

# Broad beans

---

..... a great crop for beginners - hardy with a good success rate.

Broad Beans (*Vicia Faba*) are not usually available in supermarkets so home grown pods are often the first many of us will ever try.

It's the beans that are nestled inside the velvety pods that are usually eaten, although young beans that are no thicker than a finger can be cooked in their pods.



Larger beans must be shelled before they're cooked, and can then be eaten hot or cold.

Big mature beans should be shelled and once they've boiled, the tough outer skin removed and the small beanlet inside mashed with butter (*you'd need the patience of a saint to do that very often!*). We usually dish them up with dinner and remove the beanlets ourselves.

We've always grown Broad Beans in our garden as three of us love to eat them cooked (*I usually steam them*) and our daughters like to eat them raw.

They're a very easy first veg to grow and ideal for beginners. They're also very hardy and most varieties can be sown outside from October/November or February to April.

They germinate at much lower temperatures than most other vegetables and can be sown in or around February, depending upon conditions, making them the first legume crop (*pea/bean*) of the year.

## **Planting or Sowing**

The seeds can be sown straight into the soil at about 2.5 cm (1") deep but they can be started off in modules in December, ready to plant out in February. It's also a good idea to place stakes around the perimeter of the crop which will help to prevent the stems snapping in the wind (they'll support each other).

Broad beans like well-dug, previously manured soil so are an ideal crop to follow potatoes. Once they've all been harvested, if they're disease free chop the stems off at soil level and compost, leaving the nitrogen fixing roots in the soil to benefit the brassica type crops (cabbages etc.) that might follow them.

Things to watch out for ..... if you plant broad beans in the Spring, one day you may wander into your garden





and find that the tops of them are covered in blackfly, who adore their sweet flavour.

Sometimes just spraying them hard with the hose is enough to remove them, or the tops can be pinched off the plants as soon as you notice the little black aphids. A [garlic spray](#) works wonders on them too but will have to be repeated regularly.

We try to encourage beneficial insects into our garden that will

prey on the predatory aphids, but hoverfly and ladybird larvae never seem to be around at this time of year when we need them!

Chocolate spot ..... this is a disease that's particular to broad beans and one we've suffered on every crop grown here. It is what it says ... chocolate coloured spots that appear on the leaves, and then spread to the stems, flowers and pods, potentially leading to the plant's death.

It's caused by a fungus (*Botrytis fabae*) that thrives in damp, humid air and can overwinter on the remains of previously infected plants. For this reason it's a good idea to get rid of old, infected plants rather than composting them. The good news is that it usually affects the pods last of all so whilst they remain unaffected (or infected); they're still fine to eat.

Spacing the plants well -about 25cm between each plant - will help with air circulation and may prevent or delay infection.

So why not give Broad Beans a chance? They're a great crop for grow your own newbies as their success rate is high, which all helps in raising the confidence levels.