

Year Round Gardening

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How to Start Your Own Vegetable Garden

Knowing that fresh, just harvested produce has higher nutritional content than produce that has been shipped and stored, perhaps you've decided to grow your own vegetables at home this year. However, sometimes the most difficult part of a new project is knowing where to start so here are some steps to get a garden started.

Select a good location.

A good location for your vegetable garden will be in full sun, with easy access to water and good soil. Soil quality is critical so you want fertile soil that drains well. Avoid planting too close to large trees and shrubs as they will compete with your vegetables.



Photo courtesy of Debra Othitis

Determine the type of garden you want. The secret to success is to start small. Only plant the amount of space that you can manage joyfully. The garden should be fun and fascinating, not a chore to be dreaded,

Types of gardens include:

Container gardens - Many vegetables can be grown in containers that are deep enough to support their root systems. Usually, the bigger the container, the easier it is to be successful. Remember that containers require more frequent irrigation than gardens. Consider using self-watering containers which are a good choice to reduce watering frequency,

Raised beds - A variety of materials can be used to construct raised beds, but do not use materials that might leach chemicals into the soil, such as old railroad ties. When planned and planted properly, one 4-foot by 8-foot raised bed may supply a good portion of the produce for one or two people. The addition of trellises provides vertical gardening and increases the space available to vining plants like cucumbers and beans.

In-ground gardens - Larger areas allow gardeners to choose traditional row gardening or gardening in beds. Using beds allows for several rows to be planted closer together, shading weed seeds and preventing them from growing later in the season.

Determine what to grow and when to plant. Grow what you like to eat. If space is limited, concentrate on vegetables that yield the greatest return for the effort, such as pole beans, tomatoes, root crops, and leafy greens. Vegetables are grouped by when they are planted:

Early spring and early fall –Cool-season annuals are frost tolerant and thrive in spring and fall when temperatures are below 70°F. These include: beets, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, collards, kale, kohlrabi, lettuce, mustard, onions, peas, potatoes, radishes, rutabagas, spinach, Swiss chard, and turnips. Cool-season crops may bolt as the days lengthen and temperatures rise.

After the last spring frost – Warm-season annuals should be planted when soils have warmed up. They are frost sensitive, thrive in summer when temperatures are above 70°F, and will grow until the first fall frost. These include: beans, cantaloupes, corn, cucumbers, eggplant, okra, peppers, pumpkins, southern peas, squash, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, and watermelons.

Most vegetables are started from seed or transplants. Generally seed can be sown directly into the garden soil for beans, beets, carrots, cucumbers, lettuce, melons, onions, peas, pumpkin, radish, spinach, squash and corn. Vegetables like broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, eggplant, peppers and tomatoes are most commonly transplanted.

Maintain your garden frequently. Plan to water and weed your garden consistently. Weed control is important because weeds compete with the vegetables for water, nutrients and light and they can harbor insects and diseases.

Enjoy the “fruits” of your labor.

For answers to urban horticultural questions, contact ask.extension.org. You can also follow the El Paso County Master Gardeners on www.facebook.com/ColoradoMasterGardeners.EPC/.