

## How to grow summer crops



THE FOLLOWING IS GENERAL ADVICE for raising the crops we grew in our backyard for a summertime feast (for the full story, including recipes, see [sunset.com/oneblockfeast](http://sunset.com/oneblockfeast)). Because growing conditions vary by region (and even micro-region), the best source for local planting information is your county's agricultural cooperative extension office; find yours at [www.csrees.usda.gov](http://www.csrees.usda.gov). For this feast's crops, we've put together region-specific planting and harvesting timelines for each of them at [sunset.com/oneblockfeast](http://sunset.com/oneblockfeast) (click on Here's What We Planted, then scroll down to Our Garden Calendars). Other important resources are Sunset.com (search by crop name) and the *Sunset Western Garden Book* (Sunset Publishing, 2007; \$34.95), which offers detailed planting advice on more than 8,000 plants, including all the edibles grown for this project. Local independent nurseries are excellent sources of information too and usually stock or can order the seeds or seedlings you need, but we've listed mail-order sources here as well. Note: Most of the edibles we planted thrive in full sun, which means the planting location needs at least six hours of sun per day. All (except rosemary, oregano, and marjoram) will benefit from regular irrigation and periodic applications of organic fertilizer, such as fish emulsion, or plenty of compost, if planted in the ground.

### WHAT WE GREW Barley 'Lacey'

A high-yield, low-protein 6-row malting type developed for the brewing industry. (To see how we're using it for own beer, go to <http://oneblockdiet.sunset.com> and click on "Team Beer").

**Seed/seedling source** Howe Seeds, [www.howeseeds.com](http://www.howeseeds.com)

**Best site** Full sun; fertile, moist, well-drained soil

**Days to harvest** Anywhere from 90 to 120 days from seed.

**Planting and care** Plant after soil has warmed to 50° F, in moist, not wet soil. Sow seeds 1 to 2 inches deep and about 3 in. apart. Space rows 7 in. apart. Water regularly.

**How to harvest** When plant is thoroughly dry and golden brown, clip off a couple of inches above ground. Either pick seeds from seed heads by hand (laborious, but efficient; we did this) or try gently beating bundles of stalks against a wide-mesh screen to loosen seeds from heads (seeds should drop through mesh).

### Basil 'Genovese'

A classic green-leafed variety whose spicy-sweet leaves make wonderful pesto and give a lift to salads.

**Seed/seedling source** Stokes Seeds, [www.stokeseeds.com](http://www.stokeseeds.com)

**Best site** Sunny, with well-drained, moderately fertile soil.

**Days to harvest** 88 days from seed.

**Planting and care** Sow seeds in garden mid spring through early to mid summer. Place ¼ inch deep, 2 to 3 inches apart, in rows 18 inches apart. Thin seedlings to 1 foot apart. Water as needed to keep soil evenly moist. Watch for slugs and snails.

**How to harvest** Pinch off branch tips and flowers to keep leaves coming. Pick leaves whenever you need them.

### Chiles

Thick-fleshed, mildly spicy, high-yielding 'Poblanos' and small, hot, bright-flavored 'Serrano'. (Dried poblanos are called anchos.)

**Seed/seedling source** Seeds of Change, [www.seedsofchange.com](http://www.seedsofchange.com); Burpee Seed Co., [www.burpee.com](http://www.burpee.com)

**Best site** Full sun; fertile, well-drained soil.

**Days to harvest** 80 to 110 days from seed; 80 to 90 days from seedlings.

**Planting and care** Plant nursery seedlings when soil is warm in spring (chiles are heat lovers). Place plants 18 to 24 inches apart. In containers, one or two plants are plenty. To start from seed, sow seeds

indoors 6–8 weeks before the last spring frost. Let the soil dry out between waterings, and cut back on water as the chiles mature to concentrate their flavor.

**How to harvest** Harvest in the red or green stage (Serranos are usually harvested green, but have a wonderful warm, ripe flavor when red). Snip pods off with scissors or pruners.

### Chives 'Fine Leaf'

Chives are related to onions and garlic. They grow in delicate-looking clusters of narrow, slender green leaves that are loaded with flavor—like a green onion, but more intense. In mid spring, they produce clusters of lilac-pink blossoms (also edible).

