

Meopham and
District
Allotments
Southdown
Shaw



Runner beans

A tender crop that will only germinate when the temperature is above 16°C, with a maximum of 30°C. Sow indoors or in a greenhouse with heat for early crops (April or May) or sow outdoors during May or June two seeds per cane 15cm apart. The RHS recommend distances of between 15cm and 30cm apart. For early sowings, the plants require hardening off prior to planting out.

Sow one bean per pot 5cm deep. These can be transplanted once they reach around 8cm tall.

Site

Select a warm spot in full sun in well-drained soil in an open position, fork in well-rotted organic matter prior to planting/sowing. An open site will encourage pollinators (essential in pod set).

Support

The traditional method is to use 2.4m canes in an A Frame tied at the tops with a horizontal cane. In a smaller location, a cane wigwam may be more appropriate. As an alternative to bamboo canes you can use cut Hazel.

The Runner beans will climb up the canes without requiring any tying in, but will need support when first planted, so a loose tie is advisable. Once the runner beans are close to the top, remove the growing point to encourage side stems to develop.

Flower Set

To ensure flower set the soil should be moist at all times, ideally watering in the evenings and mulching from June onwards. A chalky alkaline soil is favoured by Runner Beans – in acidic conditions the addition of Lime could be considered.

Harvesting

Depending on the variety, on average, harvest when the pods are around 15-20cm long – time wise roughly July/August. Runner beans are eaten when the beans are immature inside the pod. Pick regularly by hand, and do not allow any pods to reach maturity as production will cease. Handle carefully avoiding damage especially when removing them from the plant. Once the pods start to swell they will not be as palatable. Most plants will crop for around eight weeks.

Storage: after picking-store the whole pod in the fridge (it is suggested by the RHS that they should be stored in plastic bags) but loose in the vegetable tray/salad drawer would be suitable for up to one week. Runner beans freeze well - slice and freeze in an appropriate container (freezer bags or plastic containers). They can be blanched, then dipped in freezing water prior to freezing, don't forget to label them and they should last for between three and six months.

Pests and Diseases

Slugs and snails can be a problem, especially when the plants are young and soft. Options to deter them include sheep's wool, saw dust, copper tape or egg shells around the plants. Beer traps can be laid. Bio-controls such as nematodes.

Blackfly.

Black Bean Aphid – stunted leaves and stems caused by sap sucking aphids – catch infestations early and remove by hand.

RHS Recommended Varieties

'White Lady' AGM: A top-quality bean with fleshy, smooth, stringless pods.

'Hestia': New Dwarf runner bean, ideal for containers, growing to about 45cm, high quality, delicious beans.

'St George' AGM: A heavy cropping, semi-stringless bean, with bi-coloured red and white flowers.

'White Apollo' AGM: Long, smooth fleshy pods crop over a long season