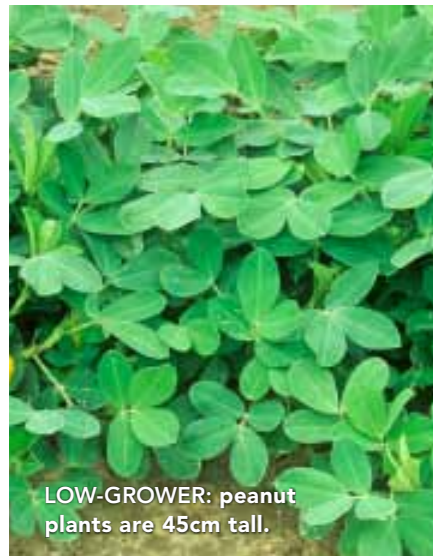


# classic companions

The 'companion planting' combo of peanuts and corn has long been popular with farmers, and the great news is that you can now buy peanut seedlings, making it very easy to get started with peanuts and corn in your own backyard.

words elizabeth swane



**LOW-GROWER:** peanut plants are 45cm tall.



**TALL:** corn grows rapidly to 1.5-2m tall.

**S**o, why are peanuts and corn such a classic 'companion planting' combo? Well, for starters, they don't compete with each other, they help each other out. They both like the same soils and growing conditions, so they are meant for each other.

Peanuts are low, spreading plants, and so their foliage acts like a mulch over the ground around the corn. This 'living mulch' helps to suppress weeds and retain soil moisture around the corn plants, but peanuts have an extra benefit to offer. These plants are legumes – just like beans and peas – and through special nodules on their roots they capture nitrogen from the atmosphere and add it to the soil. The corn plants love this natural fertiliser boost.

Corn helps the peanut plants out by providing shelter for its smaller companion, allowing the peanuts to flower and set their pods undisturbed.

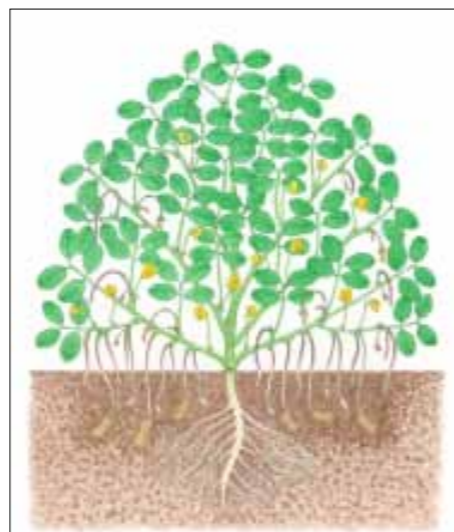
## great news

The great news for gardeners trying to grow peanuts for the first time is that seedlings will be readily available at Aldi stores nationally this January.

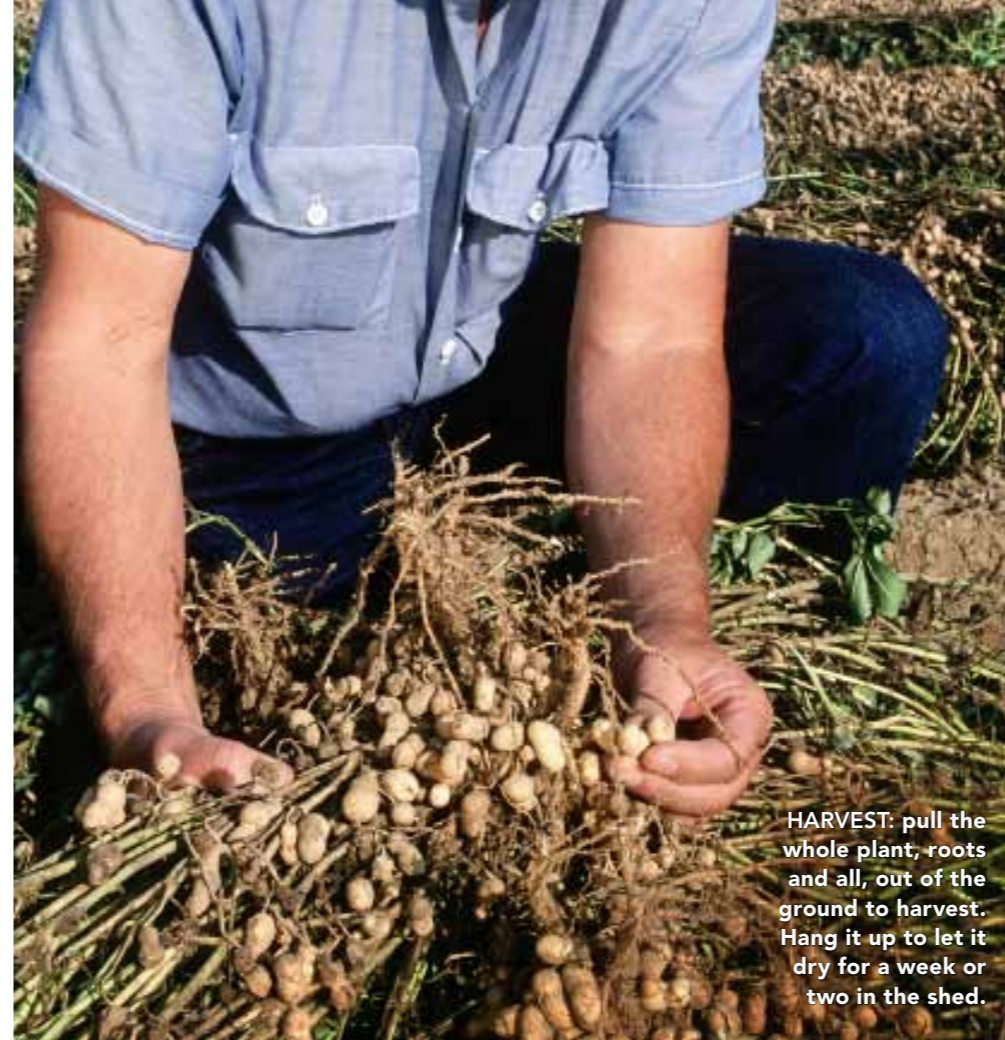
If you're keen you can grow your own peanut plants from seed (all you need is raw, unprocessed nuts still with their unblemished brown outer skins, bought

