

# GROWING BROAD BEANS

*Broad Beans are an excellent crop to grow for an early harvest of nutritious protein-rich beans. They have been in cultivation for over 10,000 years; it's no wonder they have stood the test of time and are a grower's favourite.*

## Seed Sowing

Broad beans can be sown in autumn and spring, depending on the variety and local climate. Prepare the soil by weeding and adding well-rotted organic matter. You can directly sow them into the ground 6 cm deep, with rows around 50 cm apart and plants spaced around 30 cm. Seeds can also be sown in modules indoors for transplanting. Once the true leaves appear and roots start to show underneath the modules, it's time to plant them out.

## Transplanting

Harden off young plants for 3-5 days to acclimatise. You can do this by covering them with fleece overnight once planted or by leaving the modules outside during the day. Plant in rows around 50 cm apart, with plants spaced around 30 cm, and water them well.

## Plant Care

Broad beans don't require too much work; they are self-supporting for the most part. You may encounter the odd one that flops; in such cases, you can insert a bamboo cane and loosely tie it upright. If space is limited, a robust support at either end of the row with string along the sides will keep plants upright and in place. Water well when flowers appear to get a good crop. They are self-pollinating but produce better crops with the help of busy insects, so planting flowers alongside will help attract them.

## Challenges

Broad beans typically experience minimal issues. Blackfly loves the fresh tips, so pinching them out once blooms have developed helps reduce blackfly

problems. Bean weevils leave dark holes in the beans where the larvae have burrowed in; unfortunately, these seeds cannot be saved. Chocolate spot is a fungal disease that can be avoided by not overcrowding and ensuring enough airflow around plants.

## Harvest

Autumn-sown crops start cropping earlier than spring-sown ones. Watching the pods swell and ripen is a joy. The best way to know when it's ready is by gently feeling the beans inside the pod. You can harvest them from early on and enjoy the small delicate beans before they get old and tough, which is what you want when saving seeds. Pick your best plants at the start of harvest and leave the beans to mature.

## Culinary Ideas

Broad beans are a versatile crop; they can be used fresh, frozen, or dried, and even ground into flour. The delicious plant tips can be chopped, added to salads, or steamed and used like spinach. Broad bean hummus with plenty of garlic and fresh lemon is another favourite.

## Seed Saving

Broad beans are self-pollinating and will also cross readily with other broad beans if around. To keep a variety true-to-type, isolate them from other plants of the species *vicia faba*. Select the best plants with favourable characteristics and do not harvest from them for food. You will need around 15 plants to maintain a healthy level of genetic diversity. Harvest when the pods turn almost black, leave them in a warm place to dry fully, then store.



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