

BEANS

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THE VEGE FILES

BEANS

There are a wonderful array of beans you can grow from runner beans to dwarf beans and through to broad beans. Heritage varieties have names which make you want to grow them like Devil's Defiance and Grandparent's Takamatua Black!

Beans should be sowed in the ground toward the end of October, or sowed into pots at the beginning of October (these planting times do not apply to broad beans which can be traditionally sown on Anzac day). Bush (dwarf) beans should be planted 30cm apart, and sown more often as they often will crop all at once. A pole bean (runners or climbers) will give a more continuous supply.

1. Prep the bed with plenty of compost.

2. A trellis of some sort is required if you are planting pole beans or runners, as they grow to 1.5-2 m high. You can use old mesh or fencing attached to posts, make a tepee, weave a trellis out of cut hazelnut suckers, use a frame with string hanging down or plant by your corn or sunflowers and have them climb up living poles.

3. Sow beans into pots 3-4 weeks before the last frost. Usually the last frost is early November, but we can get frosts at any time of year so sometimes a bit of frost protection is needed.

4. Harden off the plants, then plant them out once frosts are likely to have finished.

5. You can direct sow below the intended climbing route towards the end of October. Soak beans overnight before sowing. Keep an eye on the sky and give them some frost protection if needed.

6. Traditionally once sown and watered, no more watering is done til the seedling is up. Just keep an eye on moisture levels if the nor'westers are hounding your patch! You may need to ignore tradition if the soil is drying out.

7. Mulch well once the seedling is up and

water a minimum of once a week, more if it's dry. As the seedling grows it may need a little help to get going on its intended route to the stars. Every now and again, point it skyward or wrap it gently around your supportive frame as it rockets to the stars.

8. Pick beans often. Don't allow the pods to fatten up completely or the plant will think it's job is done and stop producing. You can pick many varieties of fresh beans all season then allow a final flourish to mature, giving yourself seeds for next year and dried beans for cooking through the winter.

9. Consider growing the Three Sisters. Sow beans next to your corn. The corn will give structural support to the growing bean.

A pumpkin along the ground shades the soil.

10. Stick random bush bean plants where you have a spare space. I've tried growing bush beans between my broccoli with great success.

11. Beans are a legume, meaning as they grow they are adding nitrogen to the soil, fertilising it for free. So remember at the end of their season to leave their roots in the ground.

Recommended varieties to try: Blue Lake Runner, Painted Lady Runner, any dwarf beans

