

Patch & Pot

Seasonal Food Growing Handbook

A month-by-month guide for small spaces, containers, and improvised growing

January – Quiet Beginnings

January feels like the year is still asleep. Outside, the soil is heavy with rain or frost, and daylight slips away almost as soon as it has arrived. But there is work you can do, even if you don't yet feel like a gardener again.

This is the month for preparation. Empty containers can be washed and stacked. Compost bags brought inside to warm a little, cold compost saps seedling energy. Seeds are sorted, and last year's notes (if you made them) remind you of what worked and what failed.

In very mild or urban spots, broad beans can be sown in deep pots and left under cloches or against a south-facing wall. Garlic, if not already planted, can still go in: a clove pressed into gritty compost in a pot at least 20 cm deep, kept somewhere cool but frost-free.

There is also the quiet work of feeding the soil. Old compost from spent pots can be tipped out, sieved, and blended with fresh mix, ready for spring sowing. Wormeries and compost bins benefit from a stir to re-balance them.

This is a month to rest as much as prepare. The growing season will demand plenty soon, now you can simply dream.

Reflection space: "What crops do I want most this year? Where will they live, balcony, yard, step, or box?"

February – Signs of Stirring

The light changes in February. Snowdrops and crocuses remind you that growth is stirring, even when the ground is still cold. Gardeners feel the same urge: fingers itch to sow, but the risk of frost is still very real.

For small-space growers, February is the month of windowsills. Chillies, aubergines, and peppers all demand a long season. Sow them now in small pots or trays indoors, using heat if you can (a propagator or even the top of a warm fridge). In Scotland and northern regions, this is essential, without the head start, fruit may never ripen before autumn closes in.

Hardy herbs such as parsley and chervil can also be started indoors, ready to pot on and move outside later. Broad beans in deep containers can go outside under fleece or cloches. Early

peas can be sown into guttering or trays, ready to slide out into larger troughs once weather allows.

This is also a planning month. Draw a simple sketch of what crops will go where. Decide which containers you will rotate, roots after leaves, beans after roots, even a balcony can have a healthy rhythm if you change things around.

In the south of England or coastal mild zones, potatoes can be chitted: left on a bright windowsill to sprout before planting in March.

Reflection space: "Which early crops do I have the light and space to start now? Which ones can wait?"

March – The First Rush of Growth

March is the true start of the season. The days grow noticeably longer, the sun has real strength, and you feel it in the soil and the air. Seed trays crowd every bright windowsill, and the sense of a new beginning is unmistakable.

This is the month for hardy crops outdoors. Carrots, beetroot, parsnips, peas, spinach, and radishes can all be sown in deep pots or troughs. But in Scotland, uplands, or exposed coasts, wait until the soil warms a little more, or sow under fleece for protection.

Indoors, tomatoes, courgettes, and cucumbers can be started in small pots. They will need potting on quickly, so don't sow more than you can look after.

Mind your compost: it should be damp but never sodden. Overwatering is the commonest mistake of March, as seedlings still grow slowly in cool weather. A spray bottle is better than a jug.

In warmer southern regions, first early potatoes can be planted in sacks or tubs, buried deep and earthed up as they sprout. In colder climates, delay until April.

Reflection space: "What was the first thing I sowed this March? How did it feel to see the first seedlings?"

April – Bursting Energy

April brings a rush of colour and a gardener's rush of urgency. Almost everything wants sowing at once, and it is tempting to sow too much. Pace yourself, better to stagger sowings than drown in seedlings you cannot plant out.

Hardy salads (lettuce, rocket, mustards) can be sown outdoors in boxes and trays. Root crops like carrots and beetroot grow well in deep tubs, while spinach and chard offer fast leaves if sown now.

Tender crops continue indoors: tomatoes, peppers, courgettes, beans. In southern regions, courgettes can be sown outside under cloches late in the month, but in northern and Scottish zones they remain safer inside.

Potatoes of all types can now be planted. First earlies will be under way; second earlies and maincrops can follow. Remember to earth them up as shoots appear.

April is also a month for vigilance. Late frosts are common, and a single cold night can undo weeks of work. Fleece, cloches, or even an old blanket are worth keeping to hand.

May – Risk and Reward

May is the turning point. Days are long, light is strong, and the risk of frost begins to fall. But “begins” is the key word, in northern regions, frost can still strike.

This is the month to harden off indoor-raised plants. Tomatoes, peppers, and aubergines need gentle acclimatisation: a few hours outdoors each day, sheltered from wind, before their final move into larger pots or growbags.

