



Getting Started with Vegetable Gardening

Learning to grow your own vegetables is a rewarding and ongoing process. There's so much information out there that it can be hard to know where to start. There will always be more to learn, but this info sheet will walk you through the basics and get you on your way.

SEVEN STEPS TO A SUCCESSFUL GARDEN

1. **Choose a location**

Find the sunniest spot you can. Most vegetables need at least 6 hours of direct sunlight each day, although some greens and root vegetables can get by on 4.

2. **Prepare your site**

If you plan to garden in containers or raised beds, simply fill them with an appropriate soil (see the shopping list below), add organic vegetable fertilizer and lime, and get growing.

If you'll be using your existing soil, here's a basic method to prepare for your first season:

- Dig out any existing sod, large roots, etc.
- Use a shovel or digging fork to loosen the top two feet of soil.
- Spread about two inches of compost, a thin dusting of dolomite lime, and a thin dusting of balanced organic fertilizer over the entire surface area.
- Use a hoe or shovel to gently mix these amendments into the top six inches of soil.
- Rake the surface to even it out, remove any rocks or large soil clumps, and shape the bed into an even mound. It should be a little bit higher than ground level.

3. **Plant seeds or starts**

Choose vegetables you love to eat, and check out the list of beginner-friendly crops at the end of this guide. Follow the timing and spacing directions on the seed packet or plant tag, or take a look at our *Vegetable Seed Planting Chart*. Always plant more than you think you need. That way, you won't have to stress if the occasional plant falls to pests or disease.

4. **Water as needed**

The best way to know when your garden needs water is to stick your fingers in the dirt. Ideally, the soil should always feel moist but not sopping wet a couple of inches down. You'll need to vary your watering with the seasons and weather.

5. **Weed often**

The key to stress-free weeding is frequent weeding. When you start to see tiny green shoots peaking up between your taller crop plants, you can simply rough up the surface of the soil with your fingers. This disturbs the roots of small weeds enough to kill them.

6. **Fertilize mid season**

To give your plants an extra boost, you can scratch a second helping of granular organic fertilizer into the top inch or so of soil near your plants, or use a liquid organic fertilizer. Either way, the directions on the container will let you know how much to apply.

7. Harvest your produce

Good work! Once your plants are big enough, or once fruits like tomatoes and cucumbers are ripe, you're ready to harvest and enjoy!

THE BEGINNING GARDENER'S SHOPPING LIST

What do you really need to get started? Here's a quick checklist:

- ☐ Soil: potting soil (for most containers), raised bed mix (to fill raised beds or very large containers), and/or compost (to amend existing soil)
- ☐ Amendments: balanced organic vegetable fertilizer and dolomite lime
- ☐ Irrigation: watering can, hose with a spray-nozzle, sprinkler, and/or soaker hose
- ☐ Tools: shovel, digging fork, hoe, rake, trowel, and/or cultivator claw
- ☐ Plants: starts and/or seeds of your favorite vegetables

GREAT PLANTS TO START WITH

The most important thing is to grow vegetables you're excited about caring for, harvesting, and eating. If you grow what you love, you'll love growing it. Starting off with plants that are fast-growing and well adapted to our climate is a great way to set yourself up for success. Here are a few of the best vegetables for beginning gardeners:

- Salad greens: Lettuce, spinach, and mustard love our relatively cool summers.
- Radishes: The sprinters of the vegetable world! Seeds can germinate in three days.
- Kale: Hardy and adaptable, kale will thrive in almost any garden.
- Peas: Can be planted very early and produce a continuous harvest over a long period.
- Green beans: Both climbing and bush varieties grow fast and produce abundantly.
- Carrots: Provide loose soil and give each plant enough space for an excellent harvest.
- Cherry tomatoes: Much more reliable in this climate than varieties with larger fruit.

RELAX AND HAVE FUN

Learning to garden is an adventure. Even the most experienced gardeners run into trouble with pests, diseases, unbalanced soil nutrition, and the weather. There's no such thing as a perfect garden. As you gain experience, you'll also gain confidence. Over time, you will develop your own unique gardening style.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Want to learn more? There are many great resources out there. Here are just a few of our favorite books about vegetable gardening in the Pacific Northwest.

- *Maritime Northwest Garden Guide*, 2nd ed., by Lisa Taylor and the Gardeners of Seattle Tilth
- *Growing Vegetables West of the Cascades*, 6th ed., by Steve Solomon
- *Food Grown Right, In Your Backyard*, by Colin McCrate and Brad Halm

Of course, you can always give us a call or come in to see us when you have questions.