

## THE FRUITCAGE

Most top fruit pruning will have been done in the previous autumn or winter. Plums and cherries should, however, be pruned when the sap has risen, ie in the early summer. Another important task just now is to mulch the soil round trees and fruit bushes. The soil will have been left bare over winter as a pest control technique. A mulch is now spread to conserve moisture and eliminate weeds. A permeable membrane can be pegged down. Alternatively you may use a biodegradable mulch like straw or grass clippings, this needs to be 10cm deep to exclude light, but a thinner mulch can be used if cardboard or a thick layer of newspaper is first spread on the soil. The strawberry bed should also be weeded now and any runners and dead or dying leaves removed. Straw is then placed round them when buds form. A cloche over some of the strawberries will ensure an earlier crop.



To see examples of all these techniques and a wide range of organically grown plants visit

### the ASK Organic Garden

a half acre garden within Woodside Walled Garden, situated 4 miles north of Jedburgh, east of the A68 on the B6400.

The ASK Organic Garden is open 7 days a week March to October 10am to 5pm. Someone from ASK is usually on hand to answer questions on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays between 11am and 4pm.

Produced for the ASK Organic Garden Club by ASK Organic, Wolfhopelee, Bonchester Bridge, Hawick. TD9 9TP. Telephone 01450 860291 and 860778. email [da@askorganic.co.uk](mailto:da@askorganic.co.uk).

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# HOME GROWN:

*the organic way*



## Getting Started

Spring is the most exciting time of year in the garden: all the plants are rushing to grow and our green fingers are itching to get planting. Because the weather can still be unpredictable we have to curb our enthusiasm a little and carefully plan to ensure a succession of delicious fruit and veg for the coming year.



### **WHICH VARIETIES TO START ON?**

At the beginning of the season, choose only the hardier vegetables like peas, broad beans, beetroot, Swiss chard and white turnips that will not be damaged if the nights are still cold. Also sow in heat those tender crops that take a long time to grow like tomatoes, celery and celeriac; peppers, both sweet and hot take so long that they are best started in mid-February.

Salad crops are best sown successionaly, that is you sow a little every month from March to August so that you always have some fresh leaves to pick. The fastest maturing are the cut and come again varieties and they need to be sown directly into the ground or a bed in a polytunnel. They grow quickly enough for you to be able to start using them 3-4 weeks after sowing. Salad rocket must also be sown directly into the ground, it will be pickable within 3 weeks in warm weather.

Lettuces, chicories and endives that you want to heart up, that is form a large, solid middle and where you cut the whole plant, take longer to mature. They will take anything from 6 weeks to 3 months to be ready to use depending on the weather and the variety. These are best sown in seed trays and protected, as baby lettuces are a magnet for slugs.

### **SOWING SEED**

Wherever possible, seeds should be grown on into healthy plants before going into the garden. The young plants will then be able to withstand pests and diseases more easily and there will be no gaps in rows. The exceptions are roots, like carrots, beetroot and parsnip that should be sown directly into the ground as they grow forked roots if they are transplanted.

Seed should be sown very thinly to avoid the seedlings growing leggy or spindly because of overcrowding. So choose a seed tray large enough for the amount of seed you want to sow, they come in different sizes. Fill the tray with compost nearly to the top, tamp down gently and water. Sprinkle the seed thinly on the compost or space bigger seeds individually and cover with more compost, just enough to cover the seed. It pays to cover the tray with a clear lid and, ideally, to put the tray in a propagator which will maintain an even heat. Keep the surface of the compost damp but not soggy and don't let the seed tray sit in a pool of water, this will make the seeds rot.

### **COMPOST TO USE.**

You can either buy suitable compost or make your own. At the seedling stage plants need very little nutrient since they are still using that stored in the seed, so a mix of leafmould or coir with garden loam, 1:1, will be fine. [Remember peat should not be used in an organic garden.] This compost mix will provide enough feed until the first true leaves start to grow and this is the time to pot on. Your compost mix should now be: loam: garden compost: coir or leafmould, 1:2:1. This is a good general purpose mix, a Rotasieve will help to combine the different ingredients and sieve out any lumps.

### **PEAS AND BROAD BEANS.**

First sowings are best started now. For broad beans use an old dinner plate, dampen a piece of kitchen towel, scatter beans on the towel and cover with another damp towel. Keep the paper moist and store in a warmish part of the house. Peas need better drainage to prevent them from rotting, so a bean sprouter is ideal for them. Otherwise sow directly into 5cm pots, root trainers or plastic guttering. Peas will have started to germinate in a bean sprouter within a couple of days; broad beans will take around 10 days. If you first germinate the seed, plant immediately the roots appear in medium sized root trainers or 5cm pots, individual beans or 3 or 4 peas per container. Otherwise sow directly into the container.

Some people plant peas in old plastic guttering and, when ready, slip them into the ground but this is a difficult operation to perform neatly as they won't slide out easily. To be successful, the guttering needs to be no longer than about 60cm and the little plants should be left in until the roots are well developed, so binding the soil together more effectively.

### **SOWING IN THE OPEN**

Once your soil feels warm to the touch, it is time to sow those crops which don't like to be transplanted. Dig and rake the soil where you want to sow Swiss chard, beetroot or little white turnips so it is free of lumps and of course weeds; make a tiny trench about 2cm deep and thinly sprinkle the seed along it then cover with as much soil as the size of the seed. Carrots and parsnips need even warmer soil and you need to remove stones and lumpy bits so that their little roots are not obstructed. Parsnips are very slow to germinate so do not worry if you don't see any sign of them for 2-3 weeks.