**Seed/seedling source** Renee's Garden, [www.reneesgarden.com](http://www.reneesgarden.com)

**Days to harvest** Leaves can be harvested any time

**Best site** Sunny or partially shaded, with fairly rich, well-drained soil.

**Planting and care** Grow from seed in spring or from nursery plants. Sow seeds ⅛ to ¼ inch deep and 8 to 12 inches apart. Space nursery plants 8 to 12 inches apart, and water regularly.

**How to harvest** Chives will send up pickable leaves from early summer until first

frost. If you start from seed, harvest lightly in the first year. Snip stems near base. Cut flowers while still in bud.

## Corn 'Honey Select'

Triple-sweet types like this one combine great corn flavor with especially sweet, tender kernels. An All-America Selection, 'Honey Select' hybrid sweet corn is noted as being easy for the home gardener to grow from seed. It does not have to be isolated from sugary-enhanced or other sugary-type cobs. It is equally prized for eating fresh, canning, or freezing.

**Seed/seedling source** Ed Hume Seeds, [www.humeseeds.com](http://www.humeseeds.com); Park Seed, [www.parkseed.com](http://www.parkseed.com)

**Best site** Full sun. Moist, deeply cultivated, well-drained soil. Fertilize and cultivate prior to planting.

**Days to harvest** 80 days from seed.

**Planting and care** Plant after soil has warmed, in moist, not wet soil. Plant in blocks of short rows. Sow seeds 1 to 2 inches deep and 4 to 6 inches apart. Space rows 2 to 3 feet apart. Thin to 8 to 12 inches apart when seedlings are 6 inches tall. Water regularly and deeply.

**How to harvest** Harvest ears when silks turn brown and kernels release milky juice when you puncture them with a fingernail (clear juice means they're not ripe yet; pasty liquid means they're overripe).

## Cucumber 'Diva'

Very productive; sweet, crunchy flesh; doesn't get bitter, even if watering is irregular; no spikes on skin; disease-resistant. A 2002 All-America Selection, 'Diva' cucumber is a vining type that reaches 5 to 6 feet tall and 1 to 2 feet wide.

**Seed/seedling source** Park Seed; [www.parkseed.com](http://www.parkseed.com)

**Best site** Full sun. Moist, well-drained, normal or loamy soil.

**Days to harvest** 58 days from seed; 32 days from seedlings.

**Planting and care** Sow seeds after the last frost date, or start seed indoors 4 weeks before the last frost date. Choose whether to grow your crop in rows or in hills. For rows, sow a cluster of 2 or 3 seeds 1 inch deep, 8 to 12 inches apart; space rows 3 to

6 feet apart. When seedlings are a few inches tall, thin to 1 per cluster.

For hills, make soil mounds 4 to 6 feet apart in each direction and sow clusters of 4 to 6 seeds 1 inch deep in each hill; thin seedlings to 2 or 3 per hill. Cucumbers are extremely thirsty plants. Water regularly throughout the growing season; be especially vigilant about watering from the time the fruit begins to swell.

**How to harvest** For cucumbers of supreme crunch and sweetness, harvest at 6 to 8 inches, when they're still young. Harvest several times a week to keep new fruit coming.

## Edamame 'Sayamusume'

High yields from a 2-foot-tall bush plant; soybeans are nutty and buttery in flavor and high in protein.

**Seed source** Renee's Garden, [www.reneesgarden.com](http://www.reneesgarden.com)

**Best site** Full sun, well-drained soil. Plant after weather warms, with night temperatures staying above 50 degrees.

**Days to harvest** Approximately 85 days from seed.

**Planting and care** Sow seeds 1 inch deep and 3 inches apart in rows 2 feet apart. When seedlings are several inches tall, thin to final spacing of 6 inches apart.

**How to harvest** In summer, pluck off pods when they're nice and swollen (meaning the beans have reached full size inside) but still green.

## Garlic 'Spanish Roja'

Hardneck type, with large, firm cloves that peel easily; pungent but not biting; cloves turn buttery soft when cooked.

**Seed/seedling source** Irish Eyes Garden Seeds, [www.gardencityseeds.net](http://www.gardencityseeds.net)

**Best site** Sun with rich, well-drained soil. Suited to colder climates.

**Days to harvest** Set out cloves in fall for an early-summer harvest. In cold-winter climates, mulch heavily at the onset of winter to help prevent soil heaving, which can force the cloves out of the ground.

**Planting and care** Plant cloves with pointed ends up and tops 1 inch deep, 4 to 8 inches apart, in rows 16 inches apart. Irrigate evenly and weed regularly or mulch.

