



ASK A MASTER GARDENER

PREPARING FOR YOUR FIRST SPRING GARDEN

By Trish Grenfell, Placer County Master Gardener

Q I have decided that I want to grow my first vegetable garden next spring. I don't have much money and my yard is mainly grass. And I am novice gardener with little time to learn. What can I do now to prepare for my spring garden?

A There are a number of things you can do this fall to get your garden off to a running start. But you do need to know some of the basics. If you have access to a computer, start with <http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/news/article/21283> to cheer you on in your quest for a "victory garden." And Publication 8059 <http://ucanr.org/repository/fileaccess.cfm?article=54131&p=%20QLEYDH> is excellent. Alternatively, call the Master Gardener Hotline and ask that this publication be mailed to you.

- 1) Pick a plot of land with at least 6 hours of sun in the spring & summer and decide how you will protect it from wildlife. Make sure the area to be cultivated should not exceed your ability to care for the garden. Check out the benefits of raised bed gardening.
- 2) Plant a small "cover crop" such as annual rye grass or fava beans in your future garden bed. Two weeks ago this column addressed this subject. You can either find it online at http://www.auburnjournal.com/category/home_garden/browse.html or call the Auburn Journal and ask for a copy of Ask the Master Gardeners printed Oct 15.
- 3) An abundance of organic material should be dug into the soil and allowed to compost over the winter. There are two kinds of organic matter additions that are commonly done in fall: organic mulch like straw and fresh manure. When you dig your plot, be sure to turn your grass into the soil. Actually the best thing to do with fresh manure is to add it to the compost pile and use the resultant compost in the spring. Uncomposted manure may contain disease organisms that could contaminate produce, so NEVER spread it when crops are present. Applied to the garden soil in the fall however, the manure has sufficient time to decompose and eliminate the diseases.
- 4) Buy an inexpensive soil test kit at a local nursery and check the pH balance and nutritional needs of your soil. Although it is best to wait until spring to add fertilizer, now is the best time to amend the pH number if necessary. The pH requirements of the vegetables you plan to grow will determine if you need to amend the soil. Now is the time to add lime to increase the pH or sulphur to decrease it.

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