



CREATING A SALSA GARDEN

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Chips and Salsa, anyone?? How about salsa on salad or adding salsa to a favorite dish?

These are just a few examples of how we might use salsa to enhance what we eat.

Salsa is a wonderful accompaniment to many dishes, which is why adding a salsa garden can be a tasty and creative addition to your gardening plan.

Not many people think of gardening with a theme. Most just figure they'll plant the usual staple crops or what the nursery has out for sale when the weather permits planting in their garden.

However, creating a salsa garden can bring an interesting perspective to gardening. Theme gardening can also really help engage kids in the garden. By simply including a few common plants you may already know well to your garden planning process, such as tomatoes, tomatillos, bell peppers, onion, garlic, chilies and cilantro, you can initiate a salsa garden.

Planning Your Salsa Garden

Start by designating a specific area that will accommodate the plants. Consider an area where the plants will get sunlight for at least 6 hours a day. Tomatoes and peppers love the afternoon sun and heat. Other plants that desire less heat can be tucked a bit close to the heat-loving plants to allow them to be shaded or have less direct sunlight.

Now decide what kind of salsa you want to make, then derive a list of the plants that will provide the ingredients. This will help you determine the exact size of the space needed for your salsa garden. For instance, depending on how much salsa you want to produce, a small salsa garden may fit nicely in a 4'x8' raised bed.

Before planting, loosen the soil in the area you have chosen for your salsa garden, or consider utilizing a raised bed, as mentioned above. For the best results, add plenty of compost and mix in with the native soil, even if you are putting a raised bed on top. Don't forget to add some slow-release fertilizer to feed the plants throughout the growing season. Now you are ready to place the plants in your prepared area.

The location and spacing of your plants will depend upon the plant's needs and how the sun hits the designated space you have chosen to plant your salsa garden. The tomatoes and peppers, for instance, are the tallest plants and depending on the need for shade or sunlight of the other plants will be positioned accordingly. When planting cilantro, do so where the plant will receive more indirect sun in the afternoon. Before adding the rest of your salsa garden plants to your designated area, read the sunlight recommendations on the plant's tag to determine where they will best fit and thrive with the other plants.

Now it's time to watch your garden grow. Remember, you can always create your garden based on a salsa recipe that appeals to you. There are many ingredients that can be considered when making salsa. To derive a different twist, consider adding other ingredients, such as peach, lime or fresh corn. This is a great way to utilize those extra peaches you have from your tree!

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After you have planted your garden and the plants have flourished, it's time to harvest those beautiful, ripe fresh vegetables and herbs and turn them into incredible homemade salsa. High in flavor and nutrition and low in calories, homemade salsa is a tasty addition to meals and snacks. Try a salsa garden for your next garden adventure.

References

UCCE Placer County Master Gardeners, Hotline: 530-889-7388

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