

## Vegetable Gardens

There are many benefits to growing your own vegetables. It's easy and fun to do. You know whether or not pesticides have been used. The initial cost is a fraction of what you'd pay for market produce. Best of all, you can revel in the pride of reaping the rewards of your hard work.

Vegetable gardening is becoming as popular as shopping at the local market. Backyard vegetable gardens can produce a bounty of crops that are far cheaper than buying at the store, and the produce usually tastes much better. If you've ever grown flowers or herbs, then you will be able to plant and pick healthy vegetables that have been grown with the same degree of care and effort.

The first step to a successful vegetable garden is finding the right space. Decide how big you want your garden to be, and then select the best spot. You need to look for an area that has good drainage, proper air circulation and rich, deep soil. Find an area that gets as much sunlight as possible, and try to shelter the garden. The tasty treats in your garden will attract all kinds of animals, no matter where you live. Even rooftop gardens can be infiltrated by wildlife, so take measures to protect your produce. Surrounding your garden with a fence or placing traps for small animals are good options.

Before planting, you need to be sure that the soil is properly prepared. Soil preparation for vegetable gardens includes careful cultivation and the application of organic materials. The soil must be tilled, turned or plowed to help control weeds and mix mulch into the soil. If you have a small garden, spading will certainly do the trick. Mulching is another vital step in soil preparation. In order to thrive, plants need to grow in soil that has been enriched with nitrogen, minerals and other nutrients plants found in organic material. The most popular and beneficial type of mulch you can use is compost. Simple sheep manure is another cost-effective application that will do wonders for your plants. The type of fertilizer and application depends on the types of plants you'll be growing. Leafy plants like lettuce, cabbage and spinach usually grow best with more nitrogen. Root crops like carrots, beets, turnips and even potatoes with thrive with more potash. Beans and tomatoes require less fertilizer, while celery, onions and potatoes need a larger amount.

The arrangement of your garden is a big factor in the overall success. Depending on your specific garden conditions, you can't always guarantee that any one particular type of vegetable will thrive. For this reason, it's a great idea to plant several varieties. One popular method of arranging vegetable gardens is to plant varieties needing limited space in one area. Radishes, beets, lettuce and spinach grow on compact plants that can easily share a single bed. Other varieties, such as pumpkins, squash, corn and potatoes, need more elbow room. Tall plants, such as tomatoes and corn, should be planted at the back of the garden, providing shelter and sunlight for smaller plants.

When the preparations are complete and you're ready to begin planting, make sure that the time and weather are just right. Some seeds, like lettuce and peas, do very well if they are planted in the cool springtime soil. Most tender plants, however, can be killed by frost. Be sure the danger of frost has passed before you plant young tomatoes, peppers and other vegetables. If you'd like to get an early start, you can begin your garden inside in a hotbed or even on a windowsill, and then transplant when the weather permits. After you have planted all of your vegetables, be sure to water them regularly. Different varieties of vegetables have individual watering needs, but on average most plants will need the equivalent of about an inch of water per week.

Weeds can present a real problem in vegetable gardens, and must be dealt with promptly and properly. More than just eyesores, weeds can actually rob your vegetables of precious light, water and soil nutrients. They can also attract insects and disease to your garden. It's not necessary to use herbicides to control weeds. Simply pulling weeds as soon as they emerge will prevent them from spreading. Choosing varieties of seeds that produce disease-resistant plants is another viable option.

Growing vegetable gardens can be a lot of work, but the rewards are certainly worth the effort.