

STARTING VEGETABLE GARDENS

<http://startingvegetablegardens.net>

Planning Before Planting Vegetable Gardens

In periods of financial difficulty, planting vegetable gardens becomes a viable option that achieves two things: it helps the family reduce expenses related to buying food, and it offers the opportunity to sell excess yield to friends and neighbours. Starting a vegetable garden is not particularly difficult, for so long as you put enough thought, time, and effort.

The first decision you have to make is the location of the vegetable garden. You must place this vegetable garden in an area where it is exposed to at least 6 hours of sunlight. The location must also be near where you will source the water you will use to water the plants. It must be near enough for you to make a short trip if you are carrying a pail of water, or it must be near enough to be easily accessible to the hose you will connect to a faucet inside your home. Also, check if the area has soil conducive for growing plants. It must have good drainage, and must be free of silt, stones, and other hard objects. Lastly, the location of your vegetable garden must be somewhere accessible, so that you can frequently check for pests and weeds when you walk by.

Included in your plans should be the sort of plants that you intend to plant, and how many of them you intend to grow. This will help determine the size of the plot you will need. Afterwards, make a list of all the plants you want to grow in your garden. This decision cannot be completely random, especially because the yield of the garden will be what you will consume as a family. Make sure to plant vegetables that your family would love to eat, or vegetables that you often use for cooking. This way, you are ensured of a direct benefit from growing your own vegetable garden.

Make a plan for the arrangement of the vegetable plants in the garden as well. The first consideration is the frequency of yield. Perennial plants, or those who yield vegetables for constantly throughout the year must be placed at the back of the garden, where it will be undisturbed by whatever gardening activities you may have in the rest of the garden. Put the crops that produce early yield together. These crops include radishes, spinach, carrots, beets, and the like. Make some space for replanting successively. Once these crops have seen their yield, you can plant in their place crops that produce yield later in the season.

The last consideration for arrangement is the reality that there are plants that cannot grow beside other plants. For instance, there are those plants that enhance the growth of another when planted together; there are those that inhibit the other. It is important to take into consideration which crops inhibit the growth of the other. For instance, potatoes are capable of inhibiting the growth of both squash and tomato plants. Broccoli also inhibits tomato growth. Beans, on the other hand, inhibit the growth of onions. Carrots also inhibit the growth of dill plants. This does not stop you from planting all these plants in the garden. This only acts as a reminder of which plants you should separate from the other when planting vegetable gardens.

The Basics of Planting Vegetable Gardens

Not a lot of people try planting vegetable gardens these days, especially not in the city. What with the busy lifestyle, constrained spaces, and pollution, it seems inconceivable that a vegetable garden would survive. The fact is, you can actually grow them even if you are smack in the middle of a busy city. It's only important that you get the basics of planting vegetable gardens right.

First things first. Soil preparation. This is one of the most basic things that any new gardener will have to learn. Whether you plan to use a plot of land in your backyard or start a vegetable garden in plant boxes, soil preparation plays an important role in whether your vegetable garden will survive or not. There are three types of soil that you need to be familiar with; sand, clay and silt. Sandy soil is loose and helps the roots of plants breathe because it lets the air pass through easily. Clay soil absorbs water faster and keeps it inside longer, a soil composition that has more clay particles in it would be ideal for places that are too hot and the soil dries up quickly. Silt is a fine mixture of sand and clay particles.

When preparing the soil for your vegetable garden, dig up the soil and break off the lumps. Take out the rocks, roots, and weeds while you're at it. Check if you have just the right mixture of sand, silt, and clay before you begin planting vegetable gardens. Ideally, silt and sand should both be 40%, and clay should just be 20%, this is to make sure that the water isn't trapped inside too much that the roots will choke. Also, if the water is trapped too long inside the soil, the roots will rot. One good way to test whether the composition of your soil is good is by scooping out a handful and forming a ball with it. The soil should hold the shape of a ball without too much difficulty. If the soil cannot hold the shape, you might have too much silt or sand in the mixture. If the soil holds the shape but does not crumble easily when you poke it, it might have too much clay in it which you need to balance out with a little silt or sand.

