

# Food Plant Solutions Brief Guide to Food Plant Gardens in the Upper Hunter

## Our bodies need nutrients to be healthy and strong - nutritious food provides these:

- Starch:** Starch provides sustained energy for the body.
- Protein:** Protein helps the body repair cells and make new ones. Protein is also important for growth and development in children, teens, and pregnant women. Symptoms of protein deficiency include wasting and shrinkage of muscle tissue, and slow growth (in children).
- Vitamin A:** Vitamin A is very important for eyesight and fighting disease, particularly in infants, young children and pregnant women. People who are short of Vitamin A have trouble seeing at night.
- Vitamin C:** Vitamin C helps us avoid sickness, heal wounds, prevent infections and absorb iron from food. Severe vitamin C deficiency increases the risk of scurvy with symptoms such as inflammation of the gums, scaly skin, nosebleed and painful joints.
- Iron:** Iron is important because it helps red blood cells carry oxygen from the lungs to the rest of the body. Low levels of iron cause anaemia, which makes us feel fatigued. Iron is also important to maintain healthy cells, skin, hair and nails. Iron is more available when Vitamin C is also present.
- Zinc:** Zinc is particularly important for the health of young children and teenagers, and to help recovery from illness. It is needed for the body's immune system to work properly. It plays a role in cell division, cell growth, wound healing, and the breakdown of carbohydrates. Zinc is also needed for the senses of smell and taste. Zinc deficiency is characterized by stunted growth, loss of appetite, and impaired immune function.



# Starting a garden

## **PLAN:**

Identify a suitable location for the garden. Factors to consider include:

A site that receives 6-8 hours a day of sunlight and is not shaded by buildings or trees.

Easy access – a garden that is difficult to get to will not be maintained.

Protection from predators like native animals. If this is an issue, consider what can be used as a barrier and install it before planting.

Adequate and easily accessed water, whether it be a garden hose or a watering can.

## **TOOLS AND EQUIPMENT:**

What do you need to turn over the soil, to plant seeds and seedlings (e.g. spade, hand trowel, hoe) and how will soil be moved to cover seeds (e.g. rake). Can you borrow tools to reduce your start-up costs?

## **SIZE:**

Gardens can be all different sizes. Plan the size of your garden – what space is available and how much time do you have? Start small and increase the area as you become more confident. If space is limited, remember plants can be successfully grown in containers or pots.

## **BUILD:**

Clear the area, removing any existing plants and large weeds (turn the soil – dig, lift and turn it over onto itself). Once the soil has been loosened,

spread compost and work it into the soil. Avoid stepping on freshly turned soil, as this will compact the soil and undo your hard work. Once the digging is complete, smooth the surface with a rake and water thoroughly. Allow the bed to rest for several days before planting. Use a good quality potting medium if using pots and containers.

## **PLANT:**

Seeds and seedlings can be purchased from nurseries, garden centres and most hardware stores. A packet of seeds will grow a lot of seedlings but take longer to mature than transplanted seedlings. Plant seeds and seedlings in accordance with their specific directions and apply sufficient water to ensure the soil around the seeds and/or seedling roots is moist. Consider how tall and wide each plant will grow when planning the space between plants. Information on seed packets or seedling labels will indicate the appropriate distance between neighbouring plants. Add a thick layer of mulch around seedlings to help keep the soil moist. Make small signs to stick in the ground to show what you have planted.

## **MAINTAIN:**

Plants need regular watering, which ideally should occur in the morning, never in the heat of the day. Weeds will compete with the plants for nutrients and water, so it is important to keep them to a minimum. Hand weeding and adding mulch around seedlings will help keep weeds under control.

## Starchy Staples provide energy and dietary fibre

**Common name:** Jerusalem artichoke

**Scientific name:** *Helianthus tuberosus*

**Cultivation:** Plants are grown from vegetative setts. These can be dormant for 7 months before they will grow. The flowers on the plants are removed to increase the yield. Tubers are often sweetest after a frost.

**Use:** The tubers are eaten boiled or baked. They can be steamed, fried, pickled, pureed, or used in soups and casseroles. They can be eaten raw in salads. Roasted tubers are used as a coffee substitute

**Nutrients:** energy, protein, iron

**Common name:** Potato

**Scientific name:** *Solanum tuberosum*

**Cultivation:** Plants are grown from tubers. Large tubers can be cut to include a bud or "eye". A seed piece of 40-50 g is suitable. It is best to inter-crop as this stops bacterial wilt spreading. The plant is surrounded by dirt when 20-25 cm tall. Later the tubers need to be kept covered with dirt.

