



vegetable gardening in the wind

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Five tips for growing vegetables in the wind

1. Grow shorter crops

You'll have more success in a windy area with varieties that stay closer to the ground. Bush beans and bush tomatoes rather than taller pole beans and vining tomatoes. You can keep tall crops like tomatoes, broad beans and runner beans short by pinching out the tops when they get as high as you want them to grow. Corn is tall, but some varieties are taller than others.

2. Put up a shelter

The best shelter is semi permeable. Use hedges, windbreak cloth and trellis not brick walls, solid fences and tarpaulins. You'll get some shelter up to six times the height of the structure behind it. For example, if you put up a one metre high trellis fence, plants up to six metres behind it will get some shelter. Clearly there'll be more shelter closer to the fence.

3. Keep plants well watered

Wind increases the transpiration from plants, particularly seedlings, which stresses them. You'll need to water more in a windy area and might find your plants need more shade to survive. Plant them out in the evening if you can so they can establish themselves overnight when it's cool. Put shade cloth shelters over newly planted seedlings if it's windy.

4. Give plants support

You can secure some plants to bamboo canes, wooden stakes and steel waratahs. This reduces 'wind rock' when the wind literally tears the plant out from the ground. Use a soft, expandable tie to secure the plant to its support. Strips cut from old tee-shirts or pantyhose can work well.

5. Trade off sun and shelter

Often the sunniest spots in the garden also get the most wind. The rule of thumb is that vegetables need six hours of sun a day. However some crops, particularly leafy vegetables, can do well with much less. Most crops will do satisfactorily with more shade but just won't be as prolific or will be slower to mature. Try planting in a more sheltered but shady area and see whether the trade off is worthwhile.

If you want more information about vegetable gardening, visit www.thekitchengarden.co.nz.

Three mini-shelters

1. Tin cans with their lids and bases removed.

Remove the lid and base from a tin can e.g. a baked bean can and push it well into the ground around seedlings. You can use larger cans such as those containing baby formula or instant coffee for larger plants. Remove these shelters once the plant is established if they start to constrain the growth of the plant. They give the seedling shade and shelter and will stop birds scratching it out. They will even stop most slug and snail damage.

2. Bottomless flower pots or plastic buckets

Cut the bottom out of large flower pots or 10 litre plastic buckets using strong scissors, a serrated knife (an old bread knife is ideal) or a hack saw. Push them well into the ground around each plant.

3. Concrete reinforcing mesh fence

This fence is light, portable and is ideal for keeping out the wind while still leaving your plants accessible. It also provides shade protection and can deter possums, rabbits and mice. You can put bird mesh over the top to keep out the birds – particularly useful for strawberries. You don't need the windbreak mesh if you're keeping out cats, puppies or children's soccer balls.

Instructions for a concrete reinforcing mesh wind break fence

Use strips of lightweight concrete reinforcing mesh with 150mm square holes to make a small fence. You can buy the mesh from a DIY store in large sheets. Take bolt cutters with you or borrow some from the store to cut it into strips on site and make it easier to transport. Take a plan with you so you get the best use of the sheet. Sometimes you'll see left over mesh on building sites and builders will often be glad to give you off-cuts from bigger projects. You'll need the following:

A strip of concrete reinforcing mesh 600mm (four holes) wide, one to two metres long.

Bolt cutters

Wind break cloth 900mm wide the same length as your strip of concrete reinforcing mesh plus 400mm. <http://www.thekitchengarden.co.nz/index.php/2009/05/cheesy-leek-and-potato-flan/>

sharp scissors

Cut off the edge of the strip of mesh with the bolt cutters to leave three holes wide with prongs at the end. Cut the windbreak cloth in half down the middle to make two strips each 450mm wide. Hook the edge of the wind break cloth strip over the prongs on the reinforcing mesh, leaving 200mm of cloth at either end. Hook the other edge of the windbreak cloth over the other side of the mesh to secure it.

Make a 90 degree bend* in the strip by folding it over the edge of a work bench, brick wall or sturdy outdoor table. Push the prongs of the fence into the ground and overlap the flap of windbreak cloth with the next piece of fence to secure.

*L-shaped pieces are much more stable than straight pieces. For example, if you want to build a fence round a 1.2m square bed, use four strips 1.2m long. Bend each of them into an L-shape with the bend in the middle of the strip (600mm from each end). Secure them to each other in the middle of each side of the bed. This is much more robust than using four flat pieces secured at the corners.

