

Grow What? Qld School Veggie Gardens



School vegetable gardens are an important part of Pick of the Crop for many schools. What to grow is a question often asked, and this factsheet will help you understand:

- when and where to grow veggies
- whether to choose seeds, seedlings or cuttings
- top growing advice
- how to get students to enjoy veggies.

Nothing is EASY to grow, but you might find these easier than other plants.

Keith Gilbert, Pick of the Crop Regional Coordinator in Gympie and former Kitchen Garden Specialist highlights the key issues of school veggie gardens:

I got very tired of reading "Carrots are EASY to grow!". I spent years of trial and error just to get the seeds to sprout reliably, let alone produce a carrot resembling anything you buy!

Thanks to Keith for developing this factsheet to provide schools with top tips and information, to help Pick of the Crop schools discover what to grow in school gardens.

Background

There are so many variables in growing in Queensland - soil, water, extreme weather, seasons, moon cycles, altitude, your microclimate - that it is impossible to predict your harvest based on others' success.

Even from one side of a town to the other, conditions and results vary. The best advice you can get is from experienced growers in your area.

My 'Dirty Dozen'

That said, here's my 'Dirty Dozen'. These are veggies that myself and other gardeners from across Queensland have found less difficult and more reliable than most.

Maybe you'll have the same joy growing them at your school?

Remember

- There are other "go-to" crops suited to particular regions in Queensland.
- Get to know your climate zone and research what grows well there, and when.
- As a rule, herbs, garlic and ginger are packed with flavour and relatively low-maintenance, so are a wise choice.
- Find the best varieties for your region.
- Have some long-lived plants you pick from repeatedly e.g. tropical spinaches.



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Veggies	When & Where to plant	Seed / Seedling / Cutting	Growing advice	Getting students to enjoy the veggies (serving suggestions)
Sprouts 	All year Across Queensland	Seed	- Spray with water 2-3 times a day. - Harvest within 1-3 weeks. - Buy bulk seeds online. - Grow indoors (in trays or pots) or outside (in the garden). - Try different flavours - radish, beetroot, alfalfa, carrot, bean etc.	Grow in pots with faces drawn on - the kids can cut the "hair" and eat it. Serve in salads and sandwiches.
Snake Bean 	Feb-Oct: Tropical. Aug - Mar: All other areas	Seed	- Provide a trellis or beanpoles. - Sun or part-shade. - Likes regular watering once it's sprouted.	Really long, fun beans. Good eaten raw or cooked. Harvest daily in peak cropping season.
Land Cress 	All year Across Queensland	Seed	- Water well. - Harvest when young and tender, then again and again. - FUN FACT - land cress can lure and trap cabbage butterflies, reducing attack on your cabbages, broccoli, cauliflowers and mustards!	Mild, peppery taste. Serve in salads and sandwiches.
Lettuce 	All year Across Queensland#	Seed Seedling	# Different varieties for different seasons (As a rule - open heart in warm weather, closed in cool weather). - Quick growing - 8 weeks to harvest.	Ideal for salads and sandwiches. Iceberg makes a great curried lettuce soup. Use the leaves to wrap fillings - as in San Choy Bow.

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Parsley 	Autumn in all areas Across Queensland	Seed Seedling	- Will tolerate some dry-spells once established, but is more productive and tasty if watered regularly. - Try curly and flat-leaf varieties.	Compare curly and flat-leaf - which do you prefer? Can eat raw, but great for adding to ('hiding in') pasta sauces, fish cakes, frittata, stews etc.
Sweet potato 	Late Spring - early Summer Across Queensland	Cutting (or tuber)	- Find the best variety for your area. - Don't allow the leaves to spread far (prune them or heap them back on top of each other). This will direct energy to tuber growth. - Harvest after 6 months.	Kids love digging - be gentle and thorough! Great, nutritious substitute for potato, including oven-baked chips. The young leaves are great for eating - lightly stir fry with garlic, ginger and sesame.
Radish 	Year round Across Queensland	Seed	- Try different varieties. - Radishes are one of the fastest-growing crops (6 weeks to harvest). - Sow the fine seed in rows. - Thin sprouts, leaving 1 plant every 10cm. - Eat sprouts raw or stir-fry.	Fast growing, so great for kids. Radishes come in all colours of the rainbow, and from mild to very peppery. Great raw, stir-fried or added to sushi fillings. A real staple of Japanese food.

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Nasturtium 	Aug-Feb: Temperate Feb-Sep: All other areas	Seed Seedling	• Sun or shade. • Great under fruit trees, and good for attracting pollinators. • Pretty plant in a range of colours.	Kids love sucking the nectar from the flowers. The flowers and leaves are mildly peppery. Add to salads or wrap leaves around rice. Green seeds are edible - very spicy! Great for pickling.
Silverbeet and Rainbow chard 	Mar-Oct: Tropical & Arid Sep-Mar: Temperate All year: Subtropical	Seed Seedling	• Boost growth with water and fertiliser (e.g. chook poo or fish emulsion). • Harvest only what you need (unlike whole plants sold in supermarkets). • Rainbow chard is especially colourful in the garden and on the plate.	Watch the quantities shrink as it's cooked. Very adaptable leafy green for stir-fry, stews, soup etc. Great alternative for spinach - use in spanakopita (Greek spinach and feta filo pie). FUN FACT - same species as beetroot, just a different variety.
Basil 	All year: Tropical Aug - Feb: All other areas	Seed Seedling	• Great companion for tomatoes - in the garden and kitchen. • Lovely fragrance. • Pull off flower buds regularly to prolong leafy growth. • Genovese or sweet is the classic ingredient of pesto, but other varieties are great to grow - Thai, lemon, purple etc. • Many are long lived bushes. • Flowers are bee food.	Tomatoes and sweet basil are cornerstones of an Italian pizza/pasta themed garden. Basil is flavour-packed. Get kids to prepare: slice into fine ribbons with a knife ('chiffonade'); work to a paste (pesto) with garlic and pumpkin seeds in a mortar and pestle; blitz in a food processor. Add leaves as garnish to pizza.

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Tomatoes 	All year: Subtropical Feb - Aug: Tropical & Arid Aug - Dec: Temperate.	Seed Seedling	- Cherry tomatoes and Roma varieties are less prone to pests and diseases, and don't require pruning. - Cherry tomatoes are great as they freely self-sow in warmer areas. - Provide calcium with a dusting of lime or gypsum to the soil. - Romas will need a trellis or A-frame to grow on.	Such a versatile veggie, raw or cooked. Preserve them in sauces, or by semi-drying them in the oven and covering with olive oil. Try making green tomato pickles (pick the fruit before any critters eat them).
Malabar spinach 	All year: Tropical Aug - Feb: All other areas	Seed	- Good alternative to English spinach - and a long-lived plant. - A climbing spinach, needing a trellis or other support. - Likes a drink of water.	Substitute for spinach. Pretty heart-shaped leaves are good to wrap around rice or mince. The red-stemmed variety is especially attractive, and the edible red berries (seeds) can make a colourful dye.

For more information, see www.hw.qld.gov.au or contact Keith at potcgympie@bfgv.com.au

Other sources of information:

- www.annettemcfarlane.com.au
- www.organicgardener.com.au

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