UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND EXTENSION | HOME & GARDEN INFORMATION CENTER

GE 001
2009

How to Start a Vegetable Garden: 6 Basic Steps

STEP 1—Plan your garden

- Will you grow vegetables and herbs in containers or in garden soil?
- Start small with an in-ground garden and expand when you are ready. A good starter size is 50-75 sq. ft.
- Will you dig or till your entire plot, or perhaps use raised beds?
- Grow vegetables that you like to eat and are expensive to buy. Some of the easiest vegetables are bush bean, tomato, cucumber, pepper, lettuce, summer squash, and leafy greens (Swiss chard, kale, mustard, etc.).
- Place taller crops on the north and west sides so they will not shade shorter plants.
- Group plants by what season they grow in and how long they take to come to maturity. (This information is available on the Grow It Eat It website.)
- Early, short-season crops, like lettuce, can give way to late season crops after harvest

STEP 2—Select your site

- Your garden should be on level ground in a spot that gets at least 6 hours of full sun a day (preferably more).
- Avoid trees, shrubs, and buildings where possible.
- Make sure you have access to every part of your garden—include paths.
- Easy access to water is essential.
- Know your local animal population and fence as needed

STEP 3—Prepare your soil

- Vegetable garden soil should be deep and crumbly, should drain well, and should contain plenty of organic matter.
- Have your soil tested to determine nutrient levels and pH, and to be sure it is safe to plant in (less than 400 ppm of lead).
- Turn under or remove the grass sod but do not dispose of it as sod contains valuable topsoil and organic matter. You can also kill the grass by covering it with sections of newspaper and then covering that with a 2 to 4 inch layer of compost.
- A small plot (less than 100 sq. ft.) can be prepared using hand tools.
- Add organic matter, such as compost, manure, chopped leaves, etc. Organic matter should make up one quarter of the top 8 inches of your soil by volume.
- Garden beds may either be surrounded by an enclosure or built up with sloped sides and no enclosure.

STEP 4—Plant your crops

- Check the Grow It Eat It website to determine whether a particular vegetable is best direct-seeded in the ground or whether its seeds have to be planted indoors and grown to transplant size. You can buy seedsand transplants from local stores.
- f you buy seedlings to transplant, make sure they look healthy and are not so overgrown that roots encircle the bottom of the pot.

- Transplants raised inside your home or in a greenhouse should be exposed gradually to outdoor temperatures and conditions; this is called "hardening off."
- Transplant on a cloudy, calm afternoon if possible, and water well; handle plants carefully and make sure there is adequate room for the roots in the planting hole.

STEP 5—Take care of your garden

- Water deeply around the base of your vegetable plants, as necessary, to keep the roots systems moist.Frequent, shallow watering is good for newly planted seeds—not mature plants.
- Water in the morning when possible. Use a soaker hose or drip irrigation system to reduce water use.
- Fertilize as necessary based on your soil test recommendations, fertilizer label instructions, and the needs of your different crops.
- Control weeds by laying down organic mulches, slicing or chopping weeds with a hoe, and handpulling. Start early, as soon as weeds appear.
- Support tomato, pepper, and cucumber plants with stakes or trellises to save space.
- Monitor plants regularly for problems; check out University of Maryland Extension's resources for solutions. Learn to take an integrated pest management (IPM) approach to any plant or pest problem.
- Vegetables and herbs can be grown successfully in Maryland gardens without chemical pesticides.

STEP 6 - Harvest and enjoy!

Do you have a plant or insect pest question?
Visit us at http://extension.umd.edu/hgic

Author: Erica Smith, University of Maryland Extension Master Gardener
http://extension.umd.edu/growit

This publication, GE001, is a series of publications of the University of Maryland Extension and Program/department name. For more information on related publications and programs, visit: program url. Please visit http://extension.umd.edu/ to find out more about Extension programs in Maryland.