Rake back mulch in spring and pinch off any blossoms that develop. When leaf tips start to turn yellowish brown, stop watering.

**How to harvest** When all the leaves are brown except for a few. Lift bulbs out carefully with a garden fork; pulling by hand may crack bulbs and decrease shelf life. Hang bulbs in bundles to dry, in a dry, well-ventilated area until skins are papery, about 3 weeks. Remove dirt, cut off most of the roots, then store bulbs in mesh bags in a cool, airy place out of direct sunlight.

## Hops

The attractive little flowers grow on a mammoth climbing vine (12 to 18 feet; train them onto a tall, sturdy trellis). They provide a key flavoring ingredient in beer, and we grew them for that purpose. Many types grow easily in our climate, and it's good to have choices: citrusy, floral 'Cascade'; 'Centennial', similar to 'Cascade' but with a bitter edge; and spicy, herbal 'Nugget'.

**Seed source** Buy rhizomes from Freshops, [www.freshops.com](http://www.freshops.com), or Nichols Garden Nursery, [www.nicholsgardennursery.com](http://www.nicholsgardennursery.com)

**Best site** Full sun and light, well-drained soil; provide strong support system for plant to climb.

**Days to harvest** 150 days (5 months) from seed.

**Planting and care** After the last frost (March-May), plant rhizomes vertically, with the buds pointing up, about 2 inches below the soil surface. Hops of the same variety can be planted 3 feet apart; plant different kinds at least 5 feet apart to keep them from becoming entangled. Mulch soil and keep it moist. The hop plant requires frequent light watering.

**How to harvest** Flowers will be ready to harvest between July and September, when cones turn pale green and yellow lupulin glands (pollen-like grains) are readily apparent underneath the bracts. When squeezed, the flower cones should feel slightly papery and have a pronounced odor.

## Lemon 'Eureka'

A good all-around lemon, large and tart and juicy. Bears year-round.

**Plant source** Just about any nursery near you; sold as grafted plants in 2- to 15-gallon cans.

**Best site** Sun with rich, fast-draining soil. Digging in a 4- to 6-in. layer of compost to a depth of 1 foot helps make the soil more porous.

**Days to harvest** Depends on age of plant you buy. Fruit production generally begins when a tree is 3 or 4 years old.

**Planting and care** Plant in spring after all danger of frost is past. Remove any fruit before planting from containers, avoiding those that are root-bound. Add a 2-in. layer of mulch to help regulate soil moisture and prevent grass and weeds from growing over roots. If your area is hot, wrap newly planted trees with paper bands (available from nurseries) to prevent sunburn. Water consistently (twice a week in normal summer weather), and apply citrus fertilizer several times during the growing season.

**How to harvest** When fruit feels heavy in the hand and looks fully formed, pick it and try it. Citrus won't ripen off the tree, so let sampling be your judge as to when to pick. Ripe lemons can hang on the tree for months and be fine, but if they get puffy, they're too old.

## Lemongrass

Intensely aromatic and citrusy; a key ingredient in Southeast Asian cuisine. Lemongrass makes a wonderful end-of-dinner drink that is stimulating and soothing at the same time.

**Seedling source** Nichols Garden Nursery, [www.nicholsgardennursery.com](http://www.nicholsgardennursery.com)

**Best site** Full sun. Rich, well-drained soil.

**Days to harvest** Flavor is best when bulbous leaf base is about 1/2 in. diameter; growth rate depends on climate (plants grow fastest in tropical weather)

**Planting and care** Buy a small potted plant and repot in a larger pot or in the ground once all danger of frost is past. Eventually it will grow into a clump 3 to 4 feet tall and equally wide. During the growing season, water well and feed monthly with half-strength fish emulsion. Lemongrass is very sensitive to frost, so move potted plants indoors to a bright spot in winter or cover

in freezing weather.

**How to harvest** Push an outside stem to the side, then twist and pull it off. Discard leaves (or twist in knots and steep in boiling water, for tea).

## Marjoram, Sweet

Sweet marjoram bears a strong resemblance to its next of kin, oregano, but its little leaves are softer and finer-textured, and the plant has its own distinctive aroma.

