

The humble courgette is the unsung hero of the garden and kitchen. Just a couple of these versatile plants will provide an abundance of tender, delicious courgettes

Courgettes should be top of the list for every gardener; they are the perfect crop to get started when growing your own food. These tender, juicy fruits are delicious grated or shaved into ribbons and eaten raw in salads and coleslaw with your favourite salad dressing, or barbecue chunks on bamboo skewers for scrumptious smoky flavour. Courgettes can be used to make delicious savoury pasta dishes, roasted vegetables, ratatouille, quiche, chutneys and pickles, jams and so much more. There is even a fabulous moist and fudgy chocolate cake recipe that has courgette as the main ingredient.

FRESH FOOD

Secure your very own homegrown supply of fresh produce by growing this incredibly useful plant. Strictly speaking the courgette is a fruit, but since we use it for savoury dishes it is regarded as a vegetable and it's a very versatile one. Each plant bears male and female flowers in abundance. You can pick the finger thick immature female fruits complete with flowers and coat them in batter to make tempura, or use them to enhance and decorate summer dishes where the garnish is edible too. Nothing beats that freshly picked flavour. The male courgette

flowers can be stuffed and baked, or torn loosely into salads where they add a splash of colour and a soft texture. And if you let the fruits mature past the finger stage then the courgettes can take centre stage in all manner of tasty summer dishes and even be used in ribbons as a low calorie, healthy pasta alternative.

GROW COURGETTES

Not only are courgettes incredibly easy to grow, but they are great looking plants with fabulous foliage and are hugely productive too. Courgettes can be grown in large tubs and planters, or even within a flower

border. If you've got a veg patch or an allotment they are the perfect choice. You only need two or three plants to provide enough courgettes to feed a small family. But you can grow a few extra and share the plants, or grow them on and be the local courgette supplier, dishing out bags of courgettes to friends and family. Grow two or three different types so that the fruit you pick generously contributes to your own fresh veg supply and really enhances your summer menus. It's the vegetable to feed the five thousand and should be the first one on your list of things to grow.



EASY FROM SEED

Courgettes are very easy to grow. If you buy ready grown plants at the garden centre or mail order the choice is fairly limited. But if you grow from seed there is a wonderful diversity of plant types. You can choose compact bushy varieties, which are great for large planters, or yellow fruiting varieties to add some colour to your summer menus. But there are also plants with lovely round courgettes, which are great for baking and stuffing and even clambering varieties that can be trained over lumps and humps in the garden such as a sprawling compost heap.



YEAR OF THE courgette

