

Beginner's Guide to Growing Fruit and Veg

By [David Domoney](#) | March 11th, 2019

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Growing your own fruit and vegetables is a fun and rewarding way to use your garden. Nothing compares to the taste of homegrown fruit plucked from the tree, or crunchy vegetables hauled from the soil.

But getting started can feel daunting. So here is my handy beginner's guide to growing your own fruit, veg and herbs. It contains everything you need to know, plus my top 10 tips for growing success!

CAN I GROW VEG IN MY SMALL GARDEN?

Short answer: Yes. Fruit, vegetables and herbs can fit into any size garden as long as you have a sunny spot. You don't need a lot of space and you can even grow crops in containers!

PLOT

Even small gardens should have space for a little veg plot. I would recommend making separate beds because they are easy to manage and keep on top of weeds. Keep the beds narrow and the rows short.

But if you're really, *really* short of space you can add vegetable and fruit plants into flower borders.

POTAGER

This is known as potager, a type of French kitchen garden where edible and productive but a great

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GROWING IN CONTAINERS

Many vegetables will happily grow in containers on the patio or balcony. Make sure to choose large containers like wooden planters and half barrels.

OPEN

Look for large open pots for leafy veg like salads, and deep pots for underground veg like carrots and potatoes. You can grow tomatoes and tender veg directly in growbags too.

Here's my top 5:

Salad

Radishes

Chillies

Beetroot

Tomatoes



Plus fruit bushes are ideal for containers! Here's my top 5:

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10 TIPS FOR GROWING SUCCESS

1. Grow fruit and vegetables that you and your family love to eat.
2. Choose an open, sunny spot.
3. Check your soil type and use containers or raised beds if needed.
4. Always prepare the soil well – remove weeds and stones and dig it over to improve the structure.
5. Improve the soil by digging in compost or leaf mould. Make your own compost!
6. Never sow too early – wait until the soil is warmed up.
7. Plant fast-growing varieties in containers for a speedy harvest.
8. Stagger your sowing by sowing a few seeds every two weeks rather than all at once for a long harvest.
9. Keep everything well-watered, especially during dry spells.
10. Practise crop rotation to prevent building up pests and diseases.

CHOOSING WHAT TO GROW

The first rule of growing your own is to grow things you will actually eat! Write a list of your favourite fruit, veg and herbs.

It's probably a long list. So cut it down to something manageable by crossing off:

- Anything that doesn't suit your soil type
- Anything that needs lots of space if you have a small plot
- Anything too tender to grow in your region
- Anything you can buy really cheaply – no sense in using valuable space to grow staples
- For example, carrots need deep, rich soil to grow well. So if you have shallow sandy soil, cross them off your list and look to surface crops like beetroot instead.

Not sure where to get started? Here's my top picks for beginners

SOWING SEEDS VS PLUG PLANTS

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rom seed. Hardy plants, should be sown directly in the under this category.

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Mark a straight line across the soil by pegging a length of string down between two wooden stakes. Use the end of a hoe to make a ridge in the soil, as deep as the seeds need to be sown.

Water in the drill to make the soil moist (seeds need this to germinate). Sow the seeds according to the packet instructions.

Use the hoe to push the soil back into the drill and gently press down the surface. Mark one end of the row before removing the string.



Follow the sowing instructions on the packet to the letter, especially the spacing information. If you put plants too close together, they will produce smaller crops.

SOWING SEEDS – TENDER

Tender plants can be damaged by frost, so these are sown indoors first and then planted out into the garden once they are established. Follow the instructions on the seed packet and wait until late spring or early summer before moving them out into the garden. Tender plants include tomatoes, aubergines and peppers.

Make sure to harden off any plants that are sown indoors! This means acclimatising them to the outside conditions before you plant them out into the garden.

Once the seedlings are ready to go into the garden, start moving the pots outside during the day and bringing them back in at night for a week or two. Then you can plant them outside.

