

# Vegetables

Gardening for minibeasts and the family



Maltese Honey Bee on Snapdragon (photo: Hannah Pepe)

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# Vegetables and minibeasts



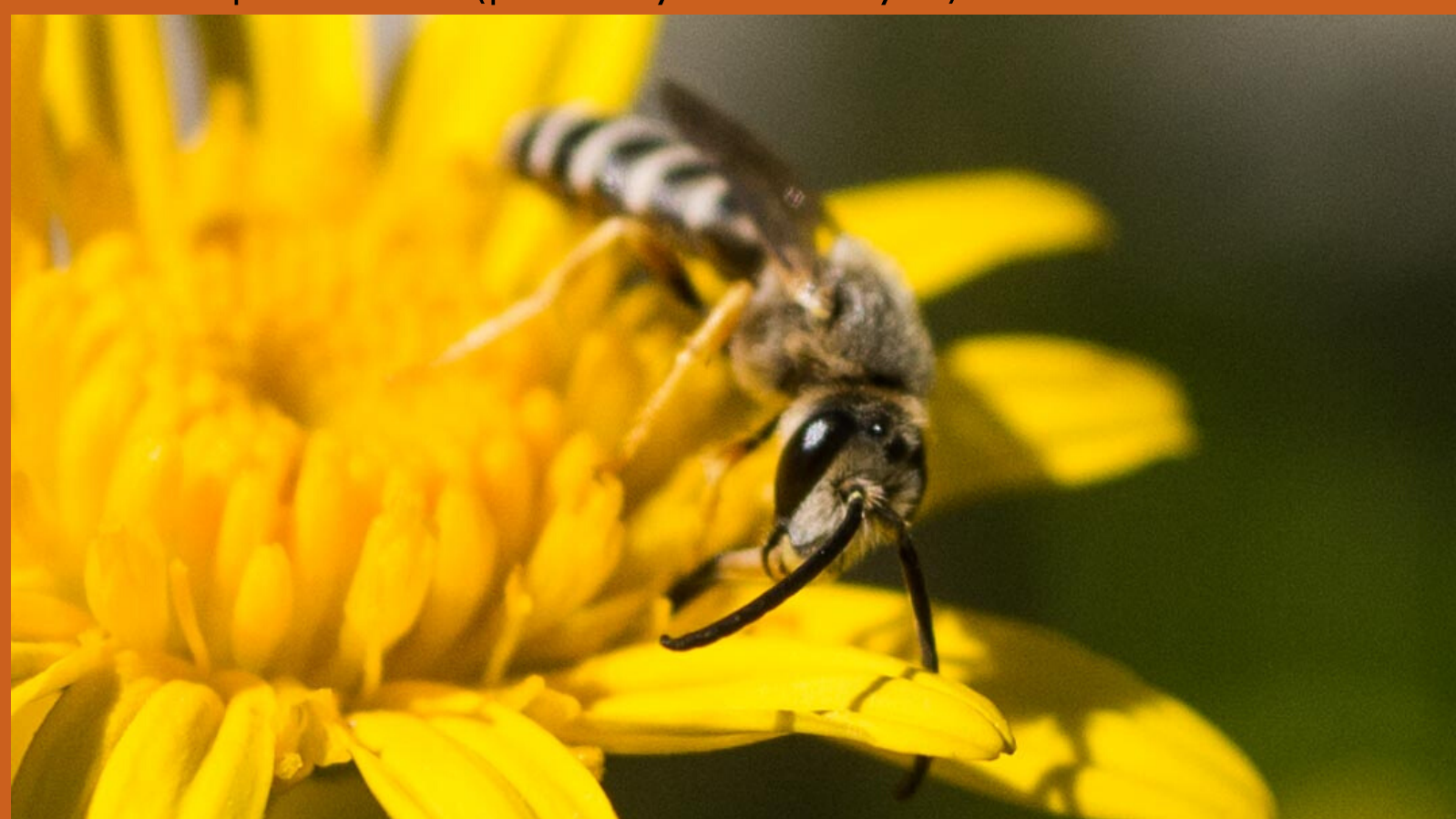
Growing vegetables is a relatively common pastime here in Malta, and for good reason! It not only provides affordable and delicious food for you and your family, but is also a therapeutic activity, allowing us to relax and connect with the natural world. Growing vegetables can also help to support nature, especially pollinators such as our beloved bees! An incredible 93 species of bee have been recorded here on the Maltese Islands, and these beautiful and charismatic little insects are responsible for pollinating a wide variety of plants, including many vegetable crops!

In celebration of World Bee Day, why not create a pollinators paradise for these important insects? This guide will show you how!

**Don't worry if you don't have a garden, many vegetables can be planted in pots in a courtyard or on a sunny balcony!**



Violet Carpenter Bee (photo: Lynkoswildeyes)





# Vegetables that attract insects

## Jerusalem Artichoke

- Latin name: *Helianthus tuberosus*
- Maltese name: Artiċokk
- Usually flowers between May and October.
- Produces pollen and nectar
- Popular with:
  - Bees
  - Beetles
  - Painted Lady butterflies



Jerusalem Artichoke (photo: Paul Fenwick)

## Parsnip

- Latin name: *Pastinaca sativa*
- Usually flowers between June and August
- Produces nectar
- Popular with:
  - Bees
  - flies
  - Parasitic wasps – These will control other pests, such as caterpillars!



