



GROW • IT • GUIDE

Planting Your Vegetable Garden

Before you put any plants into the ground, you should draw a sketch of the garden area so you can plan how many plants you want and where they will go. Once you have completed this sketch, use stakes to mark out where different rows will be planted. Set up your trellises or set in stout stakes for climbing plants such as peas and beans. Create mounds on which you will put in the vining plants such as cucumbers, pumpkins and melons.

1 **Preparing the Soil:** Fertile, well drained soil is necessary for a successful garden. The exact type of soil is not as important as the soil being well drained, well supplied with organic matter, reasonably free of stones and moisture retentive. Keep in mind that infertile soil that has good physical properties can be made productive by using organic matter, lime, commercial fertilizer and other soil-improving materials. Soils should not be plowed or worked while it is very wet unless the work will certainly be followed by severe freezing weather. If the soil sticks together in a ball and does not readily crumble under slight pressure by the thumb and finger, it is too wet for plowing or working—because in this condition it will cake as it dries—making it unsuitable for young plants.

If your garden has already been cultivated and used in past years, there is little to do other than to plow in additional organic material and fertilizers. The fertilizer may be in the form of composted manure or any good commercial complete plant food distributed at a rate of 3 or 4 pounds for every thousand square feet of vegetable garden. When manure is added to the soil, it must be composted prior to planting because fresh, hot manure will also burn your plants.

Different types of vegetables require varying degrees of soil acidity. The acidity or alkalinity of the soil is measured by pH, and must be adjusted according to which crop will occupy that area. Generally, soils in

moist climates are acidic and those in dry climates are alkaline. A soil with a pH lower than 7.0 is an acid soil and one with a pH higher than 7.0 is alkaline. You can use our Soil Analyzer to test your soil. Once you have determined the pH, you can amend the soil as needed.

Once your soil structure, fertility and pH have been established, the soil should be tilled one last time and then raked smooth. Your soil is now ready for seeds or plants. Planting depths and spacing are critical, so don't crowd too many plants into the allotted space or you may end up with spindly plants and no food. Be sure to place a tag or marker on each row or area so that you will know what to expect to sprout there and when! Water your garden thoroughly the day before you intend to plant.

2 **Setting in Vegetable Plants:** If you purchased bedding plants, or started your seeds indoors in pots, dig a small hole which is slightly wider and deeper than the root ball of the new plant. Water the plant thoroughly prior to planting it in the garden to lessen the shock of transplant. Gently tap the pot to loosen the roots and remove the new plant. If the root ball is tangled and compacted, use your fingertips to gently loosen the outer roots. Set the plant into the hole slightly deeper than the depth of the growing pot, and firm the soil in around it, making certain that there is good soil to root contact. Water in well.

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3 Maintenance Tips as Your Garden Grows: During dry periods, vegetable gardens need extra watering. Most vegetables benefit from an inch or more water each week, especially when they are fruiting.

- Mulching between the rows will help to control weeds, conserve moisture in the soil and provide you with pathways to access your plants. Black plastic may be used, or you can use grass clippings, straw, wood chips or garden debris.
- Throughout the growing season, you should stay on top of insect pests. Discovering a bug problem early will make it much easier to take

appropriate action and eliminate the pests. Do not use pesticides once the plants have fruited unless it becomes an absolute necessity, and be sure to follow the manufacturer's recommendations.

- Weeds rob your vegetables of water, light and root space. If you keep them pulled regularly (try to get the entire root) the job isn't too bad. If they are allowed to go to seed, you may be dealing with thousands of weeds instead of a few.
- Once you have harvested your crop, put the spent plant and other vegetable matter into your compost pile so that it can be recycled into your garden next spring.

CAUTION: Not all plant material is edible. Though most plants are harmless, some contain toxic substances that can cause headaches, nausea, dizziness or other discomforts. As a general rule, only known food plants should be eaten. In case of ingestion, please contact your local poison control center at once and provide them with the name of the ingested plant.

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