

February 1, 2017



Advice for the Aspiring Vegetable Gardener
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Many of us have fond memories of our parents having a vegetable garden. We remember the taste of fresh vegetables that always seemed to taste better than vegetables purchased at the supermarket. So, it is natural that many of us would want to have a vegetable garden, as there are few things more satisfying than growing your own food. The problem with this idea is that although many of us want to have a vegetable garden few people consider the time, expense, and effort that goes into growing our own vegetables. Let's face it, while growing your vegetables can be very rewarding, gardening is a chore. Many new gardeners forget this and set themselves up for disappointment. They try to grow too much, become overwhelmed and frustrated with the whole process of growing their own vegetables. As someone who has grown his own vegetables for many years, I have had many successes and failures. It is easy to become disillusioned with the whole process of growing vegetables. So here is some practical advice on how to start a successful vegetable garden.

Start small - a small well-kept garden will supply more food with less work. Limit the amount of time, labor and expense to maintain your garden. A low maintenance garden is your goal for the first year. You can always improve and extend your garden once you have gained the knowledge and experience to successfully expand your garden. By small, I mean starting with just one raised bed or no more than four pots. Many vegetables are just as happy in a large pot as they are in the ground. You can even buy an elevated raised bed that will sit on your deck or patio. Growing in a raised bed or several containers will allow you grow a lot of produce in a limited space.

Plan ahead - successful vegetable gardening is the result of good planning and preparation. With good planning, even small gardens can produce a lot. Look at your yard determine where would

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be the best place to have a garden. You want an area that gets at least six to eight hours of sunlight daily. Write down what you and your family like to eat. Plan how much is reasonable to spend on your garden. You do not need to purchase expensive items like irrigation systems, timers, tomato cages, or fancy tools, when first starting your garden. Wooden stakes work for tomatoes, as well as cucumbers and peppers. You can water by hand for the first year. Make sure you like what you are doing before investing a lot of money in your garden. Look into growing organically, as this will limit your expenses on pesticides or herbicides.

Don't start your plants in the first year from seed - buy transplants. Transplants have been grown by professionals and will produce a crop earlier in the season. Select healthy looking, compact, green, leafy transplants. Avoid tall, spindly, wilted, pale or yellow plants. Limit the number of plants for the first year. Plants grown in over-crowded conditions will become stressed and produce fewer vegetables. In addition, stressed plants are more prone to diseases and insect pests. Start with just a few vegetables, such as tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers. All three can be grown easily in raised beds or containers with minimum expense. Broccoli, brussels sprouts, carrots, kale, peas, and beans can also be grown in containers or raised beds.

Take a class on growing vegetables. Yes, you can get lots of good advice on the internet, but you can get a lot of bad advice. The UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County offer free classes on growing vegetables several times a year. All the information is researched and vetted through the University of California. Furthermore, the instructors are people who have real-life experience in growing vegetables and practice what they teach.

This Saturday's Master Gardener class will be on Spring and Summer Vegetables. Zack Dowell will discuss plant selection, soil and site preparation, proper planting techniques, pest management, and more. Class will be held 9:00 a.m. to noon at Government Center-Building C, 2850 Fairland Court, Placerville.

The Wednesday, February 8th class will be on Small Garden Spaces. Mike Pavlick will go over designs, options, and methods which allow anyone to have a vegetable garden in a small yard setting. Class will be held 9:00 a.m. to noon at Cameron Park Community Center, 2502 Country Club Dr., Cameron Park.

UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\)621-5512](tel:5306215512). Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news. You can also find us on Facebook.