

GETTING STARTED WITH VEGETABLES

Seeds and seedlings

The easiest way to grow vegies is to start with seedlings bought from a nursery and plant them into a compost-enriched hole in a no-dig bed. Each year good nurseries seem to have a wider range of seedlings available. On the other hand, most of these will be hybrids and you won't be able to save the seeds for next season. The varieties available from nurseries still represent just a fraction of those it is possible to grow from seed.

If you want to obtain seed that you will be able to save season after season to grow your own vegies from scratch, or if you simply want to try some less common varieties and play a part in preserving them, open-pollinated seed is available from specialist suppliers and seed saving groups.

Preserving the past

The varieties of fruits and vegetables generally available in our supermarkets are few compared with the rich diversity once widely grown by orchardists, market gardeners and backyard enthusiasts. Modern hybrid food plants have been bred to:

- ripen within a short time period for economical harvesting

- have a long shelf life
- be of uniform size and colour
- withstand transportation and handling without bruising.

All of these are, no doubt, viable economic reasons. Unfortunately, along the way, many of the new varieties (and even many old varieties selected for economic reasons) have lost much of their distinctive taste.

Consumers have become conditioned to expect their food to be cosmetically perfect and gastronomically insipid. If you grow vegies from seed, you have access to a much broader range of food you can really taste.

Hybrid or open-pollinated?

Most commercially available vegie seeds and seedlings are hybrid varieties which, while giving gardeners a reasonable choice, will not reproduce true to type. This means that if you want to save seeds from your crop to use for next year, you don't know what, if anything, you will end up with.

The old-fashioned open-pollinated varieties, however, will reproduce true to type so you can save and reuse your own seeds. Not only is this a very economical way of gardening but