

Spring

It's time to think about planting tomatoes, zucchinis, cucumbers (try delicious apple cucumbers), eggplants, beans, silver beet and herbs such as basil, now that the frosts are behind us. Try to practice crop rotation by avoiding plantings of the same group of vegetables in the same spot two years running. This will give stronger healthier plants.

Beans: Green beans and snake beans do not like frost. They need warm soil, full sun, good drainage and slightly alkaline soil so add dolomite or lime before planting seedlings. Don't overdo it with compost or fertiliser as this will produce weak growth and in turn the pests will move in! Keep well-watered and mulched as beans have a lot of surface roots. Beans are a type of legume and are able to produce their own nitrogen via special bacteria which live in their roots, so they do not require a lot of nitrogen fertiliser. Maybe an application of seaweed... e.g. Seasol every two or three weeks.

Beetroot: A trouble free vegetable. Frost tolerant and a lover of organic matter and fertilisers. After fertilising, spread some dolomite or lime as they also like a slightly alkaline soil. They are sun lovers but happy with a little shade. Woody growth is due to irregular watering. Pick sooner rather than later for sweeter tasting beetroot. Water with a seaweed solution every couple of weeks.

Strawberries: Love full sun and a well fertilised, free draining soil. It's best to dig in the fertiliser and manure/compost if you have it. Strawberries love soil to be on the ACIDIC side so do not add lime or dolomite! Our acid soils should have the correct pH. Feed strawberries every two months with animal manure, compost or pelletised fertiliser. Water early in the day to allow leaf to dry quickly and to deter fungal diseases... treat as you would your roses! Every year, dig up all strawberries, select the best single crown plants and replant in a new bed.

Capsicums: Rich in vitamin C, this easy to grow vegetable loves a good fertile soil with a light TOUCH of dolomite or lime. The soil needs to remain just acidic so you may need to add gypsum instead of lime as this will increase the calcium levels without altering the pH. Getting the soil right will prevent blossom end rot later in the season. Capsicums like to be planted in a warm soil so wait for the last frost to pass. You may need to add a touch more dolomite/lime or gypsum half way through growing season. Keep well-watered in dry times. All capsicums are green to start with and are slow growers so don't expect to pick any for anything up to three months. Watch for aphids and whitefly. You may need to spray with a white oil. You may also need to hang some fruit fly traps as these flies are keen on capsicums!

Celery: A shallow rooted plant that requires organically rich soil and plenty of water. It does not like frost or extreme heat. Plant at the end of winter or end of summer in full sun in well composted soil. Then sprinkle a handful of fertiliser per sq. m. around plants on top of soil and water well. Fortnightly applications of seaweed emulsion will keep celery happy. To keep stalks paler and sweeter, wrap newspaper around each plant when plants are a decent size. Keep top of stalks clear of paper. Plant celery about 20cm apart in a block.

Snow Peas: Snow peas do not like frost. Construct a netting support or wigwam structure as they love to climb. They prefer sunny or light shade position with about six hours of sunlight per day and plant 10cm seedlings 10cm apart. Snow peas belong to the legume family and will release nitrogen into soil so you don't need to feed them with a fertiliser whilst growing. They do not like to be over watered!

Citrus: Fertilise at the beginning of spring. Once most of the fruit is off the trees, then prune so that the centre is open and you can reach new growth and fruit. Fertilise around the drip line in Aug/Sept and Feb/March. Keep well-watered when young fruit are forming. Citrus trees are quite shallow rooted and they do not like competition. Grass/weeds and citrus do NOT mix so mulch well out to the drip line.

Citrus gall wasp MUST be removed by the end of August, by law, and disposed of by burning or in a bag in garbage. If older leaves yellow in the centre of the leaf, this could be a magnesium deficiency. Leaves that yellow around the tips can be a lack of fertiliser. After the initial planting of a citrus tree, the soil should not be allowed to dry out. Watering weekly will be necessary whilst trees are being established. Spray with eco white oil to prevent leaf miner, seen as silver trails on surface of the leaf. You may need to spray every two weeks or whenever new growth appears. Good composting under trees will reduce damage by leaf miner. Bronze orange beetle can severely damage trees. Give the tree a deep watering and apply a citrus fertiliser to the drip line. It is best to brush them off the leaves into a bucket of hot water.

Eggplants: This vegetable is compatible in garden with beans, capsicum, lettuce and thyme but not potatoes or tomatoes! It's best to wait for the soil temperature to creep up to around 24 degrees so it's mid-September in a temperate climate such as ours. Plant at least 60cm apart. There are family ties between eggplants and tomatoes (and potatoes and chillies), so they should not be planted where tomatoes have been for the past three years! They like a well-drained fertile soil well prepared and will bounce ahead if you sprinkle chicken pellets around the plants just as flower buds appear... or make a tea coloured mixture from pellets and water this on. It's a good idea to stake the plant as they can become top heavy as fruit develops, around 12 weeks.

Cucumbers: Good soil preparation is vitally important. They need friable loose soil, well drained and full of organic matter, especially compost. Plant in a mound about 40cm across with two cucumbers to each mound. This helps with drainage. Roots like to be kept cool so add some mulch. Try and water roots only as they can get a fungal disease if leaves are too wet. Watering by hand first thing in the morning is fine. They do not like our intense heat so some afternoon shade is good. They do not mind up to 50 per cent shade and a shade cover over them will produce perfect fruit. If you are short of space, then you can train them up a trellis or fence. Give cucumbers a feed at planting time, and then again when fruit begins to develop... such as Seasol.