



Pub The Wellington Arms

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Return of the Kitchen Garden

An overgrown wilderness has been transformed into an immaculate plot to supply this gastro-pub with home grown fruit, vegetables and salads



Jason King picks chives for the pub's kitchen

Words Fiona Cumberpatch
Photos Simon Page and Jason King

A phrase you're often likely to see on the menu in a pub or restaurant is 'locally sourced.' It has become a shorthand for emphasising the freshness and low food miles of the produce that's being served. Some establishments are now

taking locally sourced food one step further by growing the veg, fruit and salad that are prepared in their kitchens.

Simon Page and Jason King own The Wellington Arms in Baughurst, Hampshire. Since taking over the pub in 2005, they have transformed its four acres of grounds from an overgrown wilderness to an immaculately tended plot which contains a

small orchard, a heated polytunnel and four raised beds. They are now self sufficient in salads and the majority of their fruit and veg.

Chef Jason turns the produce into delicious dishes which attract customers in droves. Vibrant greens, just-picked salads, spiky, orange courgette

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Neatly lined-out garlic in the pub's veg patch



Pink-stemmed 'Red Russian' kale



The polytunnel keeps salads coming in winter

Create your own kitchen garden area

Susie Watson is the vegetable guru at Barnsdale Gardens in Rutland. She tends an allotment that supplies the popular tea room with some salads and seasonal vegetables.

Here are Susie's tips for establishing a kitchen garden:

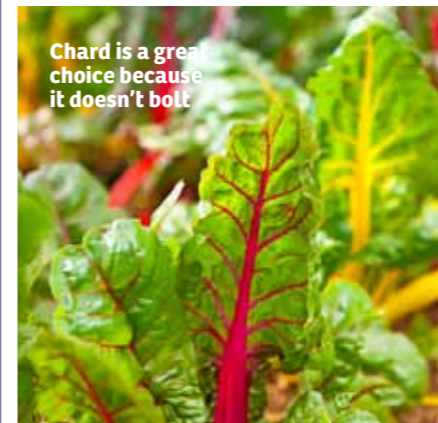
- Planning and forethought is key. Establish what you want to eat, how much space you have and how much time you can give to your garden.
- Keep your kitchen garden area close to the house, so it's easily accessible when you're cooking. Raised beds are easy to tend.
- Some good, simple choices include onions, chard (because it doesn't bolt, it's not the end of the world if you don't pick it immediately), leeks, garlic, herbs, runner beans and sweetcorn. Lettuce and radish are

good choices, but don't sow too many at once. Regular planting means you will ensure a steady supply.

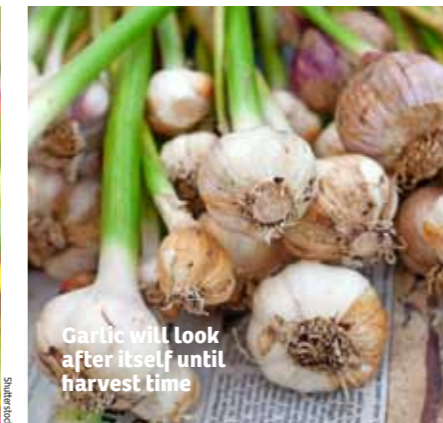
- Think about what you're going to do with your crops if you do get a glut. Last year, for example, Susie blanched and froze a lot of her carrots because she harvested a large number.
- To manage pests, rotate your crops regularly, with a minimum of three to four years rotation. This helps to reduce soil-borne pests and disease.
- Careful planning will also reduce pest damage. Plant sprouting broccoli in March, for example, and it will crop in June before the cabbage white butterflies appear (the caterpillars love brassicas).



Raised beds are often easier to manage than open ground



Chard is a great choice because it doesn't bolt



Garlic will look after itself until harvest time

flowers stuffed with cheese, home made fruit sorbets, soups and preserves, are just a few of the ways in which Jason uses the home grown ingredients.

"Before we came here, I didn't have any special knowledge of gardening, other than having a family vegetable plot as a child, where I had to do my share of the

chores," explains Jason. "We've learned by trial and error. We do make mistakes, but it's fun and it gets me out of the hectic kitchen environment into the fresh air."

The garden started with just two large troughs filled with ornamental shrubs, positioned in front of the pub. Over the next couple of years, Jason and Simon



Runner beans full of promise in spring. Right: the dining room



cleared the brambles and weeds from the land around the former shooting lodge and planted an herbaceous border, constructed four raised beds from old railway sleepers and put up a polytunnel.

"How things look is extremely important to me," says Jason. "We wanted our kitchen garden to be productive, of course, but I also like it to look picture perfect. We

always use reclaimed materials, such as old bricks, for paths and ironwork for supports and we take a lot of time planning what we are going to grow and where it will go. Our customers really seem to appreciate it, and when they come to eat, they love to look at the garden."

The key to a steady supply of produce is good soil and planting in succession, says Jason. The soil is waterlogged clay, so Jason and Simon improve it by adding chicken manure from their own flock of 70 birds. Recycled

garden waste is used as a top dressing every two years. "We don't have a lot of heavy frosts in this area, so we are able to put some plants out early and get ahead," says Jason.

