

GROWING BROAD BEANS

Although broad beans are from the Fabaceae family, they look different and grow differently to their bean cousins.



They tend to be bushy, with square, hollow stems and without tendrils. They can have tall or dwarf growth habits and produce long or short pods. Like all beans, they fix atmospheric nitrogen and so, are therefore also useful as a green manure. Happily, fresh broad beans taste nothing like canned broad beans that many of us were subjected to as kids.

Best of all, they are easy to grow and happily survive in frosty climates. Plant them in April or May for an early Spring harvest.

Site and soil

Broad beans prefer a sunny well-drained position. Ideally, the soil should be fertile, but should not have excess nitrogen or rich manure as this will promote leaf growth rather than flower and bean production.



Planting

Direct planting into the garden is most effective, with seeds sown at a depth of 5-10cm, with 15-20cm between plants and 70cm between rows from April to the end of July in the Western Cape.

Germination occurs 10-14 days after sowing, but will be slower the later you sow towards winter. Soaking seeds overnight in diluted liquid seaweed is said to speed up germination. Water seeds well directly after sowing, then not until after germination, to prevent the seeds from rotting. Fertilise with Talborne Organics 6:3:4 or 3:1:5.

Cultivating

Broad beans will need to be staked or supported to stop the plant collapsing under the weight of the mature beans.

Flowers formed during frosty weather are unlikely to set pods. Once spring arrives, pinch out the tips of the plants to encourage pod set. Try to limit water stress as this will also affect pod set.

Harvesting

Pick the pods when the seeds are fully formed but not hard. If left too long on the plant, beans are likely to be dry and less tasty. Dig in the roots and leaves after harvest to add nitrogen to the soil.

Choosing and using

Small (younger) pods can be eaten whole. When pods are larger, the beans need to be shelled and the skins removed before cooking. Freshly shelled broad beans can be frozen, blanched and then frozen or stored in the fridge for about 5 days. Broad beans team well with bacon, cheese, eggs or on their own with butter and herbs.

Vicia faba, also known in the culinary sense as the broad bean, fava bean, or faba bean is a species of flowering plant in the pea and bean family Fabaceae. The flowers are 1 to 2.5 centimetres long with five petals; the standard petals are white, the wing petals are white with a black spot (true black, not deep purple or blue as is the case in many "black" colorings) and the keel petals are white.



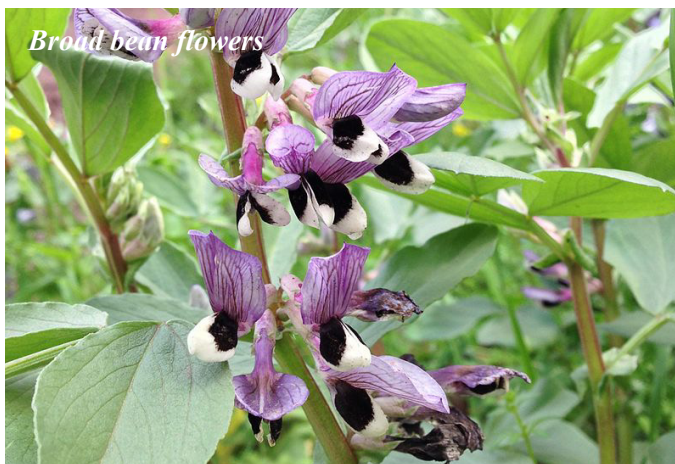
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Broad bean flowers

Crimson-flowered broad beans also exist, which were recently saved from extinction. The flowers have a strong sweet scent which is attractive to bees and other pollinators.

The fruit is a broad, leathery pod that is green, but matures to a dark blackish-brown, with a densely downy surface; Each bean pod contains 3–8 seeds that are round to oval and have a 5–10 mm diameter.



Broad beans in a pod

Problems

Broad beans are prone to fungal attack – brown spots on stems and leaves – particularly if planted too closely together or if planted in soils too rich in nutrients. Towards the end of the crop, rust (a fungal disease) – produces powdery spots on the leaves. Plants with black tips may suffer from root rot, caused by poor drainage. Remove affected plants and resow.



Black bean aphids

Pests and diseases

Broad bean plants are highly susceptible to early summer infestations of the black bean aphid, which can cover large sections of growing plants with infestations, typically starting at the tip of the plant. Severe infestations can significantly reduce yields, and can also cause discolouration of pods and reduction in their saleable values. Use an organic fungicide.

Faba bean rust is a fungal pathogen commonly affecting broad bean plants at maturity, causing small orange dots with yellow halos on the leaves, which may merge to form an orange lawn on both leaf surfaces.



RECIPE:

Buffalo mozzarella, broad bean, mint and rocket salad | Serves 4 / Prep time 10 min

INGREDIENTS

300g podded, shelled small broad beans
 75g pecorino cheese, freshly grated
 2 tablespoons chopped mint
 Juice of 1 lemon
 5 tablespoons (100ml) extra virgin olive oil
 3 (about 250g) Buffalo mozzarella balls
 2 cups loosely packed wild rocket
 2 tablespoons mint leaves, torn if large

METHOD

1. Place the broad beans in a mortar and pestle with a little salt and smash to a rough, chunky paste.
2. If you don't have a mortar and pestle, mash with a potato masher.
3. Add pecorino, half the chopped mint and three quarters of the lemon juice. Season to taste and toss to combine. Add enough olive oil to make mixture loose and wet (about 3 tablespoons).
4. Break mozzarella into pieces and place on a serving plate. Top with half the broad bean mixture.
5. Combine rocket with remaining mint, lemon juice and olive oil. Scatter over mozzarella. Dress with remaining broad bean mix and freshly cracked black pepper.