

# Vegetable Gardening

It doesn't take too much effort to grow your own food, and it can be both fun and rewarding to harvest your first homegrown vegetables.

**SITE:** Choose a spot with maximum sunlight, since the majority of vegetables require about six hours or more. A south or west facing site is ideal. Try 4'x8' or 10'x10' beds to get started. Start small; you can always add more space later. You need a blank slate of weed free soil. You should remove any existing vegetation from your growing site, but remove as little topsoil as possible.

**CHOOSING YOUR EDIBLES:** Make a wish list of your desired edibles, and then consider what will fit in your space. For beginners, easy growers include carrots, peas, lettuce, potatoes and strawberries. Don't be afraid to try anything, just be sure you can provide it with the space and growing needs it requires. Squashes and corn take up a lot of room, tomatoes need good air circulation, and so on. Make sure taller crops don't shade out sun-loving shorter crops (i.e., plant corn on the north side of the veggie garden). A number of veggies can be started as early as February, like lettuce and spinach, while heat-loving varieties like tomatoes and peppers can't be planted until the weather is much warmer, as late as April or May. So don't forget to leave room for varieties you want to plant later, or plan what early crop you will harvest to make room for later crops.

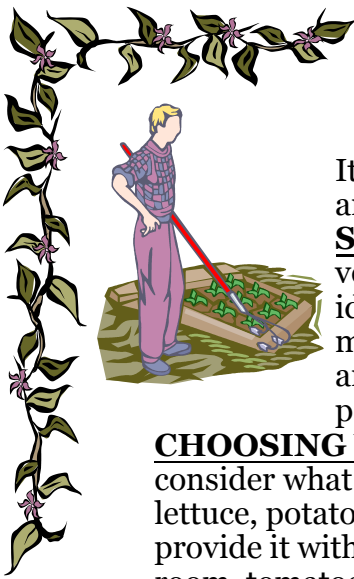
**SOIL PREPARATION:** Soil for vegetable gardens should be rich in organic matter and well-drained. If the soil in your chosen spot has poor drainage, consider building a raised bed. Compacted soils should be loosened with a tiller, digging fork, or spade. Amend your soil with organic matter throughout the whole bed, six to eight inches deep. Good choices would be Bumper Crop Organic soil Builder or Organic Soil Conditioner. You can plant your veggies in rows, leaving pathways to access the growing area (no wider than you can reach to weed is a good width), or you can make "square foot gardens", 4'x4' spaces with each 1'x1' corner planted with a single crop.

**CARE:** Specific requirements will depend on the type of crop you choose to grow, a little research and a basic vegetable book will help you. To generalize, most everything you grow will benefit from regular fertilizing and watering. Using a soaker hose for irrigation instead of overhead watering will greatly lessen your chance of disease. If you must water overhead, try to do so in the morning. Water thoroughly on a regular basis as most crops have shallow roots and need regular water. In sunny weather, especially if you have raised beds, you may have to water more often.

**FERTILIZER:** Use Dr. Earth Starter Fertilizer mixed into the soil with any crops you plant, it's a great way to get your plants growing. A well-balanced vegetable fertilizer such as

Dr. Earth Tomato, Vegetable and Herb Fertilizer will suffice for most crops. You can use liquid fertilizers to give your crop a quick boost or to aid ailing plants that need a pick me up, but in the long run the best way to provide good nutrients to vegetable gardens is to improve the soil and provide a rich growing medium.

**WINTER:** Planting a green manure crop (cover crop) in the fall will help to reduce winter weed growth and improve the soil. Cover crops should not be allowed to bloom, but cut back to the ground and tilled in before they get to the bloom stage. See our handout on Cover Crops for more details.



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