After you have decided on the kind of vegetables you want and planting them into the cultivated soil, you'll have to learn about how to water them properly. Vegetables need to be watered consistently. When planting vegetable gardens in a big space, you might want to consider using a soaker hose. A soaker hose has many holes along its body that waters your garden by letting the water seep through its holes.

Planting vegetable gardens require manual labor (yes, actual work), and a lot of patience. The rewards are very well worth it, though. Especially for people who are concerned about their health. Growing your own vegetables makes sure that there's the least amount of poisonous (and in the long run, carcinogenic) particulates in it as possible.

Advantages of Planting Vegetable Gardens

Yummier veggie treats

Many people attest that vegetables grown in their own backyard tastes much better than those bought at grocery stores. They remark how much flavorful their harvests are, whether used as ingredients in a fresh veggie salad or cooked dishes. Be it because of the extra amount of love and care these home-grown vegetables got or the person taking pride in growing crops in his or her backyard, it doesn't rally matter. What matters is what you serve on the table is fresh right off your vegetable garden and more scrumptious for every member of the family to enjoy. You are also assured that what you put on the table is fresh and free from harmful chemicals like preservatives.

Guaranteed no harmful chemicals

Chances are you might not fully know whether the vegetables you buy at the supermarket are free of pesticides. Some vendors claim that their vegetables are free from harmful chemicals. What about if the soil where those crops grew was exposed to pesticides before or they were planted next to crops sprayed with pesticides? Prolonged dietary exposure to pesticides is linked to various adverse reproductive and developmental effects, although there is little data to support this. Your children are at higher risk to the dangers of such chemicals on the vegetables they consume. Their bodies are not yet fully developed to properly metabolize or excrete such substances.

A great way to workout

If you got little or no time to go to the gym or health spa to workout, then let gardening provide your daily dose of exercise. Tending your vegetable garden for at least 30 minutes a day is a great way to burn those excess calories and lose weight. You are able to work several major muscle groups in the body, like the legs, arms, back, buttocks and many others. Gardening also improves your flexibility each time you stretch to reach for weeds or bend to plant a seedling.

By the time your crops are ready for harvest, you will notice a change in your body, especially if you look after your garden on a regular basis. Picking the car key that fell on the floor or reaching for a book at the top of a tall shelf will be a lot easier for you to do. Unlike jogging, playing basketball and others, gardening has less impact on your joints. Gardening is best where vigorous exercises is not applicable, such as for people with high blood pressure, heart diseases, bone joint disorders and many others.

Help save the environment

If commercially grown vegetables receive little demand from consumers, then commercial farmers will find no reason to expand their plantations. So there's no need to cut down rain forests and devastate habitats of wild animals. Also, if demand is lowered farmers will use less pesticide and other harmful chemicals that pollute our rivers and the rest of the environment. You might feel that you as a concerned citizen cannot contribute that much positive impact on the environment by planting vegetable gardens. But imagine the difference made if a lot of people started to plant their vegetables in their own backyard.

Building and Planting Vegetable Gardens

The structure of your vegetable garden does not have to be entirely functional but it should also look and feel good. Building some decorative arches and some tomato cages not only makes your garden look good but also helps it produce more crops. After all, there is more to planting vegetable gardens than just cultivating a spot of land.

Function Over Form

The most well known form garden structures are those that are built to sustain plants and give them the room to climb, hold up the weight of its fruits and other plants as well.

Building cages and poles lets you have a vertical garden which boosts your produce per square foot since you'll have more space to plant in the ground.

Vegetables like cucumbers, peas, peppers and eggplants need lots of garden support. Carrying these vegetables above ground not only will produce better crop it also protects it from insects found in the soil. Plus, the fruits will be less likely to rot if planted this way. Building other support structures like stakes and cages will help in making your plants grow stronger and taller.

Choose Your Structure

If you plan to shop for things for your garden online or in a garden store, you'll notice how many choices there are when it comes to garden structures. A great online garden resource is Amazon's Vegetable Gardening Department.

