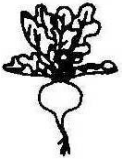




PLANNING A VEGETABLE GARDEN

Tips for the Home Gardener



Vegetable gardening allows you to enjoy truly ripe produce picked at the peak of perfection. Bountiful harvests can supplement a family's food supply as well as provide gourmet vegetable varieties available only in specialty markets. Though vegetable gardening does not need to be time consuming, the more time you put into your garden, the greater the harvest will be in the end.

Site Selection and Design

Whether you have a large open plot or a small container garden, planning allows you to make the most of the space available. Begin by choosing a site for your vegetable garden, keeping in mind that nearly all vegetables require full sun and well-drained soil. Positioning your garden close to a water source makes supplemental irrigation much easier.

Next, decide on a garden design. The layout can be formal or informal, with vegetables planted in rows or clumped in various shapes. Plants with similar requirements and complementary colors, textures and habits can be combined attractively in container plantings. Regardless of your design, be sure to include walking space that will allow you to move easily among the plants for weeding and harvesting.

Choosing the Right Plants

When selecting vegetables for your garden, look for disease-and-pest resistant cultivars that have performed well in your area. Your local Cooperative Extension can provide advice on selecting the appropriate varieties.

If you have a small garden plot or garden in containers, consider growing bush varieties of your favorite vegetables. Bush varieties stay compact with multi-branched stems and usually do not need support.

Growing Vegetables from Seed

Starting plants from seed will give you access to a wide variety of cultivars and hybrids. In addition, you can control the size of the plant, sow in succession for a continual harvest, and keep viruses out of your garden that might arise in nursery-grown crops. Read the instructions on the seed packet to determine if the seeds are best started indoors or planted directly in the bed.

Tips for Healthy Soil

Soil Testing - Test your soil at least every 3 - 4 years to determine its fertilizer and lime needs. Obtain a test kit from your local Cooperative Extension Service.

Compost - Incorporate finished compost into the bed to loosen and improve the soil, and to attract beneficial earthworms.

Mulch - To help retain soil moisture, inhibit weeds, and maintain soil temperature, apply organic materials such as straw, compost, ground-up corncobs, and shredded leaves.

Crop rotation - Rotate crops through different areas of the garden to reduce the build up of plant-specific pests and disease, as well as discourages uneven reductions of certain nutrients in the soil. Rotate plants that use up nitrogen (such as corn) with those that replenish it (such as beans and peas).

Cover crops - Cover crops sown in the fall help control erosion in the winter and improve soil fertility when they are plowed under in the spring. Popular choices include winter rye (*Secale cereale*), hairy vetch (*Vicia villosa*), field pea (*Pisum sativum*), and crimson clover (*Trifolium incarnatum*).

Raised beds - For sites with poor soil, try growing vegetables in raised beds that have been filled with a nutritious soil mix.

When to Plant

Part of the planning process involves establishing a timeline for planting. Rather than planting all at once and harvesting more produce than your family and friends can possibly eat, stagger your planting times over several weeks to ensure a steady harvest of vegetables throughout the summer and early fall.

Cool season plants should be planted in early spring, a few weeks before the last average frost. Many leafy vegetables will bolt (go to seed) when the weather gets too warm, resulting in a crop that is tough and bitter. For a fall harvest, plant cool season plants in late summer or early fall.

Warm season plants cannot tolerate cold spells and should be planted after the last average frost date for your area. For effective use of garden space, plant cool season and warm season crops in succession.

<i>Cool Season Crops</i>	<i>Warm Season Crops</i>
<i>Asparagus</i>	<i>Beans</i>
<i>Beets</i>	<i>Corn</i>
<i>Broccoli</i>	<i>Cucumbers</i>
<i>Brussel sprouts</i>	<i>Eggplants</i>
<i>Cabbage</i>	<i>Melon</i>
<i>Carrots</i>	<i>Okra</i>
<i>Cauliflower</i>	<i>Potatoes</i>
<i>Lettuce</i>	<i>Peppers</i>
<i>Radishes</i>	<i>Squash</i>
<i>Peas</i>	<i>Tomatoes</i>

Longwood's Vegetable Garden

Visit Longwood's Idea Garden from March to November to explore a living catalog of vegetable crops that are easy to grow and delicious to eat. The Children's Vegetable Garden will engage the youngest gardeners with a Sunflower House and a maze of colorful plantings.

"Plant a Row for the Hungry"

Did you know that you can use your vegetable garden to help fight hunger in your local community? "Plant a Row for the Hungry" is a national grassroots campaign that calls for gardeners to plant an extra row of produce and donate it to a local food bank or soup kitchen. When planning your garden this year, make room for an additional row of vegetables that you can donate to a charitable food distributor in your area (see www.secondharvest.com for a list of local food banks). Longwood Gardens participates in the program by donating its Idea Garden produce to the Kennett Food Cupboard in Kennett Square, PA.

For more information about "Plant a Row for the Hungry," visit www.gardenwriters.org/par/.

