



Crunch time

Growing your own fruit and veg can lower your food bills – and you don't need to be a pro or have a huge plot to get great results

There are many good reasons for growing your own fruit and veg – personal satisfaction, involving your family, reducing food miles, gentle exercise, de-stressing and, as the credit crunch bites, saving on food bills.

We found that cucumbers cost around £1.10 each in the supermarket, but could be grown at home for just 5p each. Similarly, you'd pay around £1.47 for a bag of salad leaves in a supermarket, but you could grow your own for around £1.

If you don't have much space, most of our suggestions will grow well in a large pot filled with the contents of a growing bag (preferably peat-free) in full sun or partial shade. Growing from seed is the cheapest way, but young plants are readily available in garden centres and DIY stores in spring.

If you haven't found your favourite greens here, go to www.which.co.uk/gardening for advice on how to grow many more.



Fruit and veg for less



What to grow, how to grow it – and how much you could save



Cucumbers

Buy a plant in early May, and give it at least one square metre of garden. Train the plant up a wigwam of canes or let it sprawl. Keep the soil moist, and watch out for slugs. The fruits grow very quickly.

Good varieties: 'Marketmore'; £1.50 a plant (expected yield: 30-40 fruits per plant)

Cost: 5p each (homegrown); £1.10 each (supermarket)

Saving: £1.05 a cucumber

Tomatoes

Use one plant per 10-litre pot filled with growing bag compost, and tie the main shoot to a tall cane. Nip out the

side-shoots, but leave the flower shoots. Water frequently and use a tomato fertiliser.

Good varieties: 'Gardener's Delight'; £1.50 a plant (expected yield: 3kg a plant)



Cost: 50p a kg (homegrown); £3.56 a kg (supermarket)

Saving: £3.06 a kg

Courgettes

Fork in a bucket-full of soil improver before you plant in late May to early June, giving each plant roughly one square metre of sunny garden. Water weekly in dry periods and pick the courgettes regularly when they reach 10-15cm long.

Good varieties: 'Defender',



'Endurance'; £1.50 (expected yield: 30 courgettes a plant from June to October)

Cost: 5p each (homegrown); 43p each (supermarket)

Saving: 38p a courgette

Mangetout

Sow seeds in furrows 2cm deep, in double rows 15cm apart, with room either side for picking. Push twigs along the middle for the plants to cling to. The plants need little attention, but if it's dry when pods start to appear a good soak will boost



your crop. Pick the flat pods when they reach 5-7cm long, before 'strings' start to develop.

Good varieties: 'Delikata', 'Oregon Sugar Pod'; £2.50 for a packet of seed (expected yield: 3kg a square metre)

Cost: 83p a kg (homegrown); £6.62 a kg (supermarket)

Saving: £5.79 a kg

Baby carrots

Choose a quick-growing variety and sow short rows several times from late spring to late summer. Create shallow furrows 15-30cm apart and scatter seed thinly (one every 1-2cm). Don't thin out the seedlings – they'll push apart as they grow. When



THE RIGHT TOOLS FOR THE JOB

Which? Gardening Best Buys for growing your own**Spade and fork**

Choose a spade and fork to suit your height. Stainless steel tools are easier to keep clean and cope better with sticky soil. The Best Buy Bentley Traditional Stainless Steel Digging Spade (£25) is suitable for most heights. Bentley also does a smaller ladies' range and has a matching fork (£25).

Trowel

A good trowel is essential for vegetable plants raised in pots. Look for a strong joint between head and handle. *Which? Gardening* hasn't got a current Best Buy, but the

Bentley Stainless Steel Hand Trowel (£8) looks robust.

Hoe

Keep weeds down between fruit and veg by hoeing on dry days. The Wilkinson Sword Swoe has been a consistent Best Buy. It has three edges for pushing, pulling or working among plants. The stainless steel version costs around £28.

Rake

You'll need a rake for preparing a seedbed. Best Buys include the Wilkinson Sword Stainless Steel (£26), which is easy to clean.

**Secateurs**

You'll need a decent pair of secateurs for pruning soft fruit or harvesting courgettes. Best Buys include the Spear & Jackson Razorsnap Bypass, which come in three sizes (about £20).

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the roots reach 1cm across, start pulling them in bunches.

Good varieties: 'Early Nantes', 'Sugarsnax'; £1.50 for a packet of seed (expected yield: up to 6kg a square metre)

Cost: 25p a kg (homegrown); £3.30 a kg (supermarket)

Saving: £3.05 a kg

**Baby leaf salads**

Thinly scatter a packet of mixed salad leaf seed over a 10-litre pot filled with growing bag compost (roughly one seed every 1-2cm). Dust with compost and keep well watered. When the seedlings reach 6-8cm tall, snip them 2cm above the surface, rinse and serve.

Keep the pot watered and you should get a second or even a third crop of leaves.

Good varieties: Choose a mixture, but check you like all the ingredients; £2 for a packet of seed (expected yield: the equivalent of two to six bags of salad per pot)
Cost: 33p-£1 a picking (homegrown); £1.47 for a 125g bag (supermarket)
Saving: 47p-£1.14 a picking

Strawberries

Strawberry plants can be placed at the front of an ornamental border, although they can take over if you don't pull out unwanted baby plants (in late summer). Give them a little plant food in late spring, water if it's



dry when the fruits are swelling, and protect them from pests.

Good varieties: 'Elsanta', 'Alice', 'Symphony'; £1-£1.50 a plant (expected yield: 2kg from six plants)

Cost: £3-£4.50 a kg (homegrown); £4.36 a kg (supermarket)
Saving: up to £1.36 a kg

Raspberries

Choose an autumn-fruiting variety and you'll get berries each year from August to October. Like strawberries, the plants are expensive to buy initially, but they should last for several years, so after the first year the fruit is virtually free. After picking, cut all the stems down to ground level. After a few years you'll have a large clump which may need some support – a couple of stout stakes and string should do it. An annual bucket-full of compost should keep them healthy.

Good varieties: 'Autumn Bliss'; £1-£2 for a young plant from a garden centre; if the plants don't come with a pot, make sure they are fresh



and plant straight away (expected yield: at least 2kg a bush each year)
Cost: 50p-£1 a kg (homegrown); £9.97 a kg (supermarket)
Saving: £8.97-£9.47 a kg

NOTE: Savings and prices are a guide only. We checked supermarket prices online on 16 February 2009. Supermarket prices are for cheapest available products and from the standard range where possible. Prices of vegetables and fruit will vary according to the time of year. Yields are based on the best varieties in *Which? Gardening* trials or expert estimations.