PLUG PLANTS

Many gardeners don't want the hassle of germinating seeds and buy plug plants instead. These are very young plants that are ready to go straight into the garden. They are more expensive to buy than seeds but the hard part is done for you. Be aware that plug plants are available in less varieties than seeds too.

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plants to keep costs down.

canes, which need planting.

at any time of year but usually around late spring in time for the fruit to appear. Strawberries also fall

If you don't have room for a fruit tree, look for dwarf varieties to grow in containers. If your neighbours don't grow fruit, consider buying self-fertile fruit trees to guarantee plenty of fruit. Ask your local garden centre or nursery for their recommendations.



PREPARING THE SOIL

Good crops need good soil. Most fruit and vegetables like soil that is rich, moist and well-drained, with neutral acidity.

There are some exceptions, including blueberries which need acidic soil.

These are best grown in containers filled with ericaceous (acidic) compost.

But for the majority of crops, you simply need balanced, good quality soil.

Check out my [Expert Guide to Soil](#) for more information.



SOIL IMPROVERS

Digging in plenty of organic matter will improve the structure of your soil and add dotted manure in the autumn.

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Y few inches of the soil a
couple of weeks before planting most vegetables. Or scatter some general-purpose compost over the surface and rake it in.

CROP ROTATION

Vegetables belong to groups or 'families' of plants that are similar to each other. But this means they are susceptible to the same pests and diseases.

PESTS

If you grow the same crop families in the same spot every year, pests and diseases will build up in the soil. This is why gardeners practise [crop rotation](#). It simply means moving crops around so you grow different types of plants in each spot.

HUNGRY

It also makes sure soil doesn't get depleted. Some crops are very 'hungry' and remove large amounts of nutrients from the soil. If you plant hungry crops in the same spot again they will not grow as well. For example, brassicas like cabbage are hungry plants. So a common crop rotation technique is to plant them where you grew beans and peas the previous year.



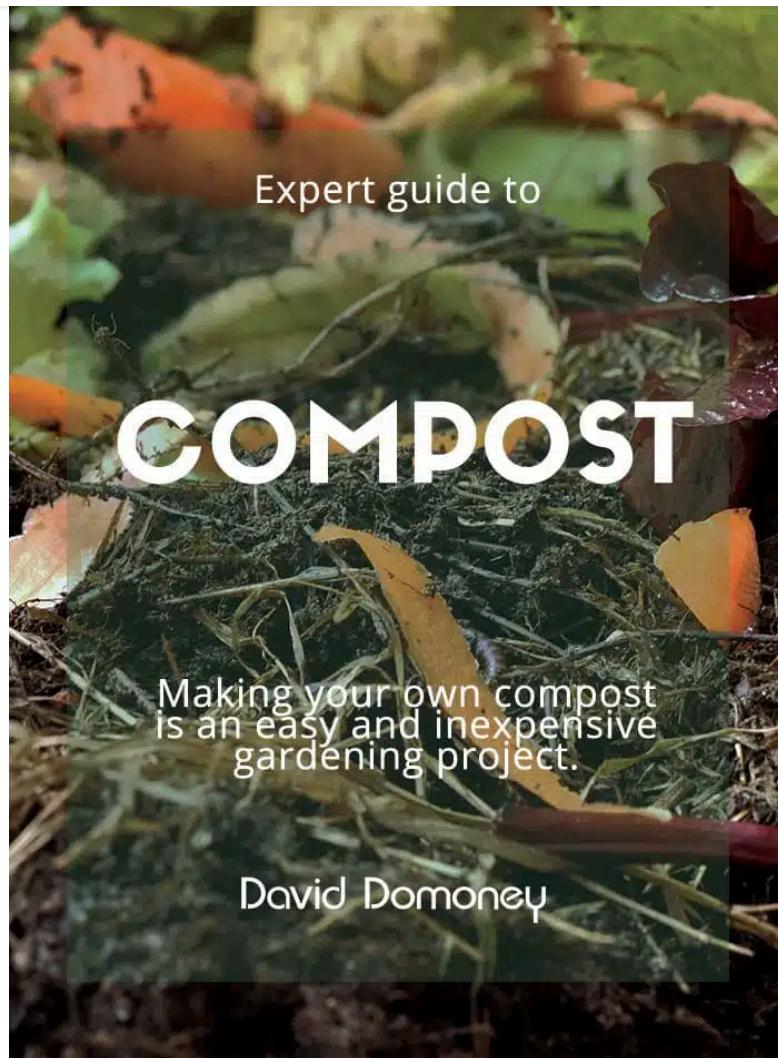
This is because those plants add nutrients like nitrogen to the soil as they grow, making it the ideal spot for growing hungry crops.