## how peanuts form – cool!

Peanuts are fascinating plants. As they grow, they form a bushy plant 45cm high and wide. Small yellow flowers are produced over summer, and as they die off the stalks (or pegs) elongate and grow downwards, pushing themselves into the soil. This is where the nuts and shells begin to form. Your job as a gardener is to keep up the water supply as the nuts develop, as peanut plants need to be kept well-watered right up to harvest time.



**BELOW-GROUND:** peanuts form beneath the soil surface.



**HARVEST:** pull the whole plant, roots and all, out of the ground to harvest. Hang it up to let it dry for a week or two in the shed.



## how to plant

**BEFORE PLANTING** add some fertiliser and a sprinkling of lime into the soil and mix both in well. Peanut plants like loose, well-drained soil, so make a mound and plant the seedlings on top. Plant the seedlings as you would any seedlings, spacing them 45cm apart. Water in well after planting.

You can eat the delicious, fresh raw peanuts straight away if you like, and if there are any left you can roast them at 160-180°C in an oven for 15-20 minutes for shelled kernels or 20-25 minutes for peanuts still in the shell.

from health food stores: sow each seed 3-5cm deep and if they are fresh they should germinate in one to two weeks).

However, the new seedlings make it quicker, easier and more reliable to get started – and in temperate and cooler parts of Australia you'll need to waste no time getting your peanut plants planted. In our warmer zones you still have plenty of time to get a crop going.

## harvest

The nuts remain in the ground for about three months, and are harvested in late summer when the foliage starts to turn

brown. Test for ripeness by forking up a few nuts. Look for dark-coloured pods inside the shell, where the kernel should be changing from a pink to gold colour. Not all the pods will be ready at once, but as you dig up the whole plant, make sure most are ready before lifting.

To harvest peanuts, dig up the whole plant (as pictured above), shake off the excess soil and hang the entire thing up in a warm, dry place, such as the garage or garden shed. Dry the bush for a week or two until brittle then break off the pods. Wash off any clinging dirt and air-dry for a couple of weeks.

## ideal climate

**NATIVE TO** Peru, Brazil and Bolivia, peanuts (*Arachis hypogaea*) are commercially grown in Australia in Qld in the

Atherton Tablelands and processed in Kingaroy (the peanut capital). You can grow them at home, provided you live in a warm climate, or in cooler areas where the growing season is