**Seed/seedling source** Renee's Garden, [www.reneesgarden.com](http://www.reneesgarden.com)

**Best site** Sunny, with especially well-drained soil; or indoors on a sunny windowsill.

**Days to harvest** Leaves can be harvested any time.

**Planting and care** Purchase nursery plants in spring and plant them 9 inches apart. Keep the soil moist, not soggy, until plants are established; then water less. Mature plants thrive on little water. To plant from seed: Sow in spring after soil has warmed. Sow very thinly in a fine-textured bed; cover seed lightly. Keep the seed bed evenly moist and well-weeded while seedlings are young.

**How to harvest** For a stronger flavor, cut stems when they are in bud (the blossoms are edible, too).

## Melons

We grew luscious, fragrant, cream-colored 'Sharlyn', which tastes like a cross between a honeydew and a cantaloupe; seedless 'Sugar Baby' watermelon, a small, crisp, juicy melon that won't take up an entire shelf in the fridge; and deep orange, meltingly soft 'Ambrosia' cantaloupe.

**Seed source** Seeds of Change, [www.seeds.ofchange.com](http://www.seeds.ofchange.com)

**Best site** Full sun. Rich, well-drained soil.

**Days to harvest** Approximately days from seed.

**Planting and care** Plant outdoors after the soil has warmed to at least 60° (raised beds warm up faster than flat ground). Mix a 2- to 3-inch layer of compost into the soil. Plant two or three seeds (or one seedling) per hole, 1 1/2 feet apart, in rows 4 to

6 feet apart. Use drip irrigation or a soaker hose to avoid wetting the foliage, and water often. When melons reach full size (but before they're mature), cut back on watering to avoid splitting and to create a more intensely flavorful melon.

**How to harvest** When fully ripe, cantaloupe types slip off the vine easily. Honeydews are ready when their color changes or when the leaf where the fruit attaches turns yellow. For watermelons, wait for the tendril next to the stem to wither and the whitish "resting spot" on the underside of the melon to turn from whitish to creamy yellow. Avoid twisting the melons as you check them; it can damage the stem and hence their nutrient supply.

## Onion 'Spanish White'

Large and evenly spherical, with good steady onion flavor; doesn't become sweet when cooked.

**Seed/seedling/sets source** Gurney's Seed & Nursery, [www.gurneys.com](http://www.gurneys.com)

**Best site** Sunny (or light shade), with fine-textured (well raked), loose, rich, well-drained soil.

**Days to harvest** 110 days from seed.

**Planting and care** Plant from seeds, nursery plants or sets (miniature, dormant onions). Put out plants or sets in spring, 4 to 6 weeks before the last frost date. Sow seeds when the soil has warmed to at least 35° and preferably 50°.

Sets are easiest and produce quick results, but they may bolt into flowers, rendering the onion inedible. Select the smallest sets available, because they are less likely to bolt than large ones. To plant, push the sets under the soil, aligning their pointed ends with the soil level; space 3 to 4 inches apart. Water regularly when green tops are growing. Weed regularly but carefully, because bulbs are easily damaged.

**How to harvest** Onions cure best if they're allowed to ease into maturity. Reduce the water toward the end of the growing cycle and water less frequently. When 25% to 50% of the foliage in your onion patch has fallen over, they're nearly ready. Stop watering and let the bulbs harden and cure in the ground for three weeks before you pull them. Store the bulbs in a cool,

dry spot (scattered on a stone floor of a shed or garage is ideal).

## Oregano, Italian

With its pungent scent and flavor, this herb is a familiar seasoning in Greek and Italian cuisines.

**Seed/seedling source** Mountain Valley Growers, [www.mountainvalleygrowers.com](http://www.mountainvalleygrowers.com)

**Best site** Sunny, with especially well-drained soil; or indoors on a sunny windowsill.

**Days to harvest** Leaves can be harvested any time.

**Planting and care** Purchase nursery plants in spring and plant them 18 inches apart. Keep the soil moist, not soggy, until plants are established; then water less. Mature plants thrive on little water. To plant from seed: Sow in spring after soil has warmed. Sow very thinly in a fine-textured (well raked) bed; cover seed lightly. Keep the seed bed evenly moist and well-weeded while seedlings are young.

**How to harvest** For a strong flavor, cut stems when they are in bud (the flowers are edible).

## Pattypan Squash

We grew disk-shaped, scalloped-edged 'Benning's Green Tint' (lime green) and 'Sunburst' (brilliant yellow) for their tender skins, delicate flavor, and few seeds. Plus they're small and perfect for stuffing.

