



PLANTS & CROPS

Plants are the source of all food. They feed on sunlight and water and a few minerals, other life obtain their solar powered nutrition second hand (or even third.) Vegetables can be defined in many ways but with garden plants, how long they live or their growth habit is usually the defining criterion.



Types of Plants

Annuals

Most vegetables are annual plants. They grow, make seeds, and die off all within one solar cycle. Lettuce and the like are obviously here for a short stretch.

Biennial

Many plants that are grown as annuals actually have a two year life cycle. Carrots, onions, cabbage, and sprouting broccoli are all examples. They build up reserves of energy in the first year so they can make seeds the next year, but people used the energy instead.

Many biennial plants can "go to seed" in the first year if they are stressed by drought, frost or mishandling. Onions must be weeded carefully, as too much disturbance can start them on their flowering cycle.

Perennial

Some plants will last many years, but many perennials will not produce in the first year. Asparagus, for example, takes three years before it is ready, but once it is established it will last for up to 25 years of production.

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Shrubs

There are many useful food bushes from berry bushes, like blackcurrant, to herb bushes, such as juniper. Some farms specialise in fruits and may even brew them into speciality items, including blackcurrant wine.

Trees

Apples and pears are the obvious fruit trees, but there are many other kinds. Orchards are productive once they are established, but they can take a few years until they are in full production.



Modern dwarfing rootstocks are often used by commercial farmers because they are ready sooner as they don't grow so tall. The low height also makes picking the fruit easier. Taller root stocks produce bigger trees that may need ladders in the picking stage.

Herb trees, like bay, are used for their leaves. Many trees can be grown in Ireland that people generally ignore, such as mulberry. Trees can also be grown for wood and nuts, like walnuts.

Choosing What To Grow

If you think before you start, you can save a lot of trouble! Choosing plants that suit your conditions is important. Frost is a problem for many plants. Soil type is also an issue: does it have the right nutrients or acidity?

You can also change your local conditions, using lime for acid soils, using polytunnels, watering, etc. This is an option for smaller projects, but on a farm is not such an easy option. You can make sandy beds for asparagus, water beds for watercress and the like; these are good options for specialised growers.

Related Videos & Websites

- ⇒ [Organic Vineyard and their Cover Crops](#) ⇐
- ⇒ [How to Choose What Crops to Grow](#) ⇐

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