



Vegan-Organic Information Sheet #2 (60p)

Growing Beans for Drying

Growing with concern for people, animals and the environment

Organic growing involves treating the soil, the growing environment and the world environment as a resource to be preserved for future generations, rather than exploited in the short term. Vegan-organics means doing this without any animal products at all, which is not difficult when you know how. *All soil fertility ultimately depends on plants and minerals - these do not have to be passed through an animal in order to work.* Fertility can be maintained by plant-based composts, green manures, mulches, chipped branch wood, crop rotations and any other method that is sustainable, ecologically benign and not dependent upon animal exploitation.

The guidelines below do not attempt to be fully comprehensive. *The extent to which you adhere to any system really depends on you, your conscience and circumstances.* We can only do our best with our available time and money. The Vegan-Organic Network has now published comprehensive Stockfree Organic Standards, which are available to commercial growers and can also be used as a reference for home growers. Of course, no one person or organisation knows everything about the subject, so constant

co-operation and updating of ideas and information is needed.

Whilst conventional cultivation relies on synthetic chemicals and animal products, traditional organic production also generally relies on animal wastes and by-products. Both involve the exploitation of living creatures, and the inefficient use of land, water and energy resources. Vegan-organic methods minimise these drawbacks. Many people who are not themselves vegan or vegetarian are coming to appreciate that animal-free growing is the most sustainable system: it is the future of organics.

To bean or not to bean

French beans, runner beans, pole beans and many other varieties are mostly easy to grow using vegan-organic methods, and are very productive of fresh green pods. What is not always appreciated is that they can also provide quantities of tasty nutritious shelled beans, which can be used fresh or dried for storage, and are a traditional basis of many winter recipes. Broad beans and peas can also be dried using the same methods.

The information given in this sheet relates mainly to the UK but with appropriate variation would also apply to most regions of the world.

Growing techniques

We are not going to go into too much detail about the actual cultivation methods but some basic points are worth making; if you are unfamiliar with growing beans then consult a good handbook such as the Hessayon *Vegetable Expert* or one of the books listed below.

To grow your crop vegan-organically you just need reasonable soil with a good content of vegetable matter worked in, plenty of moisture, and an occasional boost with plant food. See Information Sheet #1 for details of liquid fertilizer. Beans do need fertile soil, well dug if it's at all heavy, but as long as plenty of moisture is available at the roots then large amounts of compost will not be needed every year.

It's helpful to start the plants in small pots and only put them in the growing situation when the soil has warmed up about early June; mulching will be beneficial once they are growing well. If planting direct into the ground, make sure the soil has warmed up, as runners in particular will not germinate in cool soil. Although runners are usually started from seed they are not annuals and the roots of the plants can be carefully lifted at the end of the season; stored over winter in a cool dry place these roots can be re-planted when the danger of frost has passed and they will grow again.

Although beans are included in standard crop rotations, many people grow runners in the same place year after year; the only problem this might encourage



Broad beans at Hardwicke

is anthracnose, which is a form of rot. In fact, the roots of runners and maybe other varieties are said to produce an enzyme, which assists growth, so using the same site each year may be an advantage; you can thus decide to rotate them or not as you wish.

Drying techniques

It's possible to grow just to produce shelled beans, or, more usefully, to produce both green pods and shelled beans from the same crop.

When the plants start cropping, pick the young pods regularly in the usual way, for eating as a green vegetable; then in about mid-August you can decide how many plants you wish to use to produce your shelled beans. The point is that once the seeds in the pods reach maturity, the flower-producing mechanism switches off, so no more pods will form. If you want to produce mostly beans for drying then take just a few of the early green pods.

So for shelled beans simply let the pods develop, not forgetting to feed and water. With most varieties, the young green seeds can be shelled out and cooked like peas; these are flageolets, and some catalogues sell especially suitable varieties.

To dry beans for storage it's preferable to let the pods dry out in place on the plant. The skins go brown and brittle in autumn and when the pods begin to split then it's time to pick and shell them: keep a close eye on the crop at this stage as the beans may spill onto the ground.

