

How To Start A Vegetable Garden

"Farm To Child" Farmers Market

August 6, 2010

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Plan

Make a list of plants you want in your garden. Decide if you will need to start seeds or buy plants for each type of vegetable. Find out how much light each plant needs, how tall it will grow, and how much space you will need for each plant ("spacing"). Find out when you can plant each kind ("start date") and how long they will need to grow before you can harvest ("days to maturity"). Don't forget to add some flowers and herbs to the plan. Annuals (marigolds, petunias, salvia, etc.) will provide color all season and can be tucked in around the edges, even in between plants.

Start Your Garden

Where: Choose a spot with lots of sun in a level part of the yard. To grow plants for their fruit (tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, cucumbers, squash) you must have at site with more than 6 hours of full sun. Lots of other vegetables and herbs will grow with less light. No vegetables will grow in full shade. If you can't find a site in the yard with enough sun, consider putting big pots in a sunny spot. Get creative.

When: Late fall or early spring. If you plan far enough ahead you can kill the grass (and weeds) in the new garden spot by laying down 6-8 layers of wet newspaper and covering it with 2-4 inches of mulch. Do this in the fall or in the spring after the soil is completely thawed. You will need to wait at least 4-8 weeks for the grass to die. This method really works and it sure beats digging up sod!

Before you start, make sure the soil is ready to be worked. The soil should be moist. Dig a test hole. Gently squeeze a handful of soil in your hand. If it falls easily into smaller bits when you tap the ball, it is ready to work. If it stays in a ball - wait. You will do more harm than good by working with wet soil.

How: Remove sod (or not, if you planned ahead) and dig 6-12 inches deep with a shovel or digging fork. Remove rocks and roots. Add 2-4 inches of compost or well-rotted manure to the soil and dig to blend. Rake the soil flat. Lay out the rows and measure out and mark where plants will go. Believe the package directions. Don't plant cold sensitive plants until the recommended dates.

Dates you need to know

Average **last frost** for the Madison area is **May 2**. Start cold ahrdy plants after this date.

Average **first frost** is the **first week of October**. Frost ends the active growing season. Some plants can stay in the garden until the first freeze, or longer if properly protected.

Don't have full sun? Plants for part shade locations

Radishes
Beets
Broccoli
Cauliflower
Kale
Swiss chard
Arugula

Grow in containers

Pots 8-10 inches wide and at least 10-12 inches deep

Greens: arugula, cress
Lettuces : baby and small varieties
Herbs: chives, cilantro, parsley, thyme, tarragon, basil, mint

Pots 16-20 inches wide and at least 12 inches deep

All those mentioned above
Broccoli raab
Cauliflower
Radishes
Spinach
Swiss chard

Pots 20-24 inches wide and at least 16 inches deep

All those mentioned above
Bush and runner beans (add a trellis for pole beans)
Beets
Broccoli
Carrots
Turnips
Tomatoes (choose container or patio varieties)
Eggplant
Peppers

References

Month-By-Month Gardening in Wisconsin by Melinda Myers One of the best for general gardening in Wisconsin. Very concise. Lots of tables and charts. If I could have only one book on gardening in WI I would choose this one.

The Wisconsin Garden Guide, 3rd Edition by Jerry Minnich (1995) An old reference, but lots of basic info that is still useful.

Resources

Olbrich Botanical Gardens Schumacher Library Books, gardening magazines, seed catalogs, videos and references on all things horticultural. They also have a small, but wonderful, children's book collection. Olbrich Botanical Society members may check out books. Others may use on site. <http://www.librarything.com/catalog/olbrich> is their online "card" catalog.

Madison Public Library Your local branch library is a great resource for gardening info, too.

<http://www.hort.cornell.edu/4hplants/vegetables.html> Basic info on garden vegetables.

<http://hort.cals.cornell.edu/>

"Growing Vegetables, Herbs and Annual Flowers in Containers"

<http://www.gardening.cornell.edu/factsheets.html> Growing info on 58 different vegetables, presented in single page fact sheets. and lots of other gardening info.

<http://vegvariety.cce.cornell.edu>

Over 2000 varieties listed. Growing info to help you select what you need. Links to seed companies and to other Cornell gardening resources including online guides for more than 60 garden crops. You need this site to plan your garden. Bookmark it!

<http://learningstore.uwex.edu> The site for all Extension publications. Many can be downloaded as pdf file and printed on your home printer.

A1989 *The Vegetable Garden*,

A1653 *Vegetable Cultivars and Planting Guide for Wisconsin Gardens*

A3900-04.pdf *Fall Vegetables*

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Events : **Urban Horticulture Day August 21, 2010 10am-3pm**

Evening Walks (with a guide) Selected Wednesdays 6:30-8 pm