



Paddy Madden continues his series of SESE tips

March

Hands-on: the edible container garden

What is it?

Some schools have the problem of having very little space for raised beds to grow edible plants. Container gardening will produce edible crops in these schools.

Growing medium

Ensure containers are at least 20 cm deep. The growing medium should be an even mixture of peat-free compost, sterilised top soil and well-rotted manure or compost. 'John Innes No.3' is also a suitable growing medium. Specific vegetable composts are on the market too.



Filling the container

Cover the drainage holes with a layer of chippings or broken polystyrene. Fill with growing medium to within 2.5 cm of top. Position it in a sunny place.

Feeding

Add slow-release fertiliser granules when the container is full or feed every couple of weeks with a general purpose liquid organic fertiliser. A small amount of an Irish fertiliser called 'Seamungus' releases nutrients over a three month period. This is available from www.quickcrop.ie.

Edible flowers

Children are fascinated with these. It should be pointed out, however, that some flowers are poisonous and are inedible.

Edible Flowers Taste

Nasturtium	Strong and peppery
Calendula	Mild and peppery
Chives	Onion flavour
Borage	Like cucumber
Pea	Like fresh peas

Remove the inner parts of the flower. Detach from the heel.

Pick immediately before eating. Avoid bought flowers and ones that have been sprayed with insecticide. Children with allergies should avoid eating these flowers.



Edible Marigold

Edible Nasturtium



Growing carrots in dustbins

Excellent for growing carrots because the height deters the carrot-root fly. (This fly cannot fly higher than 61 cm).

Method

- 1 Drill drainage holes in base. Cover



with broken-up polystyrene or plastic bottles to within 35cm of top.

- 2 Cover this with polythene punched with drainage holes. Fill with soil-based potting compost to within 2.5 cm of top. Alternatively make up a medium of well-sieved garden soil mixed with mature home-made compost or manure. (Avoid fresh manure or compost).
- 3 Sow Early Nantes or Amsterdam Forking seeds c.1cm apart and c.1 cm deep in February to guarantee a June crop.
- 4 Cover with fleece to help germination. (Carrots need a soil temperature of 10°C to germinate). Children could check this with a soil thermometer.
- 5 When plants are 2cm tall, thin to 8cm apart. Keep the growing medium moist.



Mini-veg

Dwarf peas such as 'Hatif d'Annonay' and 'Half Pint' grow well in containers and don't need staking. Pinch out the growing tips to keep them compact. Sprout indoors in March and plant out in April

Marrowfat peas

Nearly fill a 15cm pot with multipurpose peat-free compost. Water well and allow to soak. Place the marrowfat peas side by side on top of the compost. Lightly cover and leave on a sunny window sill. When the seedlings are c. 7 to 10 cm high they can be snipped with a scissors and eaten raw.



Literacy/Litearthacht

- **Green salads/Sailéid Ghlasa:** Leafy vegetables such as lettuce and rocket which are eaten raw. *Glasraí duilleacha mar leitís agus ruachán a itear go hamh.*
- **Potassium/Potaisiam:** A plant nutrient (K) which promotes flower and fruit production. *Cothaitheach planda (K) a chothaíonn planda chun bláthanna agus torthaí a tháirgeadh.*
- **Fleece/Lomra:** Strong light-weight fabric which

protects sensitive plants from frost. *Ábhar láidir, ach éadrom ó thaobh meáchain de, a chosnaíonn plandaí leochaileacha ó shiúc.*

- **Home-made compost/Múirín déanta sa bhaile:** Compost made from vegetables and plants (greens) and from leaves/shredded cardboard and paper (browns). *Múirín déanta de ghlasraí agus de phlandaí (glas) agus de dhuilleoga nó páipéar/cairtchlár mionstailta (donn).*

Other container vegetables to sow outside in late March/April

- Beetroot** Soak in warm water before sowing. Sow thinly in drills 1cm deep and 10cm apart. Thin to 10cm between plants. Harvest in 12 weeks.
- Kohl Rabi** Sow thinly in drills 3cm deep and 12cm apart. Harvest in 12 weeks.
- Chives** Sow seeds indoors in March. 3 seeds per 7.5cm pot. Later transplant 6 seedlings into 33cm pot filled with soil based compost. Leave outside or inside.
- Swiss Chard** Lovely red stems. Sow thinly in drills 10mm deep and 15cm apart. Harvest in eight weeks.
- Oriental Mustard** Sow thinly in drills 12mm deep and 10cm apart in late April. Harvest in four weeks.
- Radish** Sow thinly and lightly cover. Harvest in four weeks.
- Lettuce** Sow a cut and come variety. Thin the seedlings as soon as the first leaves appear to create space for growth.
- Spring Onions** Sow thinly. Thin seedlings to leave 2.5cm between plants.

Hanging baskets

Plant strawberries in baskets in the autumn in a sheltered, sunny position. Don't let compost dry out. A 40cm basket will take 10 plants – five on the sides and five on top. When flowering starts in the following summer feed every 10 days with a fertiliser high in potassium.

**Onion greens**

Sow marrowfat peas from a packet in the same way as onion sets. Do not cover. The green stems are very tasty.

**Indoor salads**

Packets entitled 'salad leaves' can be grown all year round indoors in large pots which are c. 30cm in diameter. These leaves often include salad rocket, mustard, pak choi, mizuna and lettuce. Put drainage pebbles in the bottom and fill with peat-free compost. Water well and allow to drain. Scatter the seeds thinly and cover with a thin layer of vermiculite. Leave in a warm place covered with clear polythene until they germinate. Then remove the polythene. When large enough to handle thin seedlings to 13mm apart.



Test carrot growth

Potatoes in bags

See www.blackrockec.ie/content/march A fair test on potato growth.

**Resources**

Websites mentioned plus:

- ✦ *Gardeners' World* (April 2010)
- ✦ *Amateur Gardening Magazine* 4 June 2011, 18 Sept 2011, 14 April 2012, 18 May 2013.
- ✦ *The Container Garden* by Dr D.G. Hessayon (1996)



PADDY MADDEN lectures on SESE in the Marino Institute of Education. He gives short courses to whole staffs on school gardening and visits schools through the Heritage in Schools scheme. His book *Go Wild At School*, has recently been reprinted. Available for €18 from paddy.madden@mie.ie (Includes p&p). *Buóchas do Marie Whelton (MIE) don aistriúchán.*