If the pods are not dry by the end of October and the weather stays wet it is



Broad beans

possible to pull up the whole plant and hang them up in a shed to complete drying, or pick the pods in bunches and spread them on cardboard fruit boxes in a dry place which is reasonably warm. If drying beans indoors in boxes there is always a risk of mould and rot, so inspect them frequently and discard any that become soft and wet. A through flow of air assists drying, whichever drying method is used.

Broad beans and peas are treated in the same way, except that the green pods of peas are not eaten, the whole crop being left to dry. You will have to decide yourself whether or not it is worthwhile growing peas to dry; usually there is only enough of a crop to provide fresh green peas for the summer table.

Storage

Before the shelled beans are stored they

must feel very hard to the touch and if this is not the case then spread them out on cardboard fruit boxes, again in a warm dry place, for a few more weeks. Drying in the sun or an oven is not recommended.

Store the produce in a dry place in paper bags or cardboard boxes. It's necessary to check from time to time for signs of mould growth and throw any mouldy ones away: mould would indicate incomplete drying or damp storage.

Cooking

As mentioned, the green flageolets can be cooked like fresh peas. Home-grown dried beans will usually require less cooking time than shop-bought ones, so some experimentation will be needed. In any

event, boil well for at least ten minutes, as natural toxins can be present (this of course also applies to shop-bought ones).

Simply test the beans often during cooking and when they are soft to bite, then they're done. The degree of dryness will affect the cooking time. As for the differences in flavour between the different varieties, well, despite what the catalogues say, it's just a matter of taste: some people prefer one type, some favour another.

If you are in doubt about the suitability of any produce for the table, then don't use it. Seek advice if need be.

Which varieties should we grow?

There is a bewildering choice available. The runner bean varieties are all worth-



Runner beans on canes



Runner beans at Hardwicke

while: you can try the white seeded, or the red flowered ones, which give vivid dark red beans. Mergoles/Desiree is a good white variety as is White Knight. Red Knight is a favoured scarlet type and Painted Lady is multicoloured, pink and white.

Climbing varieties of French beans are usually more productive than the bush types. Borlotti (Suffolk Herbs) and Blue Lake are good. Suffolk Herbs sell the Italian 'Meraviglia di Venicia' which gives very tasty small black beans and also deliciously crisp, flat yellow pods; this one, however, does need a good summer if grown outside the southern counties of the UK; it should do well in any of the warmer temperate regions of the world.

All the bush types can be used; Suf-

folk Herbs sell several claimed to be especially good for drying, but we have no experience of them. Bush types are usually not so good as climbers for drying in situ, as the beans tend to straggle on the ground where they soon become wet and fail to dry properly; they are also prone to being attacked by slugs and snails.

Soya beans are normally difficult to grow in the UK and much of Europe. However a new variety called 'Ustie' is now available from Thompson and Morgan. This has been tested by VON members and proved reasonable although yields have been low so you would need to grow a lot of plants in order to have a decent harvest of beans. It is advisable to start the seeds off in individual modules.

Likewise, the butter bean sold dried and canned is a form of Lima Bean which will not grow in the UK: white-seeded runners do give similar big beans, especially Czar from Suffolk Herbs, however, the taste is not the same as the true butter bean.

Saving seeds

You can grow your future crops from the beans you have saved, in which case select mature healthy seeds from vigorous plants and store them in a cool dry place. Bean seeds will usually grow true to type year after year but where two varieties

grow closely together then cross-pollination may occur; this is not necessarily a problem, you just get your own personal brand of bean which may be even better than its parents.

If you really want to avoid any chance of cross-pollination then it is possible to carefully place a small brown paper bag over a cluster of flower heads just as they are forming; leave this in place until the flowers are well open and then remove it. Use this technique with several flower heads to ensure plenty of good seed. The bag keeps out pollinating bees.

Books

Readily available handbooks, which are not wholly vegan but provide good vegan alternatives are: *The Organic Bible* by Bob Flowerdew (ISBN 1856265951) and *The New Organic Grower* by Elliot Coleman (ISBN 093003175X).

Weeds by John Walker is an earth-friendly guide to tackling weeds and making good use of them. Published by Cassel (ISBN 1 84403 061 X).

The following books are available from The Vegan Society, Donald Watson House, 7 Battle Rd. St Leonards-on-Sea, East Sussex TN37 7AA. Tel: 01424 427393. www.vegansociety.com/shop:

Abundant Living in the Coming Age of the Tree by Kathleen Jannaway (ISBN 0951732803) – towards a vegan, self-sustaining tree-based culture.

