

# How to Grow Broad Beans (Vicia Faba)

## **Introduction:**

**Vicia Faba**, the Broad bean or Faba or Fava Bean in the USA, is a species of vetch, a flowering plant of the pea and bean family Fabaceae.

Broad beans are easy to grow - either plant directly into the ground or start off indoors in pots or modules, planting out when the seedlings begin to show.

A November sowing of Aquadulce or The Sutton will produce beans for picking in early June. However, there can be serious losses in a severe winter. Only attempt an autumn sowing if your plot is free-draining, sheltered and located in a mild area. The better plan is to sow under cloches in February.

Germination takes approximately 21 days.

Broad beans like to be near potatoes and sweetcorn, but do not like to be near onions, garlic, fennel, sunflowers or kohlrabi.

## **Sowing seeds indoors**

For best results sow in 8cm (3inch) pots filled with seed compost, under glass or in a cool greenhouse. Beans will be ready to be planted out approximately 3 weeks later. This method is especially useful if soil is wet or rich in clay which can lead to seeds rotting in the ground. Mice can also be a problem as they tend to eat fresh sown seeds. Plants will need to be hardened off before planting out and then protected by fleece or cloches.

## **Sowing seeds outdoors.**

Broad beans will need a sunny spot which did not grow beans the previous year. Prepare the ground in the autumn by adding compost or well-rotted manure. Apply a general purpose fertiliser a week before sowing.

Sow beans directly into their sowing positions - usual spacing is 20cm (8inches) apart in double rows with 20cm (8inches) between the double row, staggering the planting so that the beans will support each other when they grow and help to ensure they are not blown over. If planting a second double row of broad beans, allow a distance of 60-75cm (24-30inches) between the 2 double rows.

Some form of support is necessary for tall growing varieties. Place a stake (cane) at each corner of the double row and at regular intervals along the rows. Run string around your stakes (canes) about 30cm (1 foot) above the ground.

**\*\*Pinch off the top 7.5cm (3inches) of stem as soon as the first beans begin to form.** This ensures an earlier harvest and some degree of blackfly control. Blackfly are a serious pest and must be kept down.

## **Harvesting**

Begin picking when pods are approximately 7.5cm (2-3inches) long. These pods will be very tender and can be cooked whole.

Beans for shelling - wait until the beans are visible through the pod. Don't leave picking the beans too long. The scar when picked should still be green or white. Once the scar is black the beans, at this stage, have become tough. Blanch these older beans and remove tough outer skin on beans before eating or freezing. Broad beans freeze really well.

Regular picking will encourage further beans to form. Pods lower down on the plant mature first. Check plants regularly as pods can ripen fast.

Regular hoeing is necessary to keep weeds down during the early stages of the crop's life. Watering shouldn't be necessary before the flowers appear. If the weather turns dry when pods are swelling, water copiously.

After cropping dig plants into the ground to provide a green manure.

## **Pests and Controls**

**Mice and voles** these pests will eat the seeds where planted.

**Remedy:** Break back traps of the type used against house mice can be effective but must be set in a place where the damage is occurring. Peanut butter is an effective bait for mice. If voles are the problem bait traps with pieces of carrot or dessert apple. When traps are used outdoors **they must** be placed under cover to prevent the risk of harm to other animals. Birds are particularly vulnerable.

**Black bean aphid** - a sap sucking aphid that disfigure plants and cause stunting to leaves and stems.

**Remedy** Pinch out infected tops of plants. Wash off with soapy water or the hosepipe.

**Chocolate spot** - a fungus common on over-wintering plants or in damp, humid weather. Symptoms are small, dusty, dark brown spots often surrounded by a pale yellow halo on leaves, stems and pods.

**Remedy:** Ensure good air flow around plants with the correct spacing between plants and keep the ground weed free. Adding potash to the soil can help.

**Pea and Bean Weevil:** a tiny insect biting U-shaped holes around the outside of the leaves.

**Remedy:** Although unsightly shouldn't impact on the harvest. Cover with fleece to boost growth and exclude weevils.

**Rust:** Can be a problem on broad beans later in the season. A fungal disease, spread by the rain which makes the plants look as if going rusty. Spreads rapidly in warm, wet conditions and can cause leaf drop and a possible reduction in pod size.

**Remedy:** Maximise air flow around plants and avoid damp, humid sites. Destroy affected plant material at the end of the season as spores can survive on crop residues and on seed.

There are no fungicides available for disease control on broad beans

### **Growing Broad Beans for our Annual Show**

Large, well-filled pods with clear skins and tender seeds. Size according to cultivar. Stage as attractively as possible, on plates or directly on the bench, with stalks one end and tails at the other.

**Refs:** [www.rhs-org.uk/vegetables/broadbeans/grow-your-own](http://www.rhs-org.uk/vegetables/broadbeans/grow-your-own)

[www.allotment-garden.org/vegetable/broadbean-growing](http://www.allotment-garden.org/vegetable/broadbean-growing)