spinach
- Beetroot
- Lettuce (leafy rather than hearted lettuce at this time of year would give a quick turnover)
- Broccoli
- Cauliflower
- Asian Greens
- The onion family – garlic, shallots, spring onions and chives

### No garden? No worries!

Alfalfa sprouts could be grown in the kitchen, as well as herbs. Use the sunnier sides of your home to get production happening, as long as you are supplementing with water and a bit of food. Large pots are a great way to grow inside as well – perhaps replace some of the sad looking indoor plants you have with herb gardens.

### Some hot tips for super keen gardeners

Edible plants generally need more food, water and sunshine than non-edibles. Here are the basics for most plant crops.

- Edible plants prefer full sun.
- Crops need soil with a high content of organic matter – not too sandy, not too heavy.
- Food plants need regular watering. A watering gauge can be helpful, but poking your index finger into the soil up to the first knuckle will let you know if it's time to water again. If it's dry, time to water!
- Some crops are hungrier than others, but all will benefit from a seasonal dose of a complete organic fertiliser and monthly liquid feeds.

### Try a no dig garden bed

A no dig garden bed is a bed built on top of an existing bed, lawn area or even hard surfaces like concrete.

Just like compost, you need a good amount of dry materials – like straw, lucerne and dried

leaves – along with thinner layers of high nutrient green, leafy weeds and manure to build up the soil.

- Sprinkle rock dust straight on top of the area you've chosen – unless it's a hard surface. This helps retain any nutrients already available.
- Cover with layers of newspaper, at least 10 pages thick to smother weeds, then water until wet through.
- Cover with a layer of grass clippings – this is full of nitrogen.
- Top that with a thick layer of dry leaves about 200mm deep or whatever you can rake up. Water in with 1 tbsp of molasses dissolved into a 9L watering can. The molasses feeds the microbes that will help to break all of the materials down.
- Add 150mm-200mm layer of lucerne.
- Sprinkle with a layer of chicken manure and water in with diluted molasses.
- Continue to add layers of Lucerne and Manure (cow or chicken) 3-4 times to reach desired height (The pile will sink by about 20% as it breaks down).
- Add a loose layer of mulching straw to 150mm.
- Top with 100mm of home-made compost.
- Mulch the bed with straw.

You can put anything organic in the layers, to break down into beautiful, productive soil but the more you mix it up, the more nutrients are available to the plants!





## Tricky Vegie sites

You can grow vegies in more spots than you think! Consider any potential site's temperature, sunlight and air circulation.

- As a general rule, plants grown for their fruit require full sun so the fruit can ripen, but plants that are harvested for their leaves, stems or roots will all do well in part shade. That means a site that only gets around three hours of direct sunlight a day can still be used to grow things like leafy greens and root vegetables like beetroot and potatoes.
- You can also use shaded vertical areas like fences – choose plants that will grow up towards the sunlight – like climbing peas. Don't over water your plants in a shaded bed – they're less likely to dry out and too much water can promote fungal problems.
- Suntraps, such as pots or areas near concrete, can also be used. Mulch surfaces heavily to preserve water and prevent the soil baking. Ensure adequate water with a drip system, water spikes or water-filled plant guards. Arrange shade cloth or plants that will shade your vegies.
- Most importantly, select plants that will cope with 'challenging' sites.

## Grid Planting

You'll be amazed at how much you can grow in a small space with this method.

Planting instructions for seeds or seedlings often suggest spacing plants about 30 to 40 centimetres apart, so in small areas there may only be enough space for 3 or 4 rows. Grid planting increases the number of plants you can fit into a finite area.

- As with any vegetable garden, prepare the soil with compost and manure. Because the plants will be spaced tightly it's important they have access to plenty of nutrients to support their growth.
- After the soil preparation, lay a piece of steel mesh grid on top of the soil. Off-cuts from concreting works are ideal. The grids come in different sizes, but 10cm squares give a good reference for spacing the plants much closer together.
- Plant one seedling into the centre of each square on the grid. If you want to grow larger vegetables like cauliflower, silverbeet or Brussels sprouts, give them a bigger grid reference, maybe three or four squares to give them space to grow.
- When finished planting, gently lift the metal away and water the seedlings in.





## If you are super keen – make a raised garden bed

To make a raised bed 2.5m long and 1.25m wide, you'll need:

- Four timber posts, 70cm high – not CCA (Copper, Chrome Arsenate, which contains arsenic)
- Two timber planks, 20cm x 5cm x 1.25m (not CCA)
- Two timber planks, 20cm x 5cm x 2.5m (not CCA)
- Drill
- Wood screws
- Geotextile fabric, optional – 3mx2m
- Tacks, if using geotextile
- Manure, two barrow loads
- Rock mineral fertiliser, a cupful
- Compost, a barrow load

You're essentially building a box, with the bottom open to allow water to drain.

1. Sink the posts into the ground just 10cm deep – the weight of the soil will hold them in place.
2. Drill pilot holes in the planks first before driving in the screws to fix the planks to the posts.
3. Half-fill the box with backyard soil. Then line the sides and base with a large piece of geotextile fabric, if wanted. Tack into place. The fabric acts as a root barrier and allows water and nutrients to run through.
4. Add bulky, aged manure – sheep, cattle or horse – compost, more manure and, finally, a rock mineral fertiliser.
5. You can make your raised bed any size – this is just a guide.



## Elevating Edibles

Your productive home garden may be lacking in space, but there is always room for more – if you think vertically!

Fences are a fantastic, and often under-utilised area of the garden that are perfect for growing produce. A large back fence can be home to a passionfruit vine and other vine edibles, but you can also think outside the box – why not try a grafted fruit tree, like almond. A grafted almond will grow to an eventual mature height of 2m with a similar width, but you can espalier the plant, meaning you can train it to grow ‘flat’ and horizontally along the fence. To do this, you must prepare the soil with compost, pelletised manure and rock minerals and install some trellis lines horizontally along the fence, using ‘off-the-shelf’ plumbing brackets and some salvaged steel pipe.

As the almond grows, gently tie the laterals (sideways growth) back to the trellis line, and prune off anything growing forwards of the trellis. Growing fruit in this way means the plant is easier to net to keep fruit protected from predators, and it’s also dead easy to harvest.

Another idea is to use salvaged steel pipe or weldmesh to create a trellis on/around your garden shed or a spare wall (fixing with plumbing brackets). You could plan dragon fruit into the prepared soil, and gently tie to the trellis. This is not a fast resulting plan, but in a couple of years the dragon fruit should produce some beautiful fruit.

In front of these trellis you can also place and fill a large pot/container with good quality potting mix, and plant a climber such as Malabar, a fast-growing perennial climbing plant with delicious, spinach-like foliage, best eaten cooked. This plant will fill this climbing frame in no time, providing some additional greens for the kitchen.

If you get busy in the garden we would love to see what you have been up to! Please email photos or videos of your gardening ventures to **beactive@ingenialifestyle.com.au** so we can share your successes with others.



## Online informational videos

### Elevating edibles – gardening australia

<https://www.abc.net.au/gardening/factsheets/elevating-edibles/12095850>

### Vertical Vegetables

<https://www.abc.net.au/gardening/factsheets/vertical-vegetables/11575208>

source – <https://www.abc.net.au/gardening/factsheets/>