

# Little Green Space

March is the month when things start to get really busy in the kitchen garden. By now the ground should be prepared and ready for planting – and if the soil is warm enough, the first seeds of the year can be sown.

Radishes, salads, broad beans and onions can be started off now. And by the end of the month, the first early potatoes can go in, especially if the soil has been warmed for a week or two with black polythene or a plastic cloche.

I started planning my growing year a few weeks ago when I sorted through my seed tin. Trouble is, I have so many different packets of seed that I won't have anywhere near enough space to grow it all.

So I've had to be ruthless, and very choosy about which veg to grow this year. The whole family loves all sorts of vegetables, so the usual advice "only grow what you want to eat" doesn't really apply – we want to eat everything!

The solution, I decided, was to have the healthiest kitchen garden possible. All fruit and vegetables are good for us, of course – which is why we are recommended to eat at least five portions of fruit and veg every day.

But some fruits and vegetables are really good for us. These so-called superfoods are bursting with nutrients and can improve health in all kinds of ways.

After a little research, I came up with a shortlist of 10 fruit and veg to boost health – and all of these will be growing on my patch this year.

## Beetroot

Anything naturally this brightly coloured has to be good for you. Betacyanin, the purple pigment found in beetroot, is thought to improve liver health and detoxify the body. Beetroot contains vitamins A, B6 and C, and is rich in natural nitrates, which can help to reduce high blood pressure.

## Garlic

Garlic has long been associated with protection: vampires, evil spirits and the devil can all be kept at bay with a bulb or two of this pungent plant. It can protect against illness, too – garlic boosts the immune

system and can prevent colds and flu. It's also good for the heart, containing a compound that can offer protection against clotting.

## Spinach

Popeye made this leafy green veg famous as a superfood back in the 1930s, when he would burst open a can of spinach whenever trouble loomed and he needed to increase his strength. While spinach may not give you massive muscles, it is high in vitamins C and K and is rich in iron. It's great for your skin, too, thanks to its high content of beta carotene.

## Broad beans

All beans and pulses are good for the digestive system. They are high in fibre – which is not only good for digestion, but can also help lower cholesterol. Broad beans are also rich in potassium, which helps reduce blood pressure and aid kidney function.

## Blueberries

Blueberries contain anthocyanidins, the compounds that give them their deep purple colour. These compounds are good for heart health and can reduce cholesterol. The powerful antioxidants in blueberries can boost the immune system and improve eye health.

## Kale

Kale is high in calcium and phosphorous, helping to promote bone health and guard against osteoporosis. It's also good for muscle health and can prevent cramp. One cup of kale contains all your daily requirements for vitamins A, C and K, and is also packed with potassium, iron and fibre.

## Carrots

Eating carrots will not, I'm afraid, enable you to see in the dark. But carrots can improve the general health of your eyes, thanks to beta carotene – the compound that gives carrots their vivid orange colour. Beta carotene offers protection against free-radical damage and can help prevent cataracts, and is also great for the skin, helping with conditions such as eczema and acne.

## Pea shoots

Pea shoots are possibly the easiest and cheapest vegetable to grow at home – they can be sown into pots on a windowsill and

will be ready to harvest in just two or three weeks. Pea shoots are packed with vitamin C, essential for immune system health and great in the fight against coughs and colds. They also contain amino acids, which boost protein levels in the body.

## Leeks

Leeks, along with onions, chives and garlic, are members of the Allium family – all of these vegetables can improve heart health and are good for the digestive system. They also contain a mild antihistamine, which can prevent allergies.

## Apples

Apples are high in soluble fibre and can reduce cholesterol. They are fat-free, low in calories and contain vitamins and minerals. There's also some evidence to suggest that apples can help to prevent asthma. An apple a day may not keep the doctor away – but it'll certainly help.

## Recipe –

### Apple seed cookies

Apples are naturally sweet, and adding them to cakes and biscuits means you can reduce the sugar – making treats like these cookies a little less naughty, but still very nice. The seeds contain Omega 3 oils, zinc and magnesium.  
Makes about 12:

100g butter, softened  
70g soft dark brown sugar  
1 egg, beaten  
1 teaspoon vanilla essence  
70g plain flour  
pinch salt  
1/2 teaspoon baking powder  
75g porridge oats  
25g pumpkin seeds  
25g sunflower seeds  
1 eating apple, peeled, cored and grated

Cream the butter and sugar together, then beat in the egg and vanilla essence. Add the flour, salt and baking powder and mix well. Stir in the oats and seeds, and finally the grated apple.

Place dessertspoonfuls of mixture onto a baking tray lined with greaseproof paper, leaving space between them – they will spread a little during cooking. Flatten each cookie slightly with the back of a fork, then bake in a preheated oven at 180°C for 12 minutes.

For more information on healthy eating, and dozens of mouth-watering recipes, check out The Medicinal Chef by Dale Pinnock. Always remember to consult your doctor before changing your diet if you suffer from any medical conditions.

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