

# GROWING CHICORY & RADICCHIO

*Radichio and chicory are varied and versatile crops, and some varieties can be forced to improve sweetness. There are three main types of chicory, forcing chicory, radicchio and sugarloaf chicory. They are grown in much the same way as lettuce or endive and make a great addition to a mixed salad. Many varieties are often eaten cooked.*

## Seed Sowing

Sow your seeds from June to July; they can be sown directly or in modules for the best results. Avoid sowing too early. Sow seeds in rows around 30 cm apart, placing seeds every 5 cm and later thinning to achieve a 30 cm spacing. Consume the thinned plants; they may be small, but they are delicious. Sow 3 seeds per module and thin to 1 per module when they are large enough.

## Transplanting

Ensure your seed bed is free from weeds. Sheltered, sunny sites are best, but they will tolerate some shade and can be grown between taller plants. Plant your seedlings in rows approximately 30 cm apart. Ensure plants are spaced 30 cm apart in the row, water well, and mulch around them without touching.

## Plant Care

Keep the area weed-free and watered during hot spells. The lack of water can make them more bitter. Mulch around the plants to retain moisture and prevent weeds. If your variety requires forcing/blanching, cover it for 2 weeks before harvest. For winter forcing varieties, this can be done in November. Dig up dormant roots, store them in sand, bring them indoors, and plant in pots with buckets over the top to force pale yellow sprouts for winter harvests.

## Challenges

Protect plants from slugs and snails, as they prefer direct-sown seedlings. Avoid watering in the evening, as this encourages overnight slugs and snails. Encourage predators such as ground

beetles, lizards, slow worms, and, if you're lucky, hedgehogs into your growing space by creating suitable wildlife habitats.

## Harvest

From seed, they take around 4 months to fully grow, but younger plants can be harvested to thin out the rows. Some radicchio can be regularly harvested on a cut-and-come-again basis, while others will be harvested all at once as a head.

## Culinary Ideas

There are many culinary uses for chicory and radicchio. The leaves of most varieties can be added raw to salads. They can also be cooked by sautéing or grilling. The bitter flavours of chicory are well matched to strong flavours such as walnuts and blue cheese.

## Seed Saving

Select at least 10 good plants to save seeds from. Allow these plants to flower and wait for the seeds to ripen. Keep a close eye on them; the seeds are ready when the heads turn brown, and you can see clusters of seeds inside. You can either harvest individual seed heads or the whole plant when 60-70% of the seeds are ripe. Leave the plants to dry for a couple of weeks before shaking off the ripe seeds. Store them in a cool, dry place for up to five years.