



Advice on How to Start a Vegetable Garden, from an Over-Ambitious Gardener

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The trouble with gardening is that it does not remain an avocation. It becomes an obsession.

-Phyllis McGinley

Your first job is to prepare the soil. The best tool for this is your neighbor's garden tiller. If he does not own a garden tiller, suggest he buy one.

-Dave Barry

This article is for all those individuals whose new year's resolution is to grow a vegetable garden this year. When I decided to design and build my garden, my focus was on all the vegetables I was going to harvest. I was into the farm-to-table mode, you know -- my garden to my mouth. What I did not think about was all the planning, cost and preparation that would need to be accomplished in order to get to the harvesting of the vegetables. So as one who has traveled down this path, I thought it would be wise to give a little advice on how to accomplish this task in a sensible manner. Hopefully this will enable you to avoid the mistakes I made.

First make a plan, decide how big of a garden you want: is it going to be a container garden, raised beds, or in ground planting. Do you plan to grow organically or otherwise? As Yogi Berra once said, "If you don't know where you are going, you end up some place else."

Second, have a budget, and stick to it. Your budget should include a list of the cost of soil, irrigation equipment, monthly watering, fertilizer, dealing with pests and diseases, tools, fencing and choice of plants. William Feather said, "A budget is something that tells us what we cannot afford, but it does not keep us from buying it."

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Third, pick your site. Your plants need at least six hours of sunlight every day. Determine what you will need to do to prepare the site for your garden.

Fourth, know your dirt. Where I live the soil in my garden consisted of small rocks, big rocks and even bigger rocks, so I chose to grow my garden in raised beds and containers. If you choose to plant in the ground, determine what kind of soil enhancements will be needed to enable your plants to be the most productive.

Fifth, plan to build a fence. This is El Dorado County, and for those of you who have not seen a deer, plant a garden, and they will come. Fences do not have to be expensive, but they need to be at least six feet high. If you plan to grow blueberries, or strawberries, determine how you will keep the birds from eating the fruit.

Sixth, grow what you like -- this is your garden, so grow the plants you like to eat.

Lastly, if you are really serious about growing a vegetable garden, take a class from the UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado; we have classes weekly and now on weekdays in Cameron Park. Happy Gardening and Happy New Year.

There is no UCCE Master Gardener public education class this Saturday, January 3rd, 2015. The Master Gardener office is closed from December 23, 2014 - January 2, 2015. Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome at the office, 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.