



Vegetable Gardening

Begin with what you like to eat, cook with, or preserve through canning, drying, or freezing. Get it freshly picked for nutritional content and taste. Know the source – you! – to 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. Locate your garden close to a convenient source of water and away from large trees that will compete for moisture and nutrients. Mitigate drying winds with windbreaks on the north or northwest exposure.

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 discover any nutrient deficiencies. 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, improve drainage and helping the garden to quickly warm up each spring. Amend the soil with *Dr. Earth Home Grown Vegetable Garden Compost* or other high-quality compost to add beneficial microbes and improve soil structure. Imbalances revealed by your soil test may be corrected by using *Espoma GardenTone 3-4-4* or *TomatoTone 3-4-6* (read the labels). Add *Espoma Granulated Chicken Manure 3-2-3* to supplement nitrogen (which is not listed in soil test results) and add readily available phosphate and calcium. Products such as *Espoma Bio-Tone 4-3-3* will increase microbial activity which will aid 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. Once your plants are sufficiently big, mulching with 2"-3" of compost will help prevent weeds, keep soil cooler, and prevent water loss, as well as add nutrients as it breaks down. Keep an eye out for pests and diseases and address these issues as soon as possible with organic controls or beneficial predator insects.

At last – the Harvest!

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

Putting Your Garden to Bed for the Winter – a Few Options

Cleaning up as you go along makes less work 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. Chopped autumn leaves spread over the garden will break down during the winter and add nutrients for spring planting. To help kill pests and soil borne diseases coarsely turn the soil and leave it exposed to winter weather. Sow cover crops such as winter rye, vetch, and fava beans. In the spring, till in or mow and plant directly into the decomposed plants.



Edible Ornamentals: Landscape Your Lunch

With the increased availability of colorful vegetable hybrids and heirlooms, it may be time to reconsider the typical divisions found in most backyard gardens. Instead of relegating all edibles to one massive vegetable bed, why not interweave your favorite roots, greens and fruiting vegetables in among your ornamental trees, shrubs and perennials? Add fruiting trees, vines and shrubs and you may end up with an array of edible landscaping! Proponents of permaculture have long seen the wisdom in maximizing available resources by selecting plants that are beautiful as well as useful, layering them in visual tiers, and supplementing their sustainability with chickens or other livestock. As you combine your gardens, you'll also be combining tasks necessary to tend your plants. When space and time are at a premium, "mixing it up" makes a lot of sense and a rich biodiversity in your backyard can emulate Nature herself by creating landscapes where plants support and complement each other, and the menace of pests and diseases are reduced. Use organic methods and select disease-resistant varieties and your garden will safely nourish you as it enhances your living space.

Designing Your Edible Landscape

- Think about what you love to eat and what fruits, berries, roots, and vegetables you'd most like to have.
- Take into consideration the space needed and cultural requirements of your choices as well as your available time.
- Not starting with an empty canvas? Incorporate the existing trees and ornamentals you love into your plan or move them to accommodate your changes. Your garden is a reflection of your tastes as well as your hunger.
- Start with structures – raised beds, arbors, trellises and paths – that organize your plan and help you make decisions for siting your edibles and ornamentals. For instance, annual vines (peas, beans, cucumbers) are happy with temporary trellises, but can just as easily share the permanent structures with grape vines or espaliered fruit trees.
- Next, site your largest plants – the fruiting trees and shrubs – that will form the permanent background for the perennial and annual plantings. Consider columnar apple tree or a few berry bushes with colorful foliage as well as fruit.
- Containers will increase your usable space, add flexibility, access sun in paved areas, and provide a home for tropical edibles such as citrus, fig trees or pomegranates which winter inside your home or in a greenhouse.
- Edible landscaping is also an opportunity to plant perennial herbs and vegetables which need permanent site without the perpetual cultivation of annual beds. Coneflowers, calamint and tickseed could share space with oregano, sorrel, rhubarb, or asparagus and invite butterflies and beneficial pollinators into your garden.
- As for annuals - "greens" are not just for the vegetable patch anymore! Their varied colors and textures, speedy growth and carefree habits make them great companions for flowering annuals. Try a border of beet greens and chicory around your herb garden or add colorful mizuna as a contrast to your petunias. Many favorite vegetables such as beans, peas, okra and eggplant have blooms that can compete with more conventional flowerbed choices.
- Speaking of flowers – why not add some edible flowers such as nasturtium, viola, or calendula? Rugosa roses are noted for their hips which provide Vitamin C as well as jam and tea. Winter songbirds will also eat rosehips – and why not add food for them in your garden too? You may be a permaculturist after all!