

# Five easy veg *Jacky Heron*

**M**any people might struggle to fit traditional veg growing into their garden. However keen you are, there may be a lack of willingness to take space from flowers, or perhaps some of the usual techniques are harder to manage with increasing creakiness. Here are some of my favourites in the cottage garden:

**1) Peas and beans** - I now only grow the taller varieties, so there is less bending to pick them! Pea 'Carouby de Mausanne' is really lanky and very pretty. Last year, when I wasn't sure of a support to lean them up against, I grew pea shoots in 5 inch pots, sowing to overwinter. About 20 seeds were sown in a pot in October and again in February. It seems wasteful, but the shoots are delicious in salads at a time of year when you are lacking vitamins and freshness. In pots on a wall, they are also easy to protect. 'Witkiem Manita' is the only broad bean I bother with now. It is easy to handle if you have any young helpers and quick to get going, even in the discouraging depths of February, and makes nice strong young plants in modules for putting out in a staggered row of three in March, followed by a good crop in double quick time!

**2) Chard and other brassicas** - no cottage garden is worth the name without a few! Even if you are not a fan of rainbow chard, the coloured stems and leaves of the red and yellow versions look lovely in a pot with some red geraniums. Cima di rapa and other Italian leaf cabbages can be dotted around, reducing the need for netting. These are tough plants you can cut individual leaves or the whole head from. However, you will probably need some organic slug pellets in the young stages, even if you favour modules as I do to start them off. If you like the black cabbage, cavalo nero seems to be more prone to the cabbage white and some netting may be needed. Green in snow is the world's toughest mustard. I have picked it from amongst the snow

and taken it home for a stir fry with a couple of leeks - fab!

**3) Cucurbits** - squash, courgettes, cucumbers et al. These are great plants for self-care once in. Extend their moisture levels by planting under a mulch, (e.g. 'Permalay' by Agralan). Unlike tomatoes with all the fiddling, there is no hassle, just picking aplenty. Courgette pakora, anyone?

**4) Tomatoes** - yes, they are a bit of bother initially, but so productive and a joy. Especially if you sign up for the Potato Council's free text alert 'Blightwatch' against the dreaded blight. I now grow some in very big pots amongst gladioli and dahlias.

I know people worry about blossom end rot- it is unsightly, but not serious and just tells you the plants are short of calcium, often caused by erratic watering. There are some wonderful varieties of tomatoes to play with!

**5) The humble spud** - Worth bothering with as it is a great weed suppressor and if you have a raised bed needn't be planted in the traditional way. Just space your spuds about 8 inches apart, with a gap of a foot between rows, as though you were putting in daffodils. I believe the diversity of planting really increases wildlife in the garden - even if it is nibbling at the veg. as well as me!

Along with a herb trough planted with parsley, coriander, chives and garlic chives, plus pots of mint and sorrel, you can carry on veg gardening into your dotage, despite a few limitations.

*Jacky gardens in London.*