Note that crop rotation doesn't apply to perennial plants that stay in one place year after year like rhubarb and artichokes.

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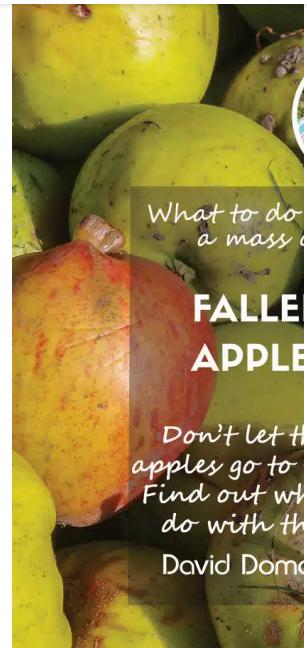
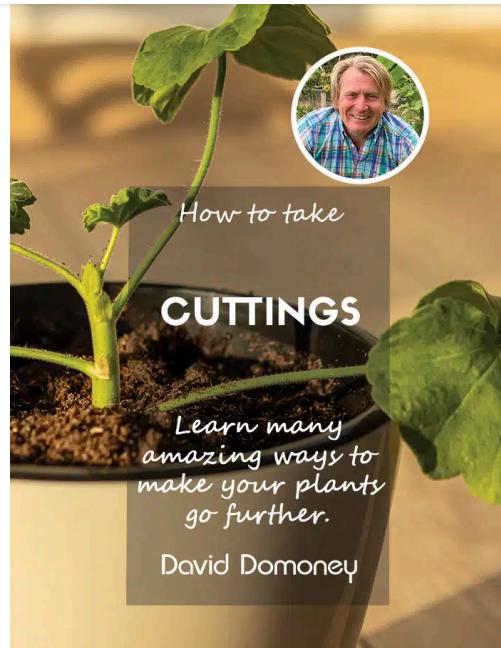
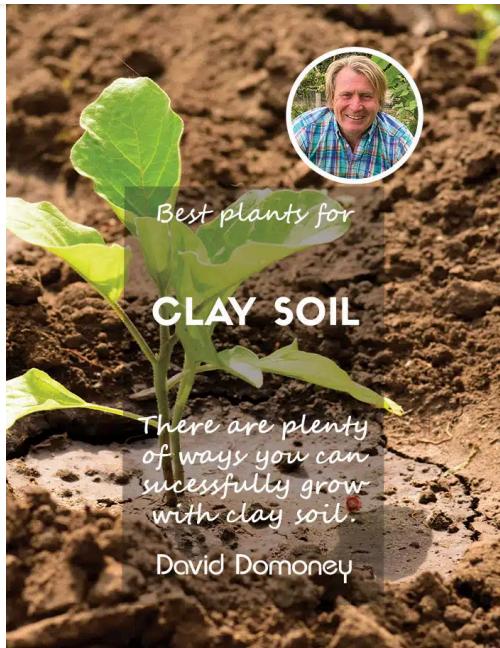
David Domoney is a Chartered Horticulturalist, Broadcaster, and Author. David has worked with a number of the UK's leading garden retailers as a plant buyer and strategic consultant. With more than 30 years experience, in horticulture, David is as

he bought his first plant at a village fete.

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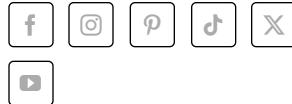
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