



Plant Your Soup?

By Michael Pizza

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Don't you just love savoring a delicious and nutritious soup during those cold autumn and winter months? Why not consider your favorite soup recipes and plant your garden accordingly? By planning your garden in advance, and learning how to freeze or preserve your crops, you can put together a hearty soup in just about fifteen minutes.

Of course nothing beats homegrown vegetables and herbs from your garden. By growing your own, you are able to monitor the quality and be assured that no pesticides arrive at your table. Also, by "planting your soup garden" you can count on a substantial savings.

The first step is learning how to "plant your soup." Consider those vegetables and herbs which you and your family crave in a hearty soup. Then consider the planting needs of those vegetables. Some will be summer crops; some will be winter crops. Some of the herbs might even be windowsill crops.

The second and equally important step is learning how to freeze and preserve those crops for your soups. Many of those crops can be easily frozen in appropriately sized freezer bags or containers. "Appropriately sized" means the exact quantity you will need of each ingredient to make one pot of soup. Other crops might be dried and stored in the pantry. Still others might be preserved in jars, utilizing safe and approved methods.

Once you have your pantry and your freezer stocked with your favorite soup ingredients sized to your recipes, it's just a matter of minutes to toss them into your pot and start the cooking process. A hearty soup can be a meal within itself. What's easier than filling a thermos with a hot soup and enjoying it hours later at school or at work? Or, "dressing up a soup" by topping it off with home made croutons or a dollop of sour cream or a heaping tablespoon of parmesan cheese and then serving it as a main course, perhaps with a lite salad?

If this concept interests you, consider attending the free presentation of “Plant Your Soup” which will be co-sponsored by the UCCE Master Gardeners and Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County. At this class, the participants will first learn how to prepare the soil, choose the plants, fertilize, and harvest some of the soup’s main ingredients. In the second part of this presentation, participants will learn how to store, dry and freeze some of these ingredients. The last part of this presentation will be an actual cooking demo of the dried, stored and frozen products in order to make a great minestrone soup in less than 15 minutes. This free class will be held at the Veterans Memorial Building, 130 Placerville Drive, Placerville on Saturday, September 13, from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm.

Master Gardeners seek your opinion on where, when, and what subjects should be taught at their free public education gardening classes. Help them understand how to best serve our community by filling out a brief online survey at <http://bit.ly/1qCsRIId>. Paper copies of the survey are also available at the Master Gardener office.

UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County are available to answer home gardening questions at local Farmer’s Markets and from Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome. The office is located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.org/Master_Gardeners/ and you can also find us on Facebook.