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## Easy Foods to Grow in Your Garden (or Balcony)

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One good thing to come out of the pandemic is a renewed interest in vegetable gardening- (and gardening in general, actually and even though things have gotten better your own personal vegetable patch is still a great way to explore gardening. It's also delightful eating the fruits of your labour! (Was that a terrible pun? I promise that's the only one.)

### TOMATOES - MY PERENNIAL FIRST CHOICE

#### Why Tomatoes?

Tomatoes are super-easy to start from the seed, so there is a ton of choice by type and variety. They reward you when you cultivate them correctly: For indeterminate- vining types you stake them, remove any unwanted shoots and they will fruit. Don't remove the flowers, a friend of mine did that years ago and thought she'd get a higher yield -- but no flowers, no fruits. (Back to botany class with you!)

You can eat delicious tomatoes right off the vine, and they are my number one cooking ingredient. You can put them in salads and pastas, dry them, or make preserves, which is a bit of a lost art but there are still some of us dinosaurs who like to make our chili (not from a can). And, my favourite, using them in a hot tamale sauce (let me know if you want the recipe, it's not spicy). Lastly, TASTE! Commercial tomatoes have been bred for certain characteristics like uniformity and shipping and I assure you, if you grow your own, the taste is much better.

#### Different Types of Tomatoes

Indeterminate (Cordon): These are the main types of tomatoes. They grow on a vine and keep on growing. They must be staked and they will get tall. The tomatoes keep coming until the frost stops them.

Semi-Determinate: The vining type, they also need staking but don't keep on growing.

Determinate (Bush): These ones don't vine, instead the stems trail out like a bush. They grow to a certain size. These ones can be easier for a balcony garden as they are planted in pots or hanging baskets and don't require stakes or removing extra shoots.

#### Tomato Growing Basics:

Tomatoes require rich, fertile soil or peat-free potting compost and a sheltered but sunny spot. They require regular watering. Once they begin to flower it's a good idea to fertilize them regularly.

If you choose tall-growing tomatoes make sure to get rid of the side shoots and properly stake them, using soft string to tie the plants to stakes. Secret tip? When the first teeny tiny fruits appear strip away the leaves underneath to allow more light and air to reach them. Leave them on to ripen naturally – unless you've got raccoons. ( I've been known to turn a blind eye to children stealing cherry tomatoes)

Bush/determinate tomatoes can be left to flower and fruit but make sure the foliage doesn't block their sun.

When summer is over, prune off old leaves to allow light in and prevent mould. You can try bringing them indoors for the winter but I've found it just too much work to get them enough light and the winter yield is almost non-existent.

### SALAD LEAVES

#### Why Salad Leaves?

Salad leaves are surprisingly versatile and provide great variety for your salads. If you want a peppery tasting leaf or some extra crunch, there's so much variety that will be different from your box of mixed greens. They also don't require as much room as growing whole lettuce heads. They take in poor soil and provide high yield. If you cut them often then the plant will keep cropping for longer.

#### Salad Leaf Tips

These salad leaf bunches can be grown from seed and even take in poor soil but that doesn't mean you should treat them any worse! The seeds can turn bitter if the soil isn't moist enough so an option is well-rotted organic matter – or nicer soil.

Seeds can be sown in March. I know this article is a bit late but you can start and still get salad leaves as it takes 6 weeks from sowing to picking. The salad can be grown in between spaces in your garden or pots and containers. Check this link for some tips:

<https://www.gardenersworld.com/how-to-grow-plants/how-to-grow-salad-in-a-container/>

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Don't let the soil dry out! You can start cutting when they are 5 cm tall and make sure to mulch. Different varieties require different care so make sure you do your research.

### PEAS

Does anyone else feel like peas have been forgotten? Well, they're easy to grow and don't take up too much space! Also, they taste infinitely better than frozen peas. They are sweet and tender and there's still time to plant their seeds – quickly though.

I love snow-peas. They are the first thing you can plant and you can plant another crop in mid August to take advantage of the cooling fall weather. They need something to climb though.

#### Basic Care for Your Peas:

Peas need to be planted about 3cm in the ground, try to have the soil be rich in compost. Once sprouted they will require staking as they grow tendrils which grasp onto anything that's around. Garden stores will have stakes specifically for peas but I am sure you can be creative and come up with alternative options. Peas require a sunny and well-draining spot. Harvest once they're grown and swollen with peas. Harvest snow peas sooner than that- you don't want the peas to grow or the pods get tough.

Herbs are also wonderful options for the summer. Parsley, basil (sweet and Thai basil) and thyme have high yield and are lovely when homegrown.

French tarragon ( not Russian) is a perennial herb that does just fine in my zone 5 garden.

Just be sure not to let your culinary herbs flower

Oh, and speaking of perennials- Rhubarb-I love rhubarb.

Time to go back outside (I possibly forgot to mention weeding)



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#### Scale- Dealing with an unwanted visitor

I know that some people will use pesticides to take out scale, but you don't really have to and they are often not every effective, anyway. Just carefully inspect your tree and scrape off any scale that you see. You might need to do it a few times to get all of them and you can wash the sap off with water. If you're squeamish, you can use a Qtip to scrape them off.

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