

Grow to Eat

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Marrows and Courgettes

Marrows and courgettes provide considerable yields from modest areas. They can be used as second vegetables, for their own dishes or even used in chutney, jam and pickles.

With courgettes many will mature together so this make them ideal for freezing for later use.

How Many to Grow?

This is your choice but normally a sufficient crop would be around 2 marrow plants and 4 - 6 courgette plants.

Planting Space

Bush marrow and courgette plants occupy less space than trailing plants and can be grown approx 2 ft apart where the trailing plants will need to be planted approx 3-4 ft apart.

Requirements

Both marrow and courgettes require sunny positions and deep rich soil (in the UK they can even be planted in compost heaps, compost heaps not recommended for Cyprus, due to fire and snakes). When preparing the bed prior to planting out, remove a good spade of soil and work in a bucketful of manure or compost into the bottom of the whole then return the soil taken out. In Cyprus it is advisable to dig a reservoir around each planting space to help with the retention of water and also ensure that water goes directly to the plant.

Sowing and planting out

In the UK the best time for sowing would be early May of course this will be earlier for anyone planting in Cyprus. I will be experimenting this year and sowing in March, as the rule of thumb I have been given to follow is that planting in Cyprus is 3 months in advance to that of the UK.

Sow into peat pots with seed compost, 2 seeds per pot. When the plants have produced their seed leaves remove the weakest plant, in the UK this is the time to grow on in a cold frame or on a shaded window-sill. Plant out when the plants are stronger and more developed for the UK usually around end May. Water thoroughly when planting out and throughout the growing season and dry spells. If preferred marrow seeds can be planted directly into their growing spaces mid May, still plant two seeds per space and remove the weaker plant just the same.

Marrows and courgettes produce both male and female flowers. Fertilisation is generally carried out by insects, which carry the pollen between the male and female flowers. In dull or cold weather when not many insects are about it is a good time to pollinate the flowers by hand to make sure that the fruits form.

Best time to Harvest

Marrows are best harvested when the fruits are 9-12 in long whilst courgettes are ideally harvested when the fruits are 4 in long.

Tomatoes

In the UK tomatoes ripen in August and September but I'm guessing and will experiment this year that in Cyprus we could probably get away with growing 3 crops (if planting time was timed correctly). I will try sowing Feb, April and July for a later crop.

At the end of the season any green tomatoes can be stored and ripened indoors or used in chutney.

Tomatoes grow successfully in pots and containers and I definitely will grow some of my crop on the patio (if only to make it easy for picking when needed in the kitchen).

For plants grown in the open, bush varieties need no de-shooting or stacking and will produce large numbers of small fruits.

Outdoor tomatoes grow at their best in sunny sheltered positions. The soil needs to be rich and moisture holding. In the winter before planting dig into the soil well rooted compost or manure.

It is a good idea if before planting you rake in a dressing of general fertiliser.

How many to plant

Grown outdoors a plant with four trusses of fruit will produce approx 4lb - 2 kg or more of tomatoes.

Growing the Plants

You can of course buy plants from garden nurseries but it is always cheaper to raise the plants from seed.

In the UK if you intend to plant outside, sow the seeds in early April. Sow seeds about 1 in apart in a seed tray filled with seed compost. Sift compost at a depth of 1/4 over the top and water in with fine rose.

Another way to sow and I find this the best way is to sow seeds on top of the soil, cover to keep out the light and after around 3 days start checking for growth. Once the roots have buried themselves and the plant has started to show, remove the cover and continue as normal. NOTE. If you intend to sow this way, the plants, if left covered to long, will become very leggy very very quickly so at the 1st signs that the plants are near ready to uncover, you will need to keep and constant check on them, at least twice a day if not more.

When the seed leaves are fully developed, the seedlings are then ready for planting into 3 in pots filled with potting compost. They will happily remain in these pots until planting time.

Plant outside when the danger of frost has passed (aren't we the lucky ones) this is usually the last week of May in the South of England and a week or two later in the North.

Set plants approx 18 in apart allowing them 2 1/2 ft between rows. Insert a 5 in stack or bamboo for each plant. Tie the plants to the canes throughout the growing period. If not growing bush varieties remove side shoots regularly from leaf axils. Water plants frequently in dry weather and apply liquid tomato fertiliser weekly once the fruits start to develop. Pinch out the top of the plants when 4 trusses have formed, leaving 2 leaves above the top truss.

Growing tomatoes in Pots

A sunny balcony or patio is ideal to grow tomatoes. Grown each plant in a 10in pot. Leave approx 4in space between the compost and the top of the pot to allow room to add a top-dressing of compost when the fruits appear.

Support, remove shoots and feed exactly the same as you would plants grown in the soil. Do remember they will require more water and possibly twice daily during hot weather. Feed double the amount of liquid feed recommended for plants grown in the open.

Aubergines

Also known as the egg plant native of tropical Asia and for this reason, if growing in the UK it is best to grow in a green house, though you may have success growing outdoors if planted against south facing wall during long hot summers. A sunny patio will also provide reasonable conditions, you can either plant in pots or in compost bags.

If planting in a greenhouse plant in 7in pots or in the border. Aubergines require well drained soil, liberally dressed with manure.

How many should you grow?

In a greenhouse you will need to place pots approx 18in apart, the same space is required for plants planted outside in a greenhouse you may expect around 12 fruits per plant whilst planted outdoors in the UK you can only expect upto 4 fruits.

How to Grow

In the UK sow aubergines in seed compost in February, the temp required is 18C 64F so sow in a propagator or close to heat source in greenhouse.

When large enough to handle prick out and plant in 3in pots and grow on in temp around 16C 61F. If you are growing these plants indoors transfer to 7 in pots when they are 4-6in high. Harden off outdoor plants during May and plant out end May. For growing on a patio plant in 7in pots.

Pinching Out

When plants are about 9in high, pinch out their tops to encourage them to bush out.

For Indoor plants allow up to 3 fruits to form on each of the lateral branches. For outdoors plants pinch out the tips of each branch once a fruit has formed, leaving 3 leaves beyond the fruit.

Whether indoor or outdoor, remove side shoots that form on laterals.

Water generously and give weekly feed of liquid manure when fruits are visible.

To keep down red spider mite spray plants regularly with water.

Globe Artichokes

Globe artichokes require an open sunny position where the soil is rich and well drained. Each mature artichoke can yield up to six heads. Each plant needs to be planted 3ft apart in each direction.

Artichokes will continue to grow and flower for upto 6 years but in the UK apart from the south they may not survive over winter. After the 3rd year you can expect the heads to become smaller and tougher so it is a good idea to replace a few plants each year.

Buy plants or suckers (for the UK buy and plant these during April). New plants will produce some heads by August or September though it is better to encourage growth in the 1st year by removing buds as soon as they appear. In the second and 3rd year allow each plant to develop only four to six stems. Leave the flower on the main stem and several others at the end of lateral shoots. Nip of any extra buds on side shoots to ensure a good crop.

Raise new plants

In April or November select strong shoots about 9in high on plants that are at least 1 year old. Cut vertically alongside each shoot with a spade or sharp knife retaining part of the rootstock.

Discard the rest of the plant after removing shoots. Shoots removed in April can be planted straight out.

Harvesting

Start with the King head 1st, pick heads whilst they are still green and tightly wrapped. Use secateurs to cut off the heads, then cut back each stem to about half its original length.