March is the peak time for planting. "We'll be putting in carrots, spring cabbage and curly kale. This spring I'm also hoping to harvest asparagus from the asparagus bed that we established two years ago," says Jason. "I like trying new things all the time. For instance, we gathered some wild garlic seeds from the woods nearby and we've grown a large clump which is ready now. I'll be adding it to leek and potato soup, or to sautéed mushrooms for extra flavour." He has also planted a crop of Jerusalem artichokes for the first time. "They look beautiful and they taste

fantastic," he says.

Traditional kitchen gardens were designed to be both useful and aesthetically pleasing. Their design has evolved from the ancient gardens of Egypt, Mesopotamia and Babylon. The classic design was a garden of four quadrants with a water source in the middle.

Walled kitchen gardens were once found in the grounds of large houses all over the UK and would have provided food for the family, their guests and servants. The high walls, built of heat-retaining brick, were designed to provide sheltered conditions and to keep out fruit and vegetable thieves! In the 18th and 19th century, 'hot walls' were built with fireplaces in them. The warmth from a single fireplace

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Home grown kale is on the menu at this time of year

Simon and Jason look after bees and chickens as well as the pub!

Gastro-pub crops to grow at home

1 Pea shoots

These look amazing as a garnish on almost anything, and have a delicate flavour somewhere between spinach and fresh peas. They're quick and easy to grow too. Just sow thickly in trays of multi-purpose compost in a greenhouse or cold frame between February and September. Harvest when the seedlings are about 15cm (6in) high.

TRY Grow a 'semi-leafless' variety that has a mass of pretty tendrils, such as 'Geisha' or 'Kenobi'.

2 Multi-coloured beetroots

Crimson isn't the only colour! Beetroot comes in a range of different colours, from deep orange yellow through bright pink, striped and white varieties. Luckily, they're all just as easy to grow as the normal varieties, and each has its own distinctive flavour, varying from sweet and sugary to rich and earthy.

TRY 'Burpee's Golden' and 'Rainbow Mix'.

3 Horseradish

Freshly-made horseradish sauce will blow you away! It's miles better than the shop-bought stuff. Horseradish is dead easy to grow – plant the roots ('thongs') in late winter, preferably in a deep container buried in the

ground to prevent it from becoming invasive.

4 Purple carrots

Wild carrots are all sorts of different colours, and it's only in recent centuries that we somehow decided orange was the way forward. Purple carrots pre-date the orange ones, have an intense taste and contain more beta-carotene than orange varieties.

TRY 'Purple Haze' and 'Purple Sun'.

5 Alpine or wild strawberries

Easy-to-grow, these tiny strawberries can be used as ground cover below fruit bushes (although more sun means more fruit). The miniature fruits make a wonderful garnish for summer dishes such as Eton mess and they look delightful in drinks and cocktails. Or simply mix them with a little sugar and leave to

macerate for 10 minutes.

TRY 'Mara des Bois' and 'Baron Solemacher'.

6 Kale

The latest trendy 'superfood' to take the nation by storm, kale is one of the easiest of the brassica family to grow. There are varieties bred for baby leaf salads in summer and intricate, frilly-leaved curly kale, which looks wonderful when steamed.

TRY 'Bolshoi' for baby leaves, distinctive 'Cavolo Nero' and 'Redbor' for curly kale in winter.

7 Jerusalem artichokes

These tall plants look like slim, leafy sunflowers. Hardy and very easy to grow.

TRY A modern variety like 'Fuseau' or 'Dwarf Sunray'.

8 Florence fennel

A delicate, feathery plant that looks as good in the garden as it does on the plate. If plants bolt then use the edible flowers as a garnish.

TRY 'Romanesco' or 'Victoria'.



Golden globes of sweet, earthy beetroot

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Kale makes a handsome veg patch plant (left). Try roasting fennel (right) to bring out its sweet, aniseed flavour



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could heat up to 12m (40ft) of wall and protect the fruit blossom from early frosts.

The 21st century version is Jason and Simon's heated polytunnel. "We are able to harvest salad all year round, although of course it's slower-growing in the winter months, and we only pick once a week," says Jason.

Summer vegetables that he recommends include runner beans and sweetcorn. "You just don't get the same flavour if you order them from a supplier, or buy from a shop."

Other successes have been red and black sweet potatoes grown in space-saving hanging baskets. "They look amazing, with long, sharp leaves, a bit like ivy, and

the taste is very good." There have been some disasters, however. "We made some hanging baskets of cherry tomatoes and the birds ate the lot."

June is Jason's favourite month in the kitchen garden. "It's pretty special," he says. "Yes, it's hard work to keep it going, because we get around 500

customers a week, but I enlist help from the kitchen team, and a farmer friend mows the lawn and does some jobs for us. But the garden is my baby, and being out here is a cathartic experience."

Next week: All the exciting new plants at Chelsea!