

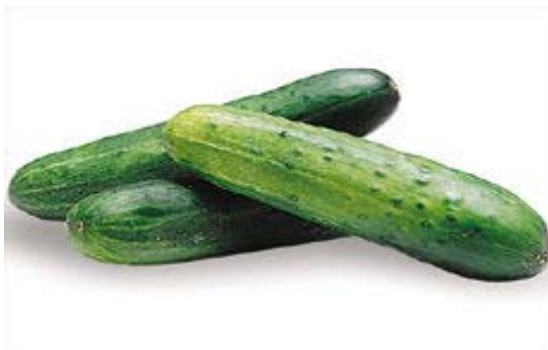


Success with vegetables

Tasty advice for the urban farmer

Whether or not this is your first year growing vegetables, there is always something to be learned. Perhaps the first lesson, as experienced gardeners will tell you, is not to get over-enthusiastic and plant a huge vegetable garden that will overwhelm you.

The layout of a vegetable garden requires some planning. Running the rows north-south will make sure each plant receives the same amount of daylight, and be sure to plant the tallest vegetables at one end so they don't shade the entire garden. A few vegetables, including potatoes, celery and leeks, will need to have soil hilled up along their stalks as they grow, so make sure the row beside these plants is far enough away that hoeing up soil won't damage the adjacent crop.



Vegetable transplants that were started in a greenhouse in March are the simplest, and fastest way to garden -- but not all vegetables can be successfully transplanted. Leaf and head lettuce, carrots, peas and beans are some that should be seeded directly in the ground. Some varieties of vegetables mature earlier than others and can be harvested mid-season, leaving space for another crop. Short-season crops include lettuce, snow peas, radishes and spinach. Short season crops are a good choice if you spend a lot of time away during the summer and you want to harvest your bounty before going on holiday.

When to plant is the next question that arises. Short-season crops in particular don't do well in the summer heat and so should be planted early. Lettuce, spinach, peas, green onions, radishes and carrots are all short season crops, which can be safely planted in most areas during the first week of May. The Victoria Day weekend has traditionally been the accepted time to seed bush beans, corn, cabbage and plant tomato transplants (along with summer-flowering annuals). Give the soil a few extra weeks to warm up and then plant zucchini, cucumber, winter squash and pumpkin plantlets during the first week of June.



The newest trend in vegetable gardening is growing vegetables in raised beds. Extra soil is added to raise the level of the bed quite high (at least 15 cm). The sides of the bed can be sloped gently or held in place with a timber or stone retaining wall. Ideally, raised beds should be narrow enough so you can reach into the middle without ever

stepping into the bed. The theory behind raised beds is that the soil around the vegetables' roots never becomes compacted -- and the vegetables can be planted more closely. The soil in raised beds warms more quickly in the spring. The soil in raised beds also drains more quickly so roots won't get waterlogged.

Another not-so-recent trend is organic gardening. We've included a few organic insect repellents as true food for thought:

- The strong scent of marigolds repels rabbits and Japanese beetles.
- Nasturtiums will keep insects from attacking melons, squash and cucumbers.
- Planting geraniums around your roses will help keep Japanese beetles away.
- Basil will protect tomatoes (as well as complement their taste!)
- Spearmint should be planted near cabbage, broccoli, Brussels sprouts and cauliflower.
- Onion skins can be spread around roses to help control the disease black spot -- picking up any fallen rose leaves will help too.

Add another dimension to your gardening experience this year with vegetables.