

Vegetable Gardening: Good Planning is the Key to Success

Taking up vegetable gardening as a hobby has a number of benefits. Some people find that the physical act of working in the soil is a great relaxation technique. Others have discovered the incomparable taste of home-grown, fresh-picked vegetables. Still others are looking for ways to reduce their personal carbon footprint--vegetable gardening makes eating locally much easier.

All of these people have something else in common: they know exactly where their vegetables are coming from. Between food recalls and e coli scares, having control over your own food supply adds an extra bit of security. Regardless of your priorities, home vegetable gardening is remarkably rewarding.

You may find that you can even earn extra money with your vegetable garden. It's a simple matter to grow much more than you can eat and preserve, so you'll have extra to sell at a farmer's market or from your own roadside stand. There's a good chance that local restaurants and health food stores would be interested in purchasing your bounty.

The first decision you'll need to make when planning a vegetable garden is size. How much space can you devote to the project, and how much work can you reasonably expect to do? When you're doing this initial "gardening in your head" exercise, you'll want to buy lots of different vegetables in a full range of varieties. But unless you've grown vegetables before, you may be surprised at the amount of work involved. Don't plan more than you can handle at first.

Start by making a list of the vegetables you want to cultivate. Don't dismiss anything yet. This is vegetable brainstorming and all ideas are welcomed. Figuring out what you have time to care for and what you can afford will come later. Give your mind free reign to create the vegetable garden of your dreams. But don't just imagine it. Be sure to actually write a list.

After you've finished listing the possibilities, start narrowing them down. Think about what you can buy locally at a good price. For example, if locally-grown cabbage or corn is readily available in your area, then there's probably no reason for you to plant them. You probably can't improve much over the taste or lower the cost by growing them yourself.

This should leave you with a list of vegetables that either aren't available locally, are just a little too pricey to buy regularly, or would taste a lot better if you could grow them. Herbs are an excellent example of edible plants on which you can almost always save money by growing them yourself.

Tomatoes are another popular choice for growing at home. It's simply not possible to buy a tomato from a store that tastes as good as one freshly picked from your own vine. While we're in the salad section, specialty lettuce is another good choice. Growing it at home means being able to eat it more often at a lower cost.

You should understand going in that vegetable gardens can take a lot of hard work. At times the labor can be relaxing. But sometimes it's just back-breaking work in brutal summer heat. In case you hadn't thought it through, there will be dirt and bugs involved.

Regret is most common when people try to create a garden that is too large. Planning for more than you can handle will transform a pleasant hobby into a nightmare of work. And gardens don't wait for you to be ready to work. Things need to be done when they need to be done. This is not meant to discourage, but rather to make sure you understand why you're narrowing down your list above.

And by the way, don't plant something you don't eat. Adjust your choices based on your personal preferences, not according to what looks good in the seed catalog. Avoid planting too much unless you plan to sell or give away the excess.

Vegetable gardening can be a relaxing, rewarding activity. It will provide you with healthy foods that taste better than store-bought produce. Realistic planning and an analysis of what's available locally will ensure that your vegetable garden will be a positive experience and become an annual tradition.

About the Author

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