**Use:** The tubers are cooked and eaten. They are also fried, canned, and made into starch. The tubers are boiled, baked, roasted, mashed, and used in soups, stews, dumplings, pancakes and potato salads.

**Nutrients:** energy, iron, zinc

**Common name:** Parsnip

**Scientific name:** *Pastinaca sativa*

**Cultivation:** Plants are grown from seeds. Sow direct into final growing position. Keep soil moist after planting seeds, seeds must not dry out or poor germination results. Often a board placed on top of the row after planting and lifting off as soon as seedlings emerge aids germination.

**Use:** The root is cooked and eaten. It can be boiled, baked, fried or used in stews. The roots are also made into marmalade, syrup, beer and wine. The young shoots and leaves are added to soups or cooked and eaten as a vegetable. The seeds can be used as a spice.

**Nutrients:** energy



## Legumes provide protein for growth

**Common name:** Common bean

**Scientific name:** *Phaseolus vulgaris*

**Cultivation:** Plants are grown from seed, preferably sown in raised beds. Seeds remain viable for 2 years. Germination is normally good if seed has been well stored. Climbing types need stakes. Plants are self-fertilised. Beans can be intercropped with other plants. If grown on their own, bush types can be spaced at 25 cm x 25 cm. They can be sown closer together in rows wider apart to make weeding and harvesting easier. For dried beans, once the pods are mature and turning yellow, the whole plants are pulled, then dried and threshed. Flowering in most French bean varieties is not affected by day length.

**Use:** The young pods, leaves and mature seeds are edible. Dry seeds are soaked in water and boiled until soft.

**Nutrients:** protein, vit A

**Common name:** Pea

**Scientific name:** *Pisum sativum*

**Cultivation:** Plants are grown from seed. Seed can be collected for re-sowing. A spacing about 5 cm apart in rows 25 cm apart is suitable. Seed can be sown 3-5 cm deep. If rotting is a problem, plants can be supported off the ground. Seed can be sown in autumn directly into the garden or into punnets/trays and transplanted once germination has occurred.

**Use:** Mostly the young seeds are eaten. They can be eaten raw or cooked. Sometimes the young pods and leaves are eaten. The flowers are eaten in salads. The sprouted seeds are eaten. The young leaves and buds are cooked as a vegetable. The dry seeds are eaten. They are used in soups and stews and ground into flour.

**Nutrients:** seed (raw): protein, vit A, iron; seed (boiled): vit A

**Common name:** Broad bean

**Scientific name:** *Vicia faba*

**Cultivation:** The crop is grown from seed. Seeds are sown at 15-40 cm spacing. If the seed pod formation is poor, it can be improved by pinching out the tops of the plants when in flower. Hand pollination also helps. Plants are self-pollinated but also cross pollinated by insects.

**Use:** It is mostly the young beans that are eaten. The ripe beans and leaves are also edible. The dried beans can be boiled, ground into flour and added to soups or used for making tofu. Sprouted seeds are cooked and eaten.

**Nutrients:** seeds (dried): energy, protein, vit A, iron; seeds (fresh, raw): vit C, zinc

## Leafy greens are a source of iron

**Common name:** Silver beet

**Scientific name:** *Beta vulgaris subsp. cicla*

**Cultivation:** A spacing of 30cm between plants is suitable. Seed are sown 2.5 cm deep.

**Use:** The leaves and stalks are cooked and eaten. They can be eaten raw in salads. The leaf stalks can be cut from the leaf and cooked separately as an asparagus substitute.

**Nutrients:** vit A, vit C, iron, zinc

**Common name:** Kale

**Scientific name:** *Brassica oleracea var. acephala*

**Cultivation:** Plants are grown from seed. Seedlings can be transplanted 30 cm apart.

**Use:** The leaves are eaten boiled, steamed and used in soups and stews. The unopened flower buds are used like broccoli.

**Nutrients:** vit C, iron

**Common name:** Garden sorrel, Sheep's sorrel

**Scientific name:** *Rumex acetosa*

**Cultivation:** It can be grown from cuttings or division. It is also grown from seeds

**Use:** The leaves can be eaten raw but are often steamed or lightly boiled then eaten. They are eaten in salads or as a potherb. They are used in soups, omelettes, sauces and chutneys. The flowers are eaten as a vegetable or used as a garnish. The juice of the leaves is used to curdle milk.

**Nutrients:** energy, protein, vit C, iron



## **Fruit** are an important source of vitamins and dietary fibre

**Common name:** Strawberry

**Scientific name:** *Fragaria x ananassa*

**Cultivation:** Plants are grown from runners. These runners form roots and then new plants. Plants are spaced about 45 cm apart in rows 75 cm apart.