**Seed/seedling source** For 'Benning's Green Tint': Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds, [www.rareseeds.com](http://www.rareseeds.com); Southern Exposure Seed Exchange, [www.southernexposure.com](http://www.southernexposure.com). For 'Sunburst': Park Seed, [www.parkseed.com](http://www.parkseed.com)

**Best site** Sunny, with rich, well-drained soil.

**Days to harvest** 50 days.

**Planting and care** Sow seeds indoors in a warm place 1 week or so before the last frost date, or wait until the soil has warmed (at least 2 weeks after the last frost date) and sow seeds outdoors. Sow seeds outdoors 2 to 3 inches deep, 12 inches apart, in rows 3 to 5 feet apart; thin seedlings to 2 to 4 feet apart. Water deeply. Avoid splashing water on leaves, stems, and flowers.

**How to harvest** Cut stems close to the

fruits with a sharp knife. Unless you need larger squashes for stuffing, harvest them when 2 to 3 inches wide. Regular harvesting keeps the plants producing.

## Peppermint

Much stronger than grocery-store spearmint, with dark, slender leaves and purplish stems. Mint spreads rapidly by underground stems and can be quite invasive in a kitchen garden. To keep it in bounds, always grow it in a pot.

**Seed/seedling source** Mountain Valley Growers, [www.mountainvalleygrowers.com](http://www.mountainvalleygrowers.com)

**Best site** Sunny or partially shaded, with average soil; mint is not fussy.

**Days to harvest** Leaves can be harvested any time.

**Planting and care** Set out young nursery plants in spring, spaced at least 6 inches apart, in containers. For best growth, keep the soil moist. Mint is usually free of pests and diseases. After 3 years, plants become bare in the center; replace them or dig up and divide each plant, and replant a few of the pieces with roots.

**How to harvest** Snip sprigs of new growth.

## Potato 'Yukon Gold'

The best all-purpose potato, with buttery, sweet flesh.

**Seed/seedling source** Gurney's Seed & Nursery, [www.gurneys.com](http://www.gurneys.com); Henry Fields Seed & Nursery, [www.henryfields.com](http://www.henryfields.com); Wood Prairie Farm, [www.woodprairie.com](http://www.woodprairie.com)

**Best site** Sunny, with fertile, fast-draining soil that is high in organic matter and has a pH below 5.5.

**Days to harvest** For fully mature potatoes, 90 to 120 days after planting.

**Planting and care** Plant in spring, 4 to 6 weeks before the last frost date. Two days before planting, cut the seed potatoes into chunks about 1½ inches square, each with two "eyes" from which sprouts will emerge. Allow them to dry a bit (callus) for 2 days before planting, which helps prevent rotting.

Dig furrows 6 to 8 inches wide and 4 inches deep, spaced 2½ to 3 feet apart. (Closer spacing will result in higher yields of smaller potatoes.) Set the chunks 12 to 18 inches apart in the furrows and cover

with 2 inches of soil.

After sprouts emerge, add another 2 inches of soil, leaving the foliage tips exposed. As the vines grow, continue adding soil, mounding until ridges are 4 inches high and 18 inches wide. The soil cover ensures the best temperature and moisture for the tubers. It also protects them from the sun, which would turn exposed areas green; such areas are poisonous, so cut them off before cooking. Keep soil uniformly moist during the growing season. Weed and watch for pests.

When most of the foliage has turned yellow to brown, water plants for the last time; wait 14 days and then cut away the vines. This "sets," or hardens, potato skins, so they won't peel or bruise easily.

**How to harvest** About 5 to 7 days after you have cut away the vines, preferably when the weather is cool and overcast, dig up the plants carefully with a spading fork; keep the fork 10 inches away from the plants to avoid injuring the potatoes. Lift the plant gently, shake off the loose soil, and pull the potatoes from the vines. Gather them in burlap bags or baskets and keep out of strong sunlight.

## Rosemary 'Tuscan Blue'

Upright grower, with broad, aromatic leaves. Chefs love this variety.

**Seed/seedling source** Goodwin Creek Gardens, [www.goodwincreekgardens.com](http://www.goodwincreekgardens.com)

**Best site** Sunny, with especially well-drained soil; tolerates poor, dry soil.

**Days to harvest** Leaves can be harvested any time.

**Planting and care** Set out small nursery plants in early spring (the typical kitchen garden will need only a few of these vigorous plants). Space at least 2 feet apart. Water regularly until the plants are established, then only keep them from drying out—rosemary often fails in soggy soil.