Beans, runner, French, and climbing, can be sown directly into deep containers or beds now, but keep fleece handy if a late frost threatens. Sweetcorn too can be started in modules and planted out in blocks, even in tubs, for pollination.

Herbs flourish in May. Basil can be sown outdoors in southern zones, while parsley, coriander, and dill enjoy the longer days.

In Scotland, many of these crops are still best in pots you can move or protect. The season lags weeks behind the south, and patience saves heartbreak.

Reflection space: “Which plants am I most eager to harden off? Do I have fleece or covers ready if the weather turns?”

June – Full Growth

June is the month of fullness. Every pot seems crowded with growth, every trough a small jungle. Now the challenge is to water enough, feed enough, and keep things from tangling.

Tomatoes are planted into their final tubs. Side-shooting and staking begin. Courgettes flower, and beans scramble up canes. Herbs are cut and used fresh.

Succession sowing is crucial. A new box of lettuce every 3 weeks keeps you harvesting all summer. Radishes, rocket, and spinach can be re-sown little and often.

Pests are also in full swing. Aphids gather, slugs patrol, and blight lurks in damp spells. Vigilance matters: inspect daily, remove damaged leaves, and use barriers where possible.

In southern England, aubergines and peppers can thrive outdoors in sheltered patios. In Scotland and cooler areas, they are best kept in greenhouses, polytunnels, or conservatories.

July – Abundance

July feels generous. Salads are cut daily, beans picked in handfuls, tomatoes colouring on the vine. Courgettes threaten to outpace you. The kitchen fills with fresh flavours.

But July also brings drought and heat stress. Pots dry quickly; daily watering is essential. Mulching the surface with compost or straw helps retain moisture.

This is also the time for late sowings. A final round of beans, carrots, and beetroot can still go in, timed for autumn harvest. Kale, cabbage, and chard sown now will stand into winter.

In hot southern cities, shade may be needed for delicate greens. In northern and coastal areas, cool dampness may mean more slug patrols.

Reflection space: “What have I harvested most so far this summer? What crop is overwhelming me, and how can I preserve or share it?”

August – Continuation and Care

August feels lazy, but plants keep working. Tomatoes ripen daily, beans keep coming, and courgettes sprawl. The temptation is to relax, but the end of the season is already approaching.

Succession sowing of salads continues. Late sowings of spinach and chard will provide autumn greens. Herbs like basil and coriander may bolt; cut often and sow fresh trays indoors if you want more.

Harvest onions, garlic, and early potatoes. Dry and store them carefully.

Watch for blight in damp summers. Remove affected leaves quickly and avoid watering foliage.

September – Transition

September is a month of shift. The light softens, days shorten, and harvest carries a note of urgency. Tomatoes are picked green if blight threatens, to ripen indoors. Beans and courgettes slow down.

This is the time to sow overwintering crops: spinach, chard, broad beans, and hardy lettuces. Garlic can be planted into tubs to overwinter.

In southern mild zones, sow broad beans and peas now for early spring crops. In colder climates, wait until October or even November.

Clean and tidy as you go. Pots emptied now can be refilled with fresh compost and sown straight away with salads.

October – Settling Down

October feels quieter but still busy. Hardy greens carry on. Kale, spinach, and chard stand strong, and Asian greens like mizuna thrive in cool weather.

Garlic, shallots, and onions can be planted. Broad beans too, though in Scotland and exposed areas you may prefer to wait until spring.

This is also the month to tidy. Old crops can be composted, pots washed, and supports dismantled.

Reflection space: “What do I want to carry through the winter? What should I let go of this year?”

November – Rest and Roots

November slows everything down. Growth almost halts. But roots underground, garlic, onions, broad beans, quietly begin.

Indoors, trays of salad leaves can still be sown on windowsills. They bring green life when everything outdoors is bare.

This is also the month for review. Look back at notes, think about crop choices, and sketch ideas for the year to come.

December – Reflection

December is rest. Outdoor work is little more than protection: fleece pots if snow threatens, check ties in the wind.

But indoors, life continues. Herbs on the windowsill, salad trays in boxes, and stored crops in the cupboard feed you.

This is the month to reflect. What did you grow? What tasted best? What failed, and why?

Reflection space: “What do I want more of next year? What is enough?”

Closing Notes

Food growing in small spaces is never identical year to year. Weather shifts, climate zones vary, and microclimates in courtyards or balconies make every setup unique.

Use fleece in the north, try autumn sowings in the south, and experiment. There is no single right way, only the joy of growing, tasting, and learning.



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