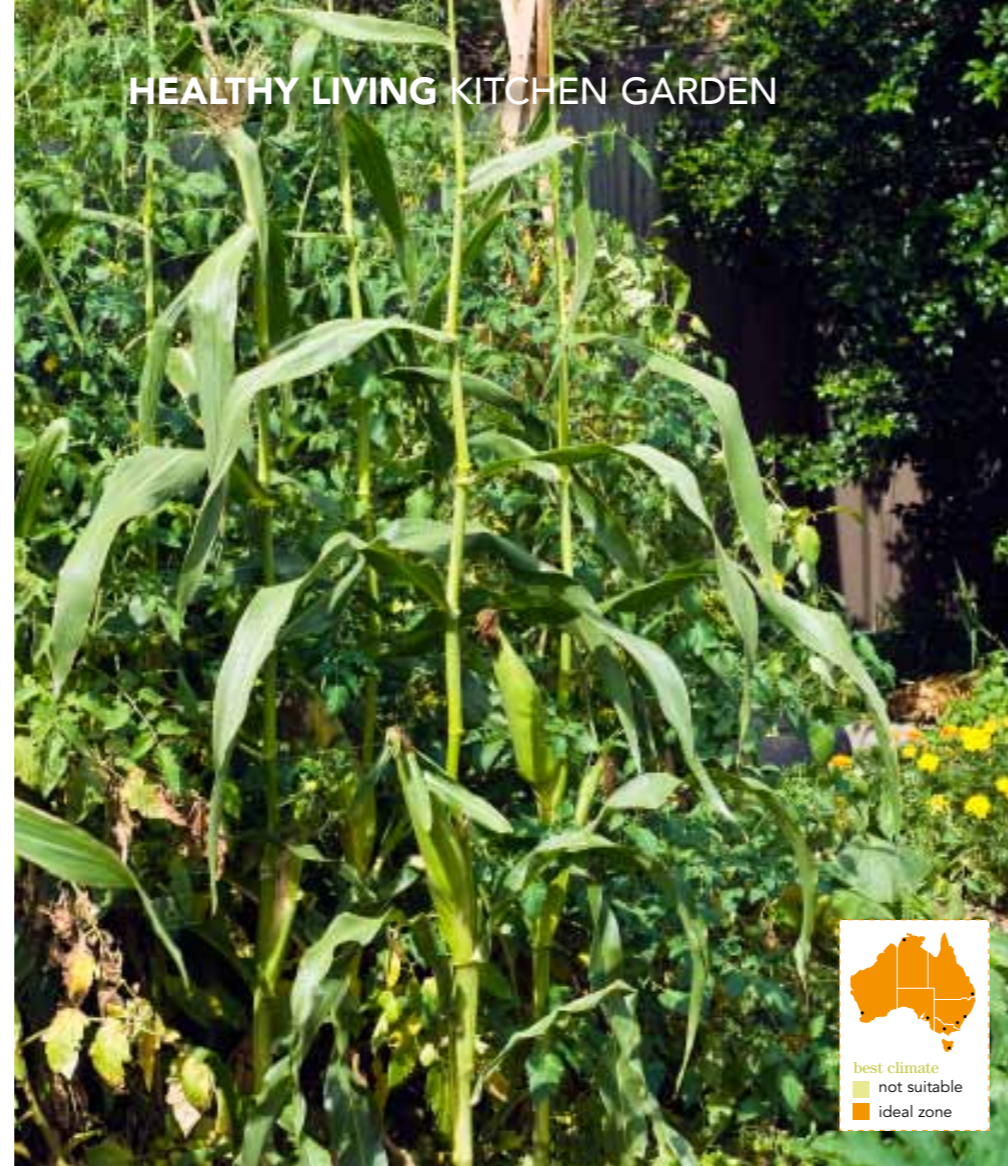
long enough (around 120 days) for the plants to set flowers. Seedling plants in 100mm pots are available this January from Aldi stores (from January 19) in NSW, Qld and Vic.



best climate  
not suitable  
ideal zone

Story by Elizabeth Swane; photos by Brent Wilson, Getty Images; illustration by Pamela Horsnell

## HEALTHY LIVING KITCHEN GARDEN



**Here's a top corn-growing tip:** plant your corn in blocks, not rows – this makes it easier for the wind to pollinate all your cobs. Each plant should yield at least two cobs, so use that number to plan out how much to plant.



### planting

**PLANTING:** you can grow corn from seeds or seedlings – seeds are cheaper, seedlings give you a head start – take your pick! Sow the seeds by pushing them in 3cm deep and 20-30cm apart (check the seed packet for correct spacings). If planting seedlings, also check the plant labels for correct spacings, as they will differ depending on the variety.

### corn farming

In cool and temperate parts of the country, most people plant their corn in spring and harvest in autumn. It's not too late to plant a late crop of corn to go in with your peanuts, but as with peanuts, don't delay! Do it now.

Corn's a fun vegie to grow and it doesn't take up a lot of space or need any expert care. It needs full sun all day, plus well-dug-over, fertile soil and a good soaking three times a week.



### soil prep

Make sure the soil is well dug-over, weed-free and crumbly before planting, and while digging add in a few handfuls of Dynamic Lifter and some dolomite lime as well (exceptions: Adelaide and Perth, they don't need extra lime).

### growing & harvest tips

Both peanuts and corn like a steady supply of sunshine and water, so that's your main task while you enjoy watching them grow: watering them when there has been no rainfall to do that job for you.

When to harvest varies with the corn variety you are growing, but generally cobs are ready to pick when the silks at the top of the cobs turn dry and brown. Another test of ripeness is to push your thumbnail into a corn kernel. If milky liquid comes out, it's time to harvest. **BBY**