Garden structures may vary especially in terms of form and function because they not only are very supportive of plants it also makes your garden look good. The best kind of garden is not only beautiful, but also enhances the health of the vegetables planted there.

Form over Function

There are so many options when it comes to building your vegetable garden especially if you're purpose is purely aesthetic. You can build ornaments like arches, trellises or archways to beautify your garden. You can even build walls or doorways to surround your garden for a more visual appeal.

For gardens like these, you can decorate them with plants aside from vegetables. You can plant beautiful flowers to cover your trellis but choose flowers that are sun friendly and attract helpful insects.

An example is trumpet flowers, which are not only beautiful but they attract bees for your vegetable garden. Since you also want to attract helpful creatures, you can build a bird bath or a bird house in your garden. If you're particularly into organic gardening, the birds can certainly help eliminate pests

As long as you keep your garden attractive to birds and other helpful insects, they will spend a lot of time in your garden and repay you by eating away harmful pests.

Supporting Your Plants

Building plant supports are essential garden structures which is why it's necessary to use them in the proper way to maximize results. This does not mean building stakes or cages in the ground and leave the plant to grow on its own.

There are other materials like plant ties, jute cords or twines which you can use to tie up your plant to the cages or poles but don't tie them too tight.

Another great support when it comes to planting vegetables gardens are stakes. Make sure to drive them properly into the ground and space them a little further from your main plant to avoid hitting its roots.

Laying Out and Planting Vegetable Gardens

Sit Down and Plan

Before choosing a layout you need to decide on what type of vegetable you would like to grow and where you would like to plant them. Here are other factors you need to consider for your garden layout:

* Garden Space * Amount of Light in the Space * Drainage System * Soil Amendments * Type of Vegetable * Additional Space (if needed)

You should also think about whether you want to grow one type of vegetable like lettuce and tomatoes or if you want one type of vegetable with different kinds. Researching about the amount of light a certain vegetable needs and the amount of space that each need to be planted are both helpful facts to find out.

Make a list of vegetables you want to plant and find out the plant requirements of each and compare it with the garden space you have. This should give you an idea of where you want to plant certain vegetables in your space.

Choose your Garden Layout

There are three basic vegetable garden layouts and they are: rows, beds and “potager” style.

The most popular rows style of layout requires planting seeds in a row which could either mean planting one type of seed in a row or different seeds in a row.

The bed type of layout is similar the rows style but in a smaller level. This layout allows access to the plant beds from the exterior of the garden or as you walk through the garden path instead of coming from inside of the plant bed. This is particularly convenient to avoid stepping on the beds which tends to pack in the soil and makes it difficult to dig and aerate in the spring or fall. Plant beds are great ways to maximize a garden space and you can even use raised beds for easy gardening.

The most decorative style of layout is the “potager” which means kitchen garden in French. This layout is described as geometric which allows you to layout your garden in circles or arrange plants by color or even food type.

Consider Companion Planting

The idea behind companion planting involves planting different kinds of plants together so that they help each other grow. A perfect example of this is planting beans, corn and squash together which were commonly done by Native Americans. While the corn gives the beans a place to climb, the beans gives its three companions nutrients in the soil and the squash serves as a shade to the roots of the plants beside it. This not only prevents weeds from growing, it also saves up on water.

Other great plants for companion planting are onions, which scares slugs and aphids away, tomatoes, which grow well with carrots and basil, which improves the taste of tomatoes. Another example is horseradish and potatoes which when planted together give your potatoes protection from disease.

Long-term Plans for Planting Vegetable Gardens

People who have been successful in planting vegetable gardens usually know that you can't keep growing only one type of vegetable in a garden. It's usually more advisable to rotate crops instead of planting only one kind of vegetable year in and out. Rotating crops will make sure that the micro nutrients in the soil will be preserved, and that diseases will not build up in soil particulates.

