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Vegetable Gardening

Starting Your Vegetable Garden

If you are just starting your first vegetable garden, this page is for you. Also, if you are trying for better success at gardening, you may pick up a few pointers that may help you here. This page will outline how to start your vegetable garden, and provide resources for further reading. Additional pages on specific vegetables, and topics such as organic gardening are found in the 'Gardens and Green Living' section of Oakland's website.

The joy of gardening is not just in the harvesting. It is the working of good earth with your hands, the wonder of watching the plants grow and the amazing difference in taste and nutrition of home-grown produce. Let's get started.

Considerations and Planning

Questions: How many people will the garden be feeding? What kinds of vegetables do you like? Am I growing from seed, or getting my plants at the garden center? All good questions, because you want to eat what you grow and you want to succeed in growing. It is much better to start small and build on success than recover from a big disappointment.

- Select a site that gets a full days sun, has access to water, and decent soil.
- Decide whether to garden on the open ground or in raised beds. Raised bed gardening has advantages, especially if space is limited. But it takes more time and money to get started.
- Make a list of your favorite veggies and pick from that list, plus a few others that might look fun to try. Consider those that will give plentiful fruit and are easier to grow..
- Some vegetables tolerate cold weather better than others. Cabbage, Carrots, Broccoli, Cauliflower, Lettuce, Potatoes, Radishes, Onions, Onion sets, Peas, Turnips, and Beets are considered cool crops and can be planted outside by mid April. Beans, Cucumbers, Melons, Pumpkins, Sweet Potatoes, Sweet Corn, Squash and Tomatoes are warm season crops and should be plant out after the threat of frost is over.
- An excellent publication by Kansas State University called 'Vegetable Garden Planting Guide' will help you determine how many plants per person to plan for. Just type in the above title into your favorite search engine, or stop into the garden center for a copy.
- Make a sketch of your garden, to scale. Plan on your tallest vegetables on the north side so they do not shade shorter crops. On the other hand,



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- don't waste space by planting too far apart. A lush garden will help keep weeds down, shade the ground from the scorching summer sun, and conserve soil moisture.

Soil

Unless growing in raised beds, the soil will have to be prepared. If your back is not in good shape, it will be! First till the top 20 inches of soil to loosen it up using a spade or rototiller (rented). In our heavy Central Ohio soils, tilling the soil 20 inches deep is pretty ambitious. Do the best you can. Work in one 40 pound bag of manure or compost humus per 10 square feet of garden area. That is the minimum amount. Adding organic matter such as manure, humus and compost is the very best ingredient of success in gardening. Organic gardening books and websites will give out lots of ideas on soil preparation and alternative types of garden soil prep.

Seeds or Transplants (Starts)

Some vegetables can only be started by seed. Many others should be either bought at the garden center as transplants, or started from seed at home and grown in containers to starter plant size before planting out in the garden. Timing the sowing of seeds is important. Carrots and celery are a few that are usually started from seed. Tomatoes and green peppers are commonly sold at Oakland as transplants.

At the height of 'Veggie Season Madness (May), Oakland usually carries a wide variety of veggie plants in flats and pots. We also carry a huge selection of veggie seeds started from mid January to May. It's always fun checking out the seed racks and catalogs for the coming season.

Maintenance

The garden is planted and things are growing great? Congratulations. Now, don't pat yourself on the back yet. You have to help your garden survive the dangers of weeds, pestilence, and weather.

- Weed your garden regularly and consider an application of mulch to minimize weeds and conserve moisture.
- Do not water overhead. Excess water laying on the plants promote disease.
- Staked plants stay healthier than plants left to sprawl. Plan on putting stakes in for beans, and tomatoes before the plants are in the ground to avoid damaging their roots.



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- Watch out for insects, disease and four footed pests. You may have to fence the garden to keep out rabbits, etc. Careful watering will keep most diseases away. Read up on the basics of insect pests. The boring insects that pick on cucumber and squash vines are the most frustrating.
- Once again, pick a few weeds each day. An overgrown garden is a bummer to resurrect.

Conclusion

Vegetable gardening looks like some work, but the wonderful opportunity to work outdoors with your hands will reward you with flavorful, nutritious produce that can't be found at the megamart. There are unique and heirloom varieties of vegetables that are amazing in their flavor and color.

Gardening is an art and science, hence, experience is the great teacher. The thing is to enjoy school. If you have already caught the gardening bug, join the community garden, start a neighborhood garden club, and patronize farmers markets and community co-ops to share your experience. You'll discover a cool community of like-minded folks.

Happy Gardening

Resources

Rodales III. Encyclopedia of Organic Gardening, Maria Rodale, DK Books, 2005.

Edible Gardening for the Midwest, Colleen Vanderlinden and Allison Beck, Lone Pine Pub., 2009.

Random House Book of Vegetables, Roger Phillips and Martyn Rix, 1993.

Starter Vegetable Gardens, Barbara Pleasant, Storey Pub., 2010.

Intensive Organic Gardening HYG 1257-02, www.ohioline.osu.edu.

Vegetable Garden Planting Guide, MF315, Kansa State University. www.ksre.ksu.edu.

Numerous websites: Type in Vegetable gardens or Organic gardening.