



Vegetable Gardening

Vegetable growing begins with what you like to eat, cook with, or preserve through canning, drying, or freezing! There is nothing to compare to your own fresh picked produce for nutritional content and taste. Using organic methods will ensure that your food is free from harmful pesticides, herbicides, or fertilizers.

choosing a location

The ideal site will have a minimum of six to eight hours of direct sunlight per day. More sun translates directly into better yields. If possible, locate away from large trees and invasive roots that will compete for moisture and nutrients. Drying winds should be mitigated with windbreaks on the north or northwest exposure. A convenient source of water is very important!

preparing the site

This step will pay dividends far into the future if done well. A flourishing garden directly reflects the health of its soil. Clear the site of existing turfgrass, vegetation, and roots. Have your soil tested to determine possible deficiencies in preparation for tilling and amending. Unless the soil is very wet, dig up the soil to a spade's depth (about 8"-12") to loosen compacted soil and prepare for the amendments to be incorporated. Add *Turface* to lighten heavy soils, aiding drainage and helping the garden to warm up more quickly each spring. Amend the soil with high-quality compost such as *Dr. Earth Motherland* to add beneficial microbes and improve soil structure and texture. Imbalances uncovered by your soil test may be corrected by using *Espoma GardenTone* or *TomatoTone* (read the labels). Add *Chick-Magic 5-3-2* to supplement nitrogen (which is not listed in soil test results) and add readily available phosphate and calcium. Products such as *Espoma Bio-Tone* will increase microbial activity and "bring the soil alive," aiding in water and nutrient take-up.

culture and maintenance

When less than 1" of rain per week has fallen, supplement by watering deeply at the roots – avoiding the foliage. Fertilize at planting and throughout the growing season according to package directions. Using organic fertilizers will eliminate fears regarding residue on freshly picked veggies. Keep an eye out for pests and diseases and address these issues as soon as possible with organic controls or beneficial predator insects. Once your plants are sufficiently big, mulching with two to three inches of compost will help prevent weeds, keep soil cooler, and prevent water loss, as well as add nutrients as it breaks down.

at last – the harvest!

Succession sow for a longer harvest of short-season vegetables such as carrots, beets, radishes, spinach, lettuce, and other greens. Other crops (tomatoes, peppers, okra, peas and beans) benefit from frequent harvesting by setting more fruit in response. Delaying your picking chores will also result in peas and beans that are past their peak and lettuce and other greens that have become bitter or have begun to bolt.

fall : putting your garden to bed

Cleaning up as you go along makes less of a chore later, so pull plants as you finish harvesting. After removing all garden debris, soil testing can be repeated, and appropriate amendments may be added to jumpstart for next spring. To help kill pests and soil borne diseases leave the soil coarsely turned and exposed to winter weather. Sow cover crops such as winter rye, vetch, and fava beans. In the spring, mow and plant directly into the decomposed plants or till them into the soil.