These are some examples of groups that can be considered "compatible" and are safe to be rotated together:

Alliums - onions, leeks, shallots, and the likes Crucifers - such as radishes, turnips, broccoli, cauliflower, and the likes Brassicas - brussel sprouts, mustards, cabbages, kale and the likes Legumes - peas and beans Cucurbits - cucumbers, squashes, melons, etcetera Solanaceae - peppers, eggplants, tomatoes, and the likes Mescluns - arugula, endive, radicchio, etcetera

Rotating vegetables of the same family would also mean that (more often than not) they would be susceptible to the same kind of pests. This makes pest control a bit more manageable for you since you don't have to adjust to different types of pests for different families of vegetables.

Vegetables such as asparagus, rhubarbs, and other perennial vegetables must not be rotated. They should be planted separately because of this. The more hardy and semi-annual vegetables can be rotated yearly so that no family of vegetables is planted in the same bed for four years. If you have done some planning before planting vegetable gardens, a small plot would like similar to this: four beds for plants that can be rotated, and one bed for perennial, non-rotating plants.

It would also be ideal for people who planning on planting vegetable gardens to spread out the kinds of vegetables they plant so that they don't harvest too much of the same vegetable in one season. You wouldn't want to be stuck with too many cucumbers in one season, would you? Throughout the growing season, try and plant varying types of short-season vegetables so that you'll be assured of many different types of vegetables throughout the season.

If you really plan to get the most out of planting vegetable gardens, it's best if you do your research first. Check which plants go together, check whether you have enough space to rotate your plants, check which plants you can actually rotate to prevent poisoning and depleting the nutrients of the soil, and spread out the type of vegetables you plant so you won't have too much of the same thing for the whole planting season.

Save Money and Get Healthy by Planting Vegetable Gardens

Planting vegetable gardens is also a great way to spend a quiet time de-stressing while getting in touch with nature.

Money-saving strategy

It's not easy to ignore the soaring prices of food items these days, including vegetables. Although your backyard may be small and your vegetable garden may not provide all that you need, it will have a dramatic effect in reducing your food bill. Imagine not having to run to the grocery store to buy some of the ingredients for your cooking. Some of the most common vegetables that you need are already right there in your very own backyard. Depending on the kind of vegetables you plant and your methods of preserving them, the economical benefits you get from your vegetable garden may be felt all year round.

You may also think that your kids will likely to eat less each time you serve them vegetables. It is obvious that kids would prefer to eat burgers, hotdogs and others. However, there are several cookbooks available in bookstores that can show you a variety of vegetable meals to prepare that are appetizing even for the kids. When what you serve on the table does not look and taste boring, your kids will surely dig it.

More nutritious meals

With a variety of vegetables practically ready to pick right in your backyard, you will find it more pleasing to cook and serve vegetable dishes to your family. This means that everybody will get to enjoy the numerous health benefits of eating fresh produce, since vegetables are packed with tons of nutrients. Aside from the fact that they are low in fats and calories, and contain no cholesterol, you will also get a steady source of the following:

- **Dietary fiber** - This is important for normal bowel movement and good for your entire digestive tract. Dietary fiber is also known to reduce the amount of bad cholesterol in the body, lower the risk of heart diseases, as well as fight off certain forms of cancers. If you are on a diet, you will also feel much fuller faster. Some vegetables rich in dietary fiber are peas, carrots, cabbage and spinach.
- **Potassium** - This is necessary for keeping blood pressure at a normal level. It is also important in keeping the brain, muscles and other tissues in the body functioning normally. Vegetables that are loaded with potassium include potatoes, squash, tomato, eggplant and celery.

- Vitamins A, B and C – Vitamin A is great for the eyes and skin. Vitamin C is necessary to maintain healthy connective tissues and is known to boost the immune system. Vitamin B is important for extracting the energy in the carbohydrates in several food sources. Carrots, asparagus, broccoli and green pepper are rich in Vitamin A. Broccoli, peas and beans are a great source of vitamin B. Your dose of vitamin C is supplied by red cabbage, kale, parsley and turnip.

Other vitamins and minerals you can get from vegetables include calcium, phosphorous, sodium, magnesium, iron, niacin, folate, zinc and manganese.

Save money and help your kids stay in the pink of health through planting vegetable gardens. Plus you get that sense of pride each time your family enjoys the meal on the table, whose vegetable ingredients you cultivated yourself in your backyard.