



INFOSHEET

GROW YOUR OWN – QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Why bother to grow your own when it is all there on the supermarket shelves for the little effort it takes to put your hand in your purse?

Growing your own fruit and vegetables IS worthwhile, not only for economic reasons, but for many other reasons as well. All you need to produce your own "good stuff" is some soil, seed and/or bushes, and a little know-how. The cost of your home grown fruit and vegetables could be a fraction of what you pay in the supermarket. More importantly is the fact that only by growing your own can you enjoy the special and unique flavour of fresh produce compared to the bought variety. Remember, when a vegetable is cut, picked or uprooted from the soil it has literally been killed and the longer it takes between supplier and shop before you buy it, the more its flavour and goodness is reduced. This applies particularly to leafy, green vegetables like lettuce, cabbage, broccoli and even rhubarb.

When you grow your own you also have control over how things are grown and whether they are treated with sprays and chemicals or not. You are free to grow whichever varieties of a particular vegetable e.g. potatoes, you like rather than be dictated to by the supermarket. Most commercially grown vegetables and fruit are chosen for their ability to produce high yields and their grading and packing qualities, rather than their flavour. In order to produce this optimum yield they can also be subjected to a whole array of sprays and chemicals which have been shown to leave "residues" which are not always removed by washing or cooking.

In these days of globalisation, your fruit and vegetables may come from a country half-way round the world using cheap, often exploited, labour and incur thousands of "food miles" (the distance it travels to get to your table). Growing your own, or buying locally grown produce, helps maintain a sustainable environment. If all you have ever eaten are supermarket bought tomatoes you will accept that their flavour is adequate, but once you start to grow your own you soon realise that that "flavour" is no longer acceptable and you can taste the crop as it should be.

It has been shown in scientific studies that people who garden on a regular basis suffer less stress and other related illnesses.

My garden is not big enough and anyway, I prefer flowers!

There is no reason why space given over to the growing of fruit and vegetables cannot be decorative as well as productive – you can now grow cauliflowers of different colours (white, green, purple etc), purple, green, yellow or striped beans, and the leaves of many vegetable crops are very ornamental with the flowers of crops such as peas, beans and even potatoes giving displays of varied colours. Vegetables and fruit can also be grown alongside flowers and shrubs and sometimes this can have the added bonus of prevention of pests and diseases – companion planting. Pergolas can provide support not only for clematis, roses etc, but also for peas and climbing beans, and fruit trees and bushes can provide season-long interest with blossom in spring, fruit in summer and wonderful autumn colour.

You don't need a large area to grow a selection of vegetables. Radish, carrots and beetroot do not take up much room and strawberries can be grown in "towers", tubs etc. Planting potatoes is a useful way of breaking up previously uncultivated ground and they can also be grown successfully in tubs or plastic sacks, none of which take up much room, they provide you with the most wonderfully tasting "new" potatoes at a time when they are at a premium price in the shops. Most other vegetables, herbs and fruit can be successfully grown in flower pots, recycled fish boxes – plastic or polystyrene, or any other suitable, weather-resistant container with sufficient depth.

You don't need a large, expensive, hi-tec structure to grow the less hardy varieties like tomatoes as these can be successfully grown on a windowsill, sheltered balcony or patio. There are also a number of inexpensive, small "tiered" structures with polythene covers available which lend themselves to this type of production if so desired.

How do I get started and where can I learn about growing?

Your local library is a good place to start as they will have copies of a wide range of books on gardening and vegetable/fruit growing. There are also a number of TV programmes, video/DVDs available where you can actually see how things are done and gardening magazines provide a wide and regular information base. If you know someone who is a keen gardener and grows their own produce, speak to them – most growers love to share their expertise and experiences. Some areas also have evening classes for beginners – usually held over the winter months. Lochaber Larder project also run a number of workshops with supporting fact sheets available separately.

Growing your own produce can provide you with a pleasant area to look at, and can, with a reasonable amount of attention, keep your plates filled from one year's end to the next. If you have a larger area of ground, it could also provide you with the opportunity for a "second" income or the basis for a new business enterprise.