



# GROWING RUNNER BEANS

*Runner beans are an excellent crop to grow for an early harvest of long green pods and also later for a nutritious protein-rich bean.. There are lots of varieties with different coloured flowers and beans.*

## Seed Sowing

Runner beans can be sown in May and June. Prepare the soil by weeding and adding well-rotted organic matter. You will need a tall and sturdy structure for your beans and either string or canes for them to grow up. You can direct-sow 2 beans on either side of your supports, 4 cm deep, with rows around 65 cm apart and canes/strings spaced around 40 cm. Seeds can also be sown in pots indoors for transplanting once the true leaves appear and roots start to show underneath the modules.

## Transplanting

It's best to harden off young plants for 3-5 days to acclimatise. You can do this by covering with fleece overnight once planted or by leaving the modules outside during the day. Plant in rows around 65 cm apart, with plants spaced around 40 cm, and water them in well.

## Plant Care

Runner beans don't need too much work. Keep an eye on stragglers trying to leave the supports and twine them back in. Water well when flowers appear and keep picking the young bean pods to encourage more. Once they reach the top of supports, cut off the tips, which will encourage side shoots further down.

## Challenges

Runner beans have few problems to look out for. Black fly loves the fresh tips; squishing or washing them off helps reduce populations. Bean weevils create dark holes in the bean where the larvae have burrowed in.

## Harvest

The best way to know when a bean is ready is by gently feeling for beans inside the pod. Start to harvest some pods quite early and enjoy the small delicate pods first, as the older they get, the tougher the pods become. Regular harvests every 2-3 days will keep them flowering and producing more pods until you reach a point where you have had enough.

## Culinary Ideas

Runner beans are a very versatile crop; the pods are best when young. You can grill them on the BBQ, add them to stir-fries and paella, or serve them steamed with chicken or fish. After the pods get stringy, it's best to leave them on the vine to ripen the beans, which can be used fresh, frozen, or dried. The beans need to be properly cooked or can cause stomach upset.

## Seed Saving

Runner beans are cross-pollinating, so you need to make sure there are no other types growing nearby to maintain varietal purity. Select the best plants and save seeds from them; do not harvest from these plants. You will need around 20 plants for genetic diversity. Harvest when the pods dry on the plant.