



YOU CAN GROW A SUCCESSFUL VEGETABLE GARDEN THIS SUMMER

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You already know what vegetables your family likes to eat and you like knowing where and how your food is grown. You know that growing your own vegetables reduces your family's carbon footprint and you really know that gardening is good exercise, so let us help you make your gardening efforts successful this summer.

Vegetables will grow in a garden plot, a raised bed or even in pots on your deck or patio.

First of all, be sure that your garden site gets plenty of **sunshine**. Six to eight hours of direct sun every day will give your vegetables the best opportunity to produce what you have in mind.

Be realistic about how big an area you will plant. We want the time you spend gardening to be enjoyable not just more stuff on your "to do list". And, you really don't want neighbors to run and hide as you approach with your daily basket of zucchini or tomatoes!

There are a couple of things to think about before you even buy seeds or seedlings: Be sure that your **irrigation** is in place AND in working order."

If your **soil needs to be amended**, now is the time to do that.

Know the likely **last frost date** before planting anything...better to plant a little late than too early! A Master Gardener friend of mine has figured out the last frost date: It's the night after you plant your tomatoes! Just because the air is warm and it's sunny, the soil may not be warm enough to plant. Those little summer plants may live, but seldom thrive when started in cold soil. And some seeds may rot in cold, too wet soil.

Thinking about **planting seeds**? It's far more economical to plant seeds and you have many more choices of varieties with seeds. And, it's always more fun to grow varieties that you could never find in a store. But, you may have to start seeds inside to get a head start on a short growing season. It's a very good idea to read the seed package before planting. There will be a recommendation about how many days before or after the last frost date you should start your seeds. It will also tell you if this is a seed that's better planted in place or started indoors to transplant later and how deep to plant the seeds. It's also good to check the "**number of days to harvest**" so you won't still be waiting to harvest when the first fall frost is on the way.

Irrigation is crucial as seeds are germinating...a hot sunny day when the soil dries out will put an end to what you thought would be your garden.

As your plants emerge, **thinning** will be necessary. I know...it's hard to take out the plants that were kind enough to grow for you, but it has to be done since plants that are too crowded will just not do as well as they could, if given room to stretch out. Try clipping off the extra plants at soil level instead of pulling them out, which can damage the roots of the other plants.

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How about **transplants**? As soon as you bring the transplants home from the nursery and get the plants in the ground, you have a garden. But, you are limited to whatever varieties your nursery chooses to stock and plants do cost more than seeds. Maybe you will plant a combination of seeds and transplants. Think about choosing disease-resistant varieties, which will save you the trouble of planting a garden only to lose it after a disease attacks your plants. This information will be on plant tags at the nursery.

So, it's time to think about watering these vegetables. It would be so useful if we could tell you exactly how often and how much to water, but it's all dependent on your soil and the weather conditions. The trouble with just taking a look, is that plants often exhibit the same symptoms when over watered as when they are under watered. It's important to have the moisture down at the root zone, so looking at the soil surface is not good enough.

You're a gardener, get your hands dirty! Poke down into the soil and see how moist it is down where the roots are. As roots get down deeper, a long screwdriver will help you check. There are times during the heat of summer that plants, even well watered plants, will wilt during a hot afternoon. They just can't take up the water fast enough and the plants will wilt to conserve their moisture. Resist the impulse to water again and take another look early the next morning. If they no longer look wilted, they're watered enough.

Now, you are not going to want to be wasting water and you have better things to do than monitoring the soil moisture day after day, so consider **mulching** your garden, which will not only conserve water, but will also have the advantage of discouraging the germination of weeds in your garden. An easy method of mulching is to water your garden well and then put down a layer or two of newspaper. Tear strips of the newspaper to fit around the plants, which will have grown to a decent size before doing this.

To keep the newspaper from blowing about and to make for a tidier garden appearance, place a mulch of **compost** on top of that and water again. Just keep the finished compost away from the stems of the plants.

Make sure that this compost is completely finished. Unfinished compost, which has material still to be broken down, is likely to invite millipedes, earwigs and other unwanted creatures to finish decomposing the mulch. While these critters are munching the mulch, they may eat your young plants as well.

Be sure to **involve your children**, or even your neighbor's children in your garden. Now, I know this is completely undocumented and non-scientific, but there seems to be something about the energy of young kids that adds to the energy of a garden. Plus, kids love to play in the dirt! And kids are quite likely to eat vegetables that they grow and harvest themselves, even those that they may have had little interest in previously eating. And, what a wonderful thing, to encourage a popular trend that is also healthful.

You probably don't want to hear this, but **insects** may visit your garden. Try to learn which insects are beneficial, which are intending to eat your garden before you do and which are just hanging around watching the garden grow.

It may not be necessary to do anything other than spray them off with a sharp stream of water from your hose and it's never a good idea to kill anything before identifying it.

Enjoy your gardening adventure! And if your garden is successful beyond your wildest dreams, please remember that your local Food Bank will be happy to distribute what you can't use to those who will be grateful for your excess. If you need more help in growing your summer vegetable garden, please be sure to call your local Master Gardener office at (530) 273-0919 (Nevada County) or (530) 889-7388 (Placer County).

Grow Your Own Vegetables—It's Worth It!

Reference

Vegetable Research Information at <http://vric.ucdavis.edu>

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