



Colwall Greener

Our Village Our Planet

Planning to grow your own

If you are a fan of New Year's resolutions, this year one of your resolutions might include growing your own fruit and vegetables and doing so has many benefits:

- **for physical and mental health:** you spend more time being active outside, possibly with other people in a social environment and you ingest produce with fewer/no chemicals if you follow organic principles;
- **for wildlife:** by growing varieties that attract pollinators and increase biodiversity and reducing the amounts of chemicals used in the growing process;
- **for the planet:** by eating produce grown “on your doorstep”, you reduce reliance on imported products with the associated heavy carbon footprint (and which are often farmed intensively with high levels of chemical input); and
- **for your bank balance:** you may save money, although this is not guaranteed so it is sensible to consider which crops you should grow to cut your food bill (see more below).

February is a great time to start planning your “grow your own” activities for the year ahead; you don't need a huge amount of space, nor do you need a lot of experience if you do your research and pick varieties, which are hardy and will thrive in Colwall's clay soil.

Step 1

Decide where you are going to start your vegetable patch; a corner of your garden (as long as it is not in total shade), outdoor pots/bags or a well-lit windowsill or balcony are all possibilities.

You might also be interested in an allotment at Colwall Village Garden <https://colwallorchardgroup.org/allotments-detail>

Step 2

Prepare your seed bed; there are different approaches to this but, generally, remove any weeds and add a peat-free compost (you can make your own quite easily if you have space).

One methodology of preparation, which is proven to produce high and healthy yields, is the “no dig” approach, which some of Colwall Greener's Committee members will be trying this year. If you are interested in learning more, Charles Dowding has some excellent resources on his website: <https://charlesdowding.co.uk>

Step 3

Choose fruit and vegetables that you enjoy eating and plant (inside or outside) as per the on-pack instructions. Pick varieties which will fruit over a period of months, so you have a plentiful supply of food.

Last year all the author's seeds planted directly in her allotment were eaten by mice (she thinks), but those grown from seed in her house and then planted out as young plants largely survived – the same might work for you.

If you are trying to reduce your grocery bill, think about which fruit and vegetables you buy from the supermarket that can be grown successfully in the UK and then prioritise the most expensive to purchase.

For example, people often grow carrots and potatoes that are relatively cheap to buy so instead you might look at growing salad leaves, such as lettuce and rocket, which are expensive to buy but can be grown cheaply and easily and which provide several harvests over the course of a season.

If you have room, what about planting a fruit bush? The price per pound of fruit can be extortionate but you can buy small fruit bushes quite cheaply and they will, without much effort on the grower's part, produce an abundant harvest each year.

Step 4

Compost will keep new plants fed for up to six weeks but, after that, you might want to top them up with specialist plant food. That said, some crops thrive on neglect; the author had success last year with courgettes, potatoes and beans without adding anything other than water (and not much of that given the drought!).

And finally, don't forget flowers; companion planting flowers with vegetables is a strategy growers use to boost yields and keep crops healthy. For example, calendula and cornflowers attract pollinating insects, which will help the vegetable flowers set fruit, and strongly scented herbs, like chives and mint, deter insects such as aphids and blackfly that damage young crops.

Good luck and happy growing!

****SAVE THE DATE****

**14th February, 7pm, the Colwall Ale House
Hidden Herefordshire, a talk by Tim Kaye**

Hidden Herefordshire is a project funded by The National Lottery and run by Herefordshire Biological Records Centre in partnership with Cultivating Learning and Nature. It aims to connect Herefordshire people of all ages and from all backgrounds to discover nature and record wildlife wherever they are.

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