**Use:** The ripe fruit are eaten raw. They are also used in desserts, jams, preserves and for flavouring.

**Nutrients:** vit C

**Common name:** Cape Gooseberry

**Scientific name:** *Physalis peruviana*

**Cultivation:** Plants should be spaced 45 cm apart. They regrow from seed each year. Do not plant seedlings or sow seed until all frosts are finished as they are frost tender.

**Use:** The ripe fruit are eaten fresh or cooked. They are used for jam or can be dried, preserved, stewed, pureed, or used in pies, cakes, jellies and sauces.

**Nutrients:** vit A, vit C

**Common name:** European Red Raspberry

**Scientific name:** *Rubus idaeus*

**Cultivation:** Rooted cuttings are used. Soft wood cuttings can be used. Fruit are usually produced on one year old canes. After harvesting, the fruit bearing canes are cut at ground level and removed.

**Use:** The fruit are eaten raw. They are also used in jams, drinks and for sweets. Young leaves can be cooked and eaten as a vegetable.

**Nutrients:** fruit (raw): protein, vit C, zinc



## **Vegetables** are an important source of vitamins and dietary fibre

**Common name:** Kohl rabi

**Scientific name:** *Brassica oleracea var. gongylodes*

**Cultivation:** The seed can be sown direct or in a nursery and transplanted.

**Use:** The bulb is cooked and eaten and can be added to soups or lightly simmered in coconut milk with spices. The young leaves are edible. It is best eaten when young before needing to be peeled and this preserves the flavour.

**Nutrients:** protein, vit C, iron

**Common name:** Broccoli

**Scientific name:** *Brassica oleracea var. italica*

**Cultivation:** The seeds are planted in a nursery then transplanted after 4-6 weeks. A spacing of 60 cm x 60 cm is suitable.

**Use:** The central flower is cooked and eaten. The leaves are edible. The sprouted seeds are eaten.

**Nutrients:** vit A, vit C, iron, zinc

**Common name:** Carrot

**Scientific name:** *Daucus carota subsp. sativus*

**Cultivation:** They are grown from direct sown seed. The seed are small, mix with sand before sowing to allow a more even distribution of plants. A spacing 5 cm apart in rows 15-20 cm apart is suitable. Often this spacing is achieved by thinning out plants.

**Use:** The roots and leaves are edible. The young leaves are used in soups. The roots can be eaten raw or cooked, steamed, fried, pickled, made into jam, or used in stews. Carrot seed oil is used as a flavouring. The juice is used raw and fermented.

**Nutrients:** vit A, vit C, iron, zinc



## Acknowledgements:

This guide is based on information from the Food Plants International (FPI) database, “Edible Plants of the World”, developed by Tasmanian agricultural scientist Bruce French AO. “Food Plant Solutions Brief Guide to Food Plant Gardens in “the

Upper Hunter, NSW” is a limited selection of food plants, which is intended as a **Draft Guide only**, to identify some local food plants that have high levels of nutrients that are important to human nutrition. This guide has been developed with the best intention to create interest and improve understanding of the important local food plants in the Upper Hunter, NSW. It is not a comprehensive guide of food plants for the Upper Hunter, NSW. Other important nutritious plants may be equally useful. Please contact Food Plant Solutions if you would like further information about these, or more detailed information about the ones selected.

Food Plant Solutions Rotary Action Group was initiated by the Rotary Club of Devonport North to assist in creating awareness of the edible plant database developed by Food Plants International, and its potential in addressing malnutrition and food security in any country of the world. In June 2007, Food Plant Solutions was established as a project of Rotary District 9830, the Rotary Club of Devonport North and Food Plants International. The primary objective of the project is to increase awareness and understanding of the vast food resource that exists in the form of local plants, which are well adapted to the prevailing conditions in which they are to be grown, and how this resource may be used to address hunger, malnutrition and food security. For more information, visit the website [www.foodplantsolutions.org](http://www.foodplantsolutions.org) or email [info@foodplantsolutions.org](mailto:info@foodplantsolutions.org)

**Disclaimer:** This Guide has been produced using information from the “Edible Plants of the World” database compiled by Bruce French of Food Plants International. Although great care has been taken by Food Plants International and Food Plant Solutions, neither organisation, or the people involved in the compilation of the database or this Field Guide:

- makes any expressed or implied representation as to the accuracy of the information contained in the database or the Field Guide, and cannot be held legally responsible or accept liability for any errors or omissions
- can be held responsible for claims arising from the mistaken identity of plants or their inappropriate use
- assume responsibility for sickness, death or other harmful effects resulting from eating or using any plant described in the database or this Field Guide

Always be sure you have the correct plant and undertake proper preparation methods.

Compost - if it has lived once, it can  
live again.

