



seed to plate

General Principles For Patios

The aim of Seed to Plate is to make it easy to transform your outdoor space – be it a patio or roof terrace – by adding a series of highly productive Grow Beds and/or Trugs that are absolutely bursting with fresh organic herbs, salad leaves and vegetables. Even with just a small area you can grow an enormous quantity of veg, provided you grow the best varieties, in the right way.

You can find out how to grow specific veg varieties in the Grow Guides. Here are a number of more general principles you should also bear in mind.

Lots of Sunshine

Many roof terraces and patios are blessed with lots of sunshine, which is great for growing veg. To check sun levels, watch how the shadows fall across your terrace at different times of day. As a general rule, if your terrace faces South, East or West you're in business.

The key thing avoid is an area directly in front of a north facing wall. It will only get sunshine in the height of summer – which is inadequate, unless you fancy growing mushrooms!

Raised Bed and Container Options

Once you've got a short list of what you want to grow, you need to pick out the right containers to grow them in. We've trialled a variety of different options, and these are our favourites.

Trugs

Trugs are an attractive and economical solution for growing plants on small terrace or patio. They're perfectly suited to plants that don't need a lot of root space like herbs and salad leaves like mizuna and rocket.

Grow Beds

Grow Beds are required for bigger plants, like tomatoes, potatoes and courgettes.

They're 1m long and 0.5m wide so they won't take up too much space. Each one comes with a porous liner that will keep all your compost in, but let water escape.

One grow bed will accommodate two rows of plants in most cases, so you can grow two different types of veg in one bed, but consult your grow manual for specific requirements. We've even got a version with a frame for growing climbers and tall plants that need support like tomatoes.

They're built from recycled plastic and designed to last for years.

Windowboxes

Windowboxes are a convenient way of growing veg if you have no outdoor space, or you want the convenience of having your plants within easy reach. They're perfect for all herbs and salad leaves like mizuna and rocket, because you can snip away at all these plants and they'll keep growing back and produce more leaves.

They need to be positioned in a sunny spot, either inside or outside. A kitchen windowsill is ideal if it's bright. If you're growing basil keep it inside because basil hates wind and cool temperatures.

You'll find a dedicated set of Window Box Kits on the website, along with their associated Grow Guides.

Pack your soil full of goodness

For a big crop and a long growing season it's important to get your soil right. Ideally you want a 50:50 mixture of soil and compost. Soil is important because it will provide essential minerals for your plants. Compost will improve the texture of your soil, provide nutrients, as well as helping it hold water.

Multipurpose compost from your local DIY shop or nursery is fine, you don't need anything fancy. Just mix it with soil from your garden with any stones removed.

Alternatively you can buy compost with soil already mixed in. Look for 'loam' based compost. Loam is the best kind of soil because the particles are very small, making it much easier for plants to access the minerals. These are sometimes called John Innes composts.

If you're growing tomatoes, chillies or cucumbers it's a good idea to give them an extra booster when they're fruiting. The seaweed based tomato fertiliser we sell is ideal for all these plants.

Watering

Watering your veg is the aspect of growing that you're going to have to pay more attention to than anything else. Lots of sunshine and wind (on roof terraces), combined with relatively shallow beds and trugs will mean your soil will naturally have tendency to dry out.

It's all very location and weather dependent. You just need to get a feel for how your terrace reacts to different weather conditions. Always get your fingers into your soil so check how moist it is. If it feels dry get the watering can out and give it a good soaking.

The alternative is to invest in an automatic watering system. These consist of a timer that you connect to an outdoor tap linked to a series of pipes that will deliver water to your veg for the length of time you specify, every day. We sell a kit that has everything you'll need for terraces with our raised beds and trugs. The system will set you back 50 quid, but you can go away for the weekend and relish the sunshine without worrying what it's doing to your plants!

Weeds and Pests

The extra hassle of watering will be more than compensated for by much lower levels of weeds and pests than you'd encounter if you were growing directly in soil

Nevertheless, some weeds will appear, so pull them out by hand and if you've got a slug problem reach for the Organic Slug Pellets we sell. This new generation product has none of the harmful effects on wildlife associated with traditional slug pellets. Sprinkle them around all your plants, especially young seedlings which can be gobbled up overnight if you're not careful.

Two Stage Growing Plan for Heat Loving Plants

Most plants can be sown directly into your soil, but plants that originate from warmer climates like Tomatoes and Chillies need to be started off inside so they're not damaged by frost.

Our rootrainers are the ideal low-maintenance solution. Once you've sown your seeds, place the trays on a sunny windowsill and water about once a week. Aim to keep the compost moist, but don't let it get waterlogged. It's essential your plants have small pockets of air in their compost to feed on.

The clear plastic drip tray can double up as a cover to keep the surface of the compost and your freshly sown seeds moist - I generally remove this once my seedlings emerge.

Transfer plants outside at the end of May when the frosts are well and truly behind us.

Labelling

Right after sowing any seeds, put a label in, otherwise it's very easy to forget what's gone where. Write on labels with a pencil and you can scrub the writing off to use again next year.