

Decorative plants in baskets are ideal for schools without gardens or areas to cultivate. They occupy minimum space in the playground, can be planted up in the classroom and are less likely to be attacked by pests. They are also an excellent way to brighten up dull corners. Growing fruit and vegetables in baskets provides an interesting alternative to growing flowers, and pupils can monitor their development and ultimately harvest and eat the crop.

CURRICULUM LINKS

Foundation Stage
1,2,4,6

Science
KS1 – SC1, SC2, SC3
KS2 – SC1, SC2, SC3
KS3 – SC1, SC2
KS4 – SC1

PSHE & Citizenship
KS1 – 1ac, 2abcegh, 3a, 5abcd
KS2 – 1c, 2ahj, 3a, 4a, 5ade

HOW TO CULTIVATE Successful Hanging Baskets

For the Growing Schools Garden, Brockhill Park Secondary School in Kent grew several varieties of cherry tomatoes in their hanging baskets, as well as courgettes and ornamental gourds.

Wire or metal mesh baskets look good. Solid plastic baskets, on the other hand, are cheaper; don't dry out so quickly, and may be less attractive to garden thieves. Choosing the right sized basket is important, to ensure it retains enough moisture. A 35cm-40 cm diameter basket will stay damp more effectively, having a smaller surface to volume ratio than smaller baskets. However, if the pupils are to take their baskets home, then a 25cm or 30cm size is more practical.

Line the basket with a suitable material which needs to be porous but strong enough to hold the compost in place. Sphagnum moss is no longer recommended, because excessive commercial collection of this plant from bogs and lowland fens is destroying these fragile ecosystems. Instead, try liners made from old woollen fabric, with perforated plastic inner liners to aid water retention. Pupils could carry out their own experiments to see which material works best, using anything from old jerseys or hessian sacks to turf sods or conifer clippings.

Then add a good multipurpose compost and mix in a slow-release fertiliser to reduce the need to feed the plants so often throughout the season. Most plants will still benefit from additional liquid feed once fruiting starts.

Tomato plants are easy to grow from seed and a good fruit to start with if you have not cultivated hanging baskets before. Peppers, dwarf peas, dwarf runner beans and French beans are other good vegetables to grow. Ornamental gourds are useful for craft work. For fruits try growing strawberries or even passion fruit. If you don't want to raise plants from seed, many plants are available as seedlings or plantlets.

Tomato seed is flat and tends to stick together, so separate them before sowing. Start the seed off individually in small pots or divided trays. Sow in mid-March in a heated propagator or on a warm sunny windowsill. When their roots fill the starter pots, first transplant them to bigger pots, and later into

the baskets. Use a dibber or small trowel to make holes large enough for each plant, taking care not to damage the roots. Put just one plant in small baskets (25cm), three in the larger ones (40cm).

Once established, the tomatoes will provide a great display of colour, climbing up the basket chains and cascading over the edges of the basket.

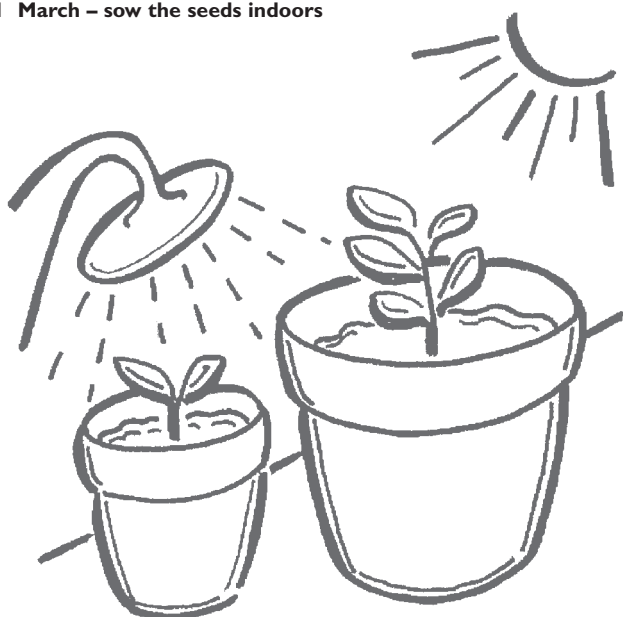
As the plants grow, remember to keep the baskets well watered, particularly the gourds and squashes, which require a lot of water. You may choose to set up your own renewable energy watering system to save time and resources. Like many fruits and vegetables, tomatoes, gourds, squashes and strawberries will reach their peak during the summer holidays. However, having the plants in baskets means they can easily be taken home by pupils to enjoy over the summer.

There are many different varieties of fruits and vegetables you can grow. For tasty cherry tomatoes try 'Tumbler', an ideal basket variety which will trail down over the sides. For colour contrast you could also grow 'Yellow Tumbling Tom'.

For ornamental gourds try 'Small-Fruited', 'Bottle Gourds' or 'Warted' varieties, all of which produce small gourds suitable for craft activities once mature.

Good varieties of courgettes and edible squashes, such as 'Little Gem' or 'Rolet', may be picked from July onwards.

1 March – sow the seeds indoors



2 Line the basket



3 Transplant the small plants



4 Let the plants trail over the edges of the basket



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

These companies sell a wide range of vegetable seeds, and some sell fruit seeds too: **CHILTERN SEEDS** ☎ 01229 581137 www.chilternseeds.co.uk (unusual seeds) **DT BROWN** ☎ 08456 014656 www.dtbrownseeds.co.uk **FUTURE FOODS** ☎ 01934 713623 www.futurefoods.com (peas & beans) **KINGS SEED** ☎ 01376 570000 www.kingsseeds.com **MR FOTHERGILL'S** ☎ 01638 552512 www.mr-fothergills.co.uk (includes children's seeds) **THE ORGANIC GARDENING CATALOGUE** ☎ 01932 253666 www.organiccatalog.com (organic and historic seeds) **MARSHALLS** ☎ 01945 466711 www.marshalls-seeds.co.uk **SIMPSON'S SEED** ☎ 01883 715242 (tomatoes) **SUFFOLK HERBS** ☎ 01376 572456 www.suffolkherbs.com (gourds & squashes, traditional British varieties) **SUTTONS SEEDS** ☎ 01803 696363 www.suttons-seeds.co.uk (includes children's seeds) **TERRE DE SEMENCES** ☎ 01227 731815 www.terredesemences.com (heritage varieties from all over the world) **THOMPSON & MORGAN** ☎ 01473 688821 www.thompson-morgan.com **TOTALLY TOMATOES** ☎ 01803 389516 www.totallytomato.com (hundreds of tomatoes and peppers) **UNWINS** ☎ 01945 588522 www.unwins-mailorder.co.uk