

What To Plant And Do In the Food Garden In December

By John Ditchburn (Ditchy), The Backyard Food Gardener www.urbanfoodgarden.org

WHAT TO PLANT IN DECEMBER (Ballarat & District) *

| FROM SEED | FROM SEEDLING | IN SEEDLING BOXES # |
|--|---|---|
| BEANS - BUSH BEANS - RUNNER BEETROOT CARROT CORN CUCUMBER LETTUCE PAK CHOI PARSNIP POTATO PUMPKIN ROCKET SILVERBEET SPRING ONION SUNFLOWER TURNIP ZUCCHINI | BASIL CAPSICUM ^E CELERY CHILLI ^E CORN ¹ EGGPLANT ^E LEEK LETTUCE SILVERBEET TOMATO ^E PAK CHOI | BASIL CORN ¹ LEEK LETTUCE PAK CHOI SILVERBEET |

* Key vegetables only, not all vegetables that can be planted at this time are listed. # Sow in seedling boxes for planting out in four to six weeks time. 1 Best sown in single cell seedling trays as these seedlings don't like their roots being disturbed when transplanted. X Prone to cabbage butterfly damage when planted this time of year. (Parenthesis) Grow in greenhouse or temporary polytunnel. DOUBLE UNDERLINED Grow in glass/plastic covered seedling box. RED DOUBLE UNDERLINED Grow in artificially heated seedling hot box. E or L Only Early or Late in the month.

WHAT TO DO IN THE VEGGIE PATCH

- **Continue planting summer crops.**

If you have not got your tomato, capsicum and chilli seedlings in the ground do so as soon as possible as they need up to 18 weeks of warm weather to produce a decent crop. Pumpkin, Zucchini and cucumber can be planted throughout December but again it's best to get the seeds in the ground at the start of the month.

Also plant warm season staggered crops (vegetables that will only produce for a few weeks so need to be planted at regular intervals throughout the season) like, bush beans and corn.

- **Apply mulch to all beds once plantings have gone beyond the seedlings stage.**

You can now plant seedlings and large seeds (e.g. beans, corn) directly into lightly mulched beds, though small seeds such as carrots are best planted in bare soil.

- **Plant lettuces in semi shaded areas or cover them with 50% shade cloth.**

This reduces the likelihood of the lettuces bolting, they will also remain sweeter for longer, mature lettuces have a tendency to become bitter in hot weather.



An A frame trellis supporting young tomato plants. The advantage of growing tomato plants on a trellis as opposed to a single stake is that the trellis can support more laterals and they can be woven through the trellis rather than having to be individually tied.

- **Continue to thin out and tie up shoots on your tomato plants.**

Early summer is the peak time for shoots so it is important that you keep on top of them. Prune particularly heavily on the lower sections of your tomato plants. This will allow plenty of airflow under the plants which will aid in the ripening of the tomatoes and reduce the likelihood of leaf mould.

- **Remove broad bean and pea crops once they have finished and prepare the beds.**

WHAT TO DO IN THE GREENHOUSE

- **Prune lower leaves of eggplant, capsicum and chilli plants and stake the growing plants.**

It is important to do this as the weight of mature fruit on these plants will force the stems to bend and even break.



Young eggplant (left) and capsicum. They have had their lower laterals removed then staked and tied up using soft ties.

- **Continue to monitor for white fly and aphid infestations and spray repeatedly with pyrethrum spray if discovered.**

WHAT TO DO IN THE GARDEN

- **Give your fruit trees a regular deep watering.** The best place to apply water to trees is at the drip line, which is the edge of the foliage. This is the point where most of the water drips off the tree when it rains, as

roots grow towards the wettest soil this is also where most of the roots will be. If you are watering your fruit trees with a drip line ensure that you have at least two drippers per tree. Drippers concentrate the water, if you only have a single dripper not all of the trees roots will be able to access it.

- **Mulch around your berry plants once all the shoots have been tied up and suckers removed.**

All berry bushes like acid soil so an ideal mulch to put around them is pine needles as it is very acidic.



Pine needle mulch around raspberry bushes. Pine needles are acidic so help to keep the soil pH low.

- **Net berry bushes and early season fruit trees.**
- **Apply pyrethrum spray to trees prone to pear and cherry slugs.**

The slugs will be too small to see now but if a tree had them last year then it is very likely that they will get them again this year. It's best to spray now before the slugs get big enough to do serious damage.

- **Apply extra blood and bone and manure to stone fruit trees.**

When applying manure in warmer weather heavily water the ground before and after adding the manure. Manure applied to dry soil can burn the roots.

- **Harvest ripe berries and early season fruit once they begin to ripen and bottle what you can't eat fresh.**