A hoverfly (*Chrysotoxum bicinctum*) on wild parsnip (photo: Keith Edkins)



# Vegetables that attract insects

## Garden Pea

- Latin name: *Pisum sativum*
- Maltese name: Piżelli
- Grows well in reasonably-sized pots.
- Can grow well on balconies that get a lot of sun
- Likes moist soil, so water fairly frequently.
- Flowers from February – May
- Produces pollen
- Popular with:
  - Bees
  - Beetles
  - Flies



The flowers of the Garden Pea (photo: Jamain)

## Wild Carrot

- Latin name: *Daucus carota*
- Maltese name: Zunnarija salvaġġa
- Can be grown in pots
- Needs regular watering
- Best planted in April
- Flowers in Spring
- Produces nectar
- Popular with:
  - Bees
  - Beetles
  - Butterflies
  - Green lacewings



A bee visits wild carrot (photo: Jeard Moldenhauer)



# Vegetables that attract insects



## Onion

- Latin name: *Allium cepa*
- Maltese name: Basla
- Onions can be grown either from the seed or from the bulb – However, it is often easier to grow from the bulb, as they are hardier.
- Can grow well on balconies that get a lot of sun
- Use compost and plant them in early spring
- Rotate them or replace the soil and compost each year
- Plant the bulbs at a depth of less than 1 inch and ensure that bulbs are planted 2 – 6 inches apart.
- Flowers between April and June
- Produce pollen, making them popular with a wide variety of minibeasts, especially honey bees (*Apis mellifera*)



## Chickpeas

- Latin name: *Cicer arietinum*
- Maltese name: Ċiċri
- Little effort is required to grow chickpeas, making them an excellent vegetable for beginners.
- Need a warm and sunny place in which to grow
- Leave approximately 5 inches between seeds
- Use gloves when handling the plant as they can produce an irritant.
- Harvest the pods when the peas inside feel large enough to eat.
- Produces beautiful flowers between February and May
- Produces nectar and pollen



A chickpea flower (photo: Joshua Endow)



# Tips and tricks

## Containers

You can use a variety of different objects as containers for your vegetables – e.g. flower pots, buckets, wooden boxes, food cans, etc.

Your container must have drainage holes in bottom to allow excess water to escape, reducing the risk of root rot. If your container doesn't have holes in the base, you can drill some into it.



A balcony garden (photo: [Gardenerspath.com](http://Gardenerspath.com))

## Shady Balconies

Does your balcony not receive much sun? Don't worry, you can still grow some useful plants that not only provide for your kitchen table, but also attract a wide variety of different minibeasts!

Shade-loving plants:

- Runner beans
- Spinach
- Peas
- Beetroot



A balcony garden (photo: [shemazing.net](http://shemazing.net))

## Picking your veggies

Consider which vegetables your family currently eats, or would like to start eating, and start by planting these. There's no point in growing vegetables you won't eat!





# PLANTING VEGETABLES

## SEEDS OR PLANT STARTS?

When planting vegetables, you can either start from the seed or buy young plants. There are benefits to each method, with seeds being significantly cheaper, but young plants being much easier to establish and grow.

Some plants are particularly hard to grow from the seed, and so it is best to start with young plants. Alternatively, other plants, including some crops such as lettuce and carrots, are far easier to grow from seed!



## WHEN TO PLANT?

Different vegetables need to be planted at different times of the year. While this differs between vegetables, it will also depend on whether your planting seeds or young plants. Seeds need to be planted earlier than young plant crops. While many crops grow throughout the summer, several can also be grown over winter, especially in Malta's mild winter climate.

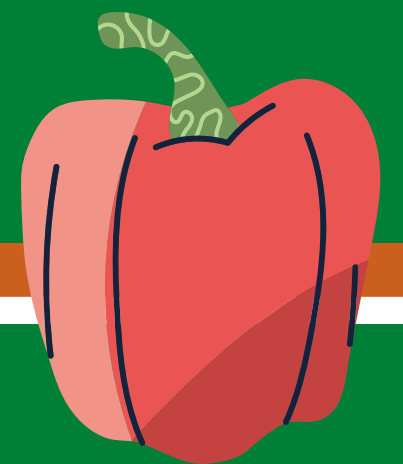
## PLANTING YOUR VEGETABLES

When planting your vegetables, carefully follow the instructions provided on the seed packet. In some cases, the seeds need to be buried beneath the soil to a certain depth, while in others the seeds must be left on the surface of the soil. The seed packet will provide clear guidelines on how deep you should bury the seeds and how far apart the seeds should be planted from one another.

If using vegetable starts, plant them so that the soil currently surrounding the young plant is level with the surface of the soil in your container.

## WATERING

Once you have planted your seeds or young plants, you should water the entire area well. Then ensure that the soil remains moist, but resist the temptation to water your plants excessively, as this can drown the plants and increases the risk of root rot. However, frequent watering, ensuring that the soil remains moist, is critical for the growth of healthy vegetables.



## MAINTENANCE

Once you've planted your vegetables it is important to monitor them and conduct maintenance so that your vegetables can produce a healthy harvest!

Weeds will compete with your vegetables for water and nutrients, so it's important to remove them as soon as they pop up. While these plants aren't bad per se and should be encouraged in other parts of the garden (especially as they are loved by insects!), their growth should be discouraged among your vegetables.

Mulching is a great way to prevent the growth of weeds in your vegetable plot. A handy guide can be found on [goodhousekeeping.com](http://goodhousekeeping.com)

## AVOID PESTICIDES

Pesticides have had an incredibly damaging impact upon the environment. Their frequent use has resulted in the rapid decline of many insect species and the poisoning of other animals, including birds. When growing your vegetables, it's best to avoid using pesticides and instead encourage a healthy insect population. Many of the minibeasts attracted to your little paradise will act as pest control, eating the caterpillars and other minibeasts they feast upon your vegetables. Planting other plants in your garden, including allowing weeds to grow in other containers, can attract more of these beneficial minibeasts.