**How to harvest** Snip branch tips with scissors or pruners.

## Thyme, French

Aromatic and invaluable in a wide range of savory dishes.

**Seed/seedling source** Renee's Garden, [www.reneesgarden.com](http://www.reneesgarden.com)



**Best site** Sunny, with light, well-drained soil; tolerates poor, dry soil.

**Days to harvest** Leaves can be harvested any time.

**Planting and care** Set out small nursery plants in early spring, 8 to 12 inches apart. Water regularly until the plants are established, then only to keep the plants from drying out completely. To plant from seed: Sow in spring after soil has warmed. Sow very thinly in a fine-textured (well-raked) bed, cover seed lightly. Keep the seed bed evenly moist and well-weeded while seedlings are young.

**How to harvest** Snip branch tips (the flowers are edible too).

## Tomatoes

We grew five different types: 'Sungold' deep-yellow cherry tomatoes, for their consistently fabulous flavor and juiciness; prolific red cherry 'Sweet 1000'; medium-size, dependable red 'Early Girl'; citrusy, tart 'Green Zebra'; tender yellow-and-red streaked 'Marvel Stripe'; and succulent, magenta-purple 'Brandywine'.

**Seed/seedling source** For seeds, Seeds of Change, [www.seedschange.com](http://www.seedschange.com), or Renee's Garden, [www.reneesgarden.com](http://www.reneesgarden.com); for seedlings, your local nursery or Laurel's Heirloom Tomato Plants, [www.heirloomtomatoplants.com](http://www.heirloomtomatoplants.com)

**Best site** Full sun (at least 8 hours a day), with fertile, well-drained soil rich in organic matter.

**Days to harvest** 50 to 90 days after setting out plants.

**Planting and care** Plant seedlings as soon as danger of frost has passed. Support seedlings with sturdy stakes or wire cages to help prevent rot. If starting from seed, sow indoors in a warm place 5 to 7 weeks before you plan to set them out (at least 10 days after the last frost). Plant seedlings deeply, burying at least half of the stem to encourage vigorous root growth. Space widely, at least 2 feet apart. Water often enough to keep soil damp but not soggy, and keep water off leaves.

**How to harvest** Snip fruit from stem or gently pull by hand.

## Wheat

We planted organic soft white wheat for brewing our beer. Its carbohydrates convert to sugars when the grain is malted (sprouted), which then convert to alcohol during fermentation.

**Seed source** Homegrown Harvest, [www.homegrownharvest.com](http://www.homegrownharvest.com)

**Best site** Sunny, with well-drained, thoroughly tilled soil, with plenty of compost mixed in. Before planting, also till in blood meal and bonemeal (about 1 lb. each per 100 square feet).

**Days to harvest** 130 to 150 days from seed.

**Planting and care** Ours was a spring wheat, so we planted in late March. Scatter seeds over prepared soil (about 6 handfuls, or 1/4 lb., per 100 square feet), then rake seeds in so they are buried to about three times their diameter. After planting, soak soil thoroughly; water to keep moist (every week or two in dry weather). Weed regularly. When the wheat starts turning brown, stop watering; when a tooth can no longer dent the berries, the crop is ready to harvest.

**How to harvest** Snip the heavy golden seedheads from the stalks with scissors.

## Zucchini 'Trombetta'

Extremely vigorous climbing vine with big fan-shaped leaves and pale-green zucchini curved like trombones; sweet, mild, and stays crunchy even when cooked.

**Seed/seedling source** Renee's Garden, [www.reneesgarden.com](http://www.reneesgarden.com)

**Best site** Full sun, in rich soil amended with aged manure or compost.

**Days to harvest** Approximately 85 days from seed.

**Planting and care** Sow seeds indoors in a warm place 1 week or so before the last frost date; or wait until the soil has warmed, at least 2 weeks after the last frost date, and sow seeds outdoors. Sow 3 or 4 seeds 1 to 2 inches deep about 4 inches from a vertical support (you'll want to save space by growing this vigorous vine on a sturdy trellis, fence, or stakes). Thin to the strongest seedling for each stake or 1 to 2 feet apart. Water deeply.

**How to harvest** Best when fruits are 10 to 12 inches long; usually still tender up to 30 inches.