Forest Gardening by Robert A de J Hart (ISBN 1900322021) – turn your garden or allotment into a vegan-organic, permaculture-based mini-forest.

Permaculture: A Beginner's Guide by Graham Burnett – apply the principles of sustainability and working with nature to your land, your community and your life.

Plants for a Future by Ken Fern (ISBN 1856230112) – pioneering book that takes garden-

ing, conservation and ecology into a new dimension. Information about growing edible and other useful plants.

The Animal Free Shopper (ISBN 0907337252) – The Vegan Society's guide to all things vegan includes a section on garden products.

Seeds and Supplies

The Organic Gardening Catalogue, Riverdene Business Park, Molsey Rd, Hersham, Surrey KT12 4RG, UK. Tel: 01932 25366. www.organiccatalog.com. Seeds and products such as fertilisers and compost listed as organic and animal-free.

Suffolk Herbs, Monks Farm, Coggeshall Rd, Kelvedon, Essex CO5 9PG. Tel: 01376 572456. www.suffolkherbs.com

Chiltern Seeds, Bortree Stile, Ulverston, Cumbria LA12 7PB. Tel: 01229 581137. www.edirectory.co.uk/chilternseeds. Wide range of seeds including uncommon and unusual vegetable varieties.

Tamar Organics, Unit 5A, Westbridge Trading Estate, Tavistock, Devon PL19 8DE. Tel: 01822 834887. www.tamarorganics.co.uk. Excellent organic seed supplier.

Organisations

HDRA, Ryton Organic Gardens, Coventry CV8 3LG. Tel: 024 7630 3517. www.hdra.org.uk
Demonstration gardens and education centre at Ryton, which is presently being expanded. Some of their advice is based on animal products but this can be adapted. Members receive a quarterly magazine, *Organic Way*.

Movement for Compassionate Living, 105 Cyfyng Rd, Ystalyfera, Swansea SA9 2BT. Tel: 0845 4584717. www.mclveganway.org.uk. MCL produces a quarterly magazine, information and books on cultivation, cooking, etc., emphasising locally grown food and cruelty-free sustainable methods, especially the growing and use of trees.

Plants for a Future, Blagdon Cross, Ashwater, Beaworthy, Devon EX21 5DF. Tel: 01208 872963. www.pfaf.org. Researching ecologically sustainable vegan-organic horticulture; an excellent resource and information centre. The website contains much useful information.

Spiral Seed, 35 Rayleigh Avenue, Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex SS0 7DS. www.spiralseed.co.uk. Have publications, vegan-organic information and ideas including lots on vegan permaculture, very useful as most 'permaculture' involves animal exploitation. The website is a mine of information.



The Vegan-Organic Network

The Vegan Organic Network is a registered charity (registered charity number 1080847), providing education and research in vegan-organic principles and has an international network of supporters. VON supporters enjoy a wide variety of contacts and can obtain advice on cultivation techniques. The magazine *Growing Green International* is sent to supporters twice a year. For more information and details of how to join, please contact:

VON, 58 High Lane, Chorlton, Manchester M21 9DZ
Email: info@veganorganic.net

General enquiries and advice on growing:
Phone: 0845 223 5232
Email: advice@veganorganic.net
Website: www.veganorganic.net

Vegan-Organic information sheets

This is one of several sheets produced on various topics by the Vegan-Organic Network. These are aimed mainly at those with allotments, kitchen gardens or other small growing areas, although many of the techniques will also apply to larger-scale situations. We welcome feedback on this information sheet and any other related topics. The information sheets currently available are: #1 Propagation and Fertilisers; #2 Growing Beans for Drying; #3 Growing on Clay Soils; #4 Vegan-Organic Growing - The Basics; #5 Fungi - FAQ; #6 Gardening for Wildlife; #7 Growers' Guide to Beetles; #8 Green Manures; #9 Chipped Branch-Wood; #10 Composting.

These are available on request. Please send £5.00 per set, or 60p each (£6 and 75p respectively if outside the UK). The sheets are also available free on our website.

Issued March 2005. This advice is given as guidance only, with no responsibility for any results, due to the nature of the processes involved!

