



The clocks have gone forward, we are past the vernal equinox and the days are now longer than the nights. Spring is really here and growing can begin in earnest.

Seed sowing You will need a line to mark your veg rows; use two sticks with a length of string between, tied on at both ends. A hoe to mark your seed sowing trench; make the depth about 2.5 times the size of the seed. Labels to record the position of the row and the contents, variety and date of sowing. Plastic labels are good. Write on them in pencil which will resist weather, can be rubbed off and allows for the use and re use of all labels until they snap with brittleness. A watering can to wet the bottom of the drill.

The first vegetables to begin growing are broad beans, onions from sets and first early potatoes.

Broad beans Make two shallow drills, 5cms deep, about 20cms apart. Water the bottom of the drills. Sow seed (large dry beans) approximately 15cms apart. Cover up the seed. The plants will need support, so drive in a stake at each corner of the double rows and at intervals in between if you have long rows, and tie a line of string all round the outside of the stakes first at a low level, 5-10cms, and then at higher levels as the plants grow. Check on the seed packet whether your beans are tall or short and put in stakes of appropriate height. Broad beans are ancient and have probably been around in Britain since at least the Iron Age. They will dry and store for winter use and also freeze well, though their fresh and earthy taste is at its best when the pods and beans are small. Easy to grow and easy to save seed from. Rarely seen in shops so grow your own and enjoy them when small and really fresh.

First Early Potatoes Hope you got to chit these earlier on the year. No problem if you didn't. Dig a shallow trench, about 12cms deep. Place seed potatoes, chitted side up, about 30cms apart in the bottom of the trench. Cover up the potatoes and draw the soil up in a slight ridge along the length of the row. The soil will need to be drawn up a few times more as the green tops of the plants grow and increase in height. Potatoes are not frost hardy and early green shoots often get frosted, go brown and crispy. If you are very dedicated, cover them over on cold nights with horticultural fleece or sheets of old newspaper. However, they will survive and grow back so don't worry. They need to be in soonest or you'll never get those luscious new potatoes as soon as is possible.

Onions from Sets This is the easiest way to grow onions. These are small onion bulbs grown from seed the year before and stopped before they get big. Push them into the soil 10cms deep, pointy end up, broader, rooty end down. Discard any which are soft, rotting or damaged. Rows should be 20 cms apart. The birds will pull some of them out. Just push them back in again. Growing onions from seed requires a long growing season, which in Cumbria means some early sowing and nurturing inside in a greenhouse if you are to get bulbs of any size. Sets are heat treated which inhibits growth in the first year and means they are inclined to bolt and produce a flower stalk in their second year when you have planted them, before they have swollen into a good edible bulb. I am disinclined to plant sets because of the heat treatment but I like a good supply of reliable bulbs and will continue to grow from sets until I am better at growing them from seed.

Sow directly outside or in the greenhouse: Broccoli, brussel sprouts, cauliflowers and kale. Peas.

Sow in the greenhouse: Tomatoes, peppers, chilis.

Sow outside: Carrots and beetroot, spinach and spinach beet. Lettuce and salads, radish, spring onions. Annual flowers. Peas

Think about and sow inside at the end of the month: Courgettes, squash and pumpkins, sweet corn and runner beans.

