

2023 veg growing season summary

After the 2023 summer growing season, we sent a short questionnaire out to Garden Organic supporters to evaluate the performance of some commonly grown vegetable crops. This was exactly the same questionnaire that was sent out in 2022 and the aim was to provide a summary picture of the vegetable growing season, that can be repeated and used to examine trends.

Weather in 2023

Spring began with a mixture of cold and warmer days in March and April followed by May that was warmer than average. A lack of sunshine (only 74% of average) got the season off to a slow start for earlier sown crops. The overall UK rainfall total in March was 155% of average, making it one of the wettest on record, so those on heavier soils had to delay ground preparation.

Summer was generally wet and dull. June was the warmest month, breaking several temperature records, but July was very cool, dull and wet, experiencing more than twice the average rainfall in some areas. August was a slight improvement, but still lacked sunshine. This resulted in slow establishment, growth and low yields in many crops.

Autumn provided some redemption with a warm and sunny September and early October, allowing some crops to be harvested later than normal, but this was too late for many crops that had not grown well over the summer.

Crops

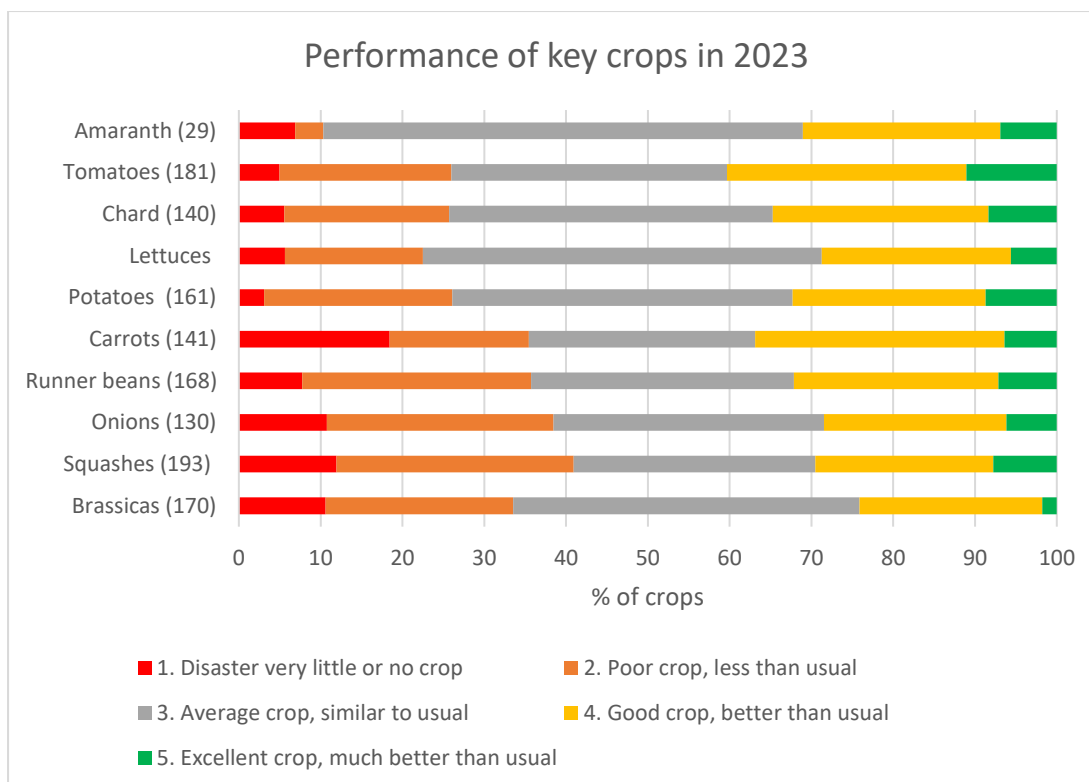
We chose 10 crop groups: brassicas, runner beans, chard, amaranth, squashes, lettuces, tomatoes, potatoes, carrots and onions.

We asked people to rank their crops as:

1. Disaster very little or no crop
2. Poor crop, less than usual
3. Average crop, similar to usual
4. Good crop, better than usual
5. Excellent crop, much better than usual

Summary of performance

203 people responded to the questionnaire and also left comments on the growing season which are summarised below.



In the bar chart above, the crops are ranked in order of performance. The ranking was determined by comparing the number of good crops to the number of poor crops. Those with large amounts of red and orange performed poorly, those with larger amounts of yellow and green performed well. Overall, there were not such stark difference between the crops as in 2022.

2023 was a dull wet summer bringing very different challenges to the hot and dry conditions of 2022. In 2023 people were faced with slow growing crops and problems such as slug damage and blight were frequently mentioned. Although many found the season a disappointment, overall there were far fewer 'disastrous' crops than in 2022 when people were unable to keep up with water demand.

As in 2022, tomatoes and amaranth ranked highly which may seem surprising in a dull season, but leafy crops such as chard and lettuces which can grow well in cooler dull weather also faired reasonably well. Squashes performed poorly overall, with many producing low yields due to the lack of sunshine.

Individual crops:

Brassicas

Many brassicas performed poorly as the cool dull July hampered their early growth. Conversely, some others mentioned that the brassicas benefited from a wet summer and they certainly didn't suffer from the infestation of aphid pests experienced in the dry summer of 2022.

Runner beans

Runner beans were not the clear failure of 2022. Many commented that the beans had a slow start in July, but still gave reasonable yields later in the season and cropped later into the autumn due to the very warm and sunny September.

Chard

Chard performed reasonably well. Although the dull weather slowed down growth, it also resulted in fewer crops bolting and running to seed.

Amaranth

A large proportion of people that grew amaranth, out of the small sample that grew it, ranked it as an average performance. This may have been partly due to more people being less familiar with the crop, so not having much to compare it with. However, it is interesting that this crop performed reasonably well in both in the dry hot summer of 2022 and the wet dull summer of 2023.

Squashes

Squashes performed poorly, as the cool wet July, did not allow adequate leaf growth to support decent yields. Some people also commented that the winter squashes failed to ripen before autumn due to the lack of sunshine.

Lettuces

People commented that lettuces required less watering than in 2022, but slugs were a big challenge, especially on heavier soils.

Tomatoes

Tomatoes showed slow growth in the cold spring. Some commented that they were slow to ripen and that although the yield was reasonable, the flavour was not as sweet as usual. A participant on the West Coast of Scotland commented that even a glasshouse could not make up for the lack of sunshine.

Potatoes

Yield was down in many crops as they were curtailed early when the blight infected foliage had to be cut down. Any tubers left in the ground were frequently attacked by slugs.

Carrots

Yields of carrots were reasonable. Establishment in May and June worked well under the warmer conditions, and the crops grew well in dull wet summer.

Onions

Onion yields were generally smaller than average, due to the lack of summer sunshine.