

Gardening Department

Vegetable Gardening Tips

We all seem to be trying to eat healthier, more organically and fresher. Nothing achieves that purpose better than your own Home Vegetable Garden and doubly good if it's totally organic. The home garden when properly planned and planted will supply a variety of vegetables for use throughout the entire growing season. It is also a rewarding and healthy hobby.

There are books on vegetable gardening and we will not try to duplicate them here. Also, subjects like weed control/insecticides/fertilizing are covered in other tips. This article will try to highlight thoughtful tips to help in your gardening.

It's all about the soil. For your plants to be as healthy as possible and provide with a flavorful and nutritious bounty, the soil has to provide the required nutrients and minerals to the plant. The best way to insure this is to add soil amendments (i.e. compost, humus) to soil each year and use an organic fertilizer like Dr. Earth Vegetable Fertilizer.

- Spread lime in your garden at least once a year, every year. This will raise or maintain a good PH and provide calcium and magnesium. Calcium and magnesium help the plants absorb other nutrients, build strong cell walls, help the plant with fruit set, help the plant maintain a greener color and also fight disease. The best time to incorporate lime and soil amendments into your garden is Fall. This will allow for the nutrients to be available right away in Spring.
- Do not till clay soil too early in Spring as it will clump and dry into hard clump. Soil with lots of organic matter (compost humus) will warm faster in Spring. Also black plastic placed over the garden will warm the soil faster so that it will be workable earlier.
- Plan your garden in Winter. Plant taller plants (i.e. Corn, Sunflowers) at one end of the garden and gradually reduce heights so that the best use of the sun is achieved.
- Plant quick spring crops like radishes, lettuce and carrots between summer crops like tomatoes and peppers. These can be harvested before the later grow too large and shade them.

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- You can plant radishes, beets, cabbage and its relatives. Carrots, lettuce, onions, and more can be planted in early spring as soon as the ground is workable. This will give you an early start as you wait for May to plant your Summer veggies.
- To control weeds, strips of landscape fabric, clean mulch or clean straw between rows will cut down weeds and help warm soil and reduce disease.
- If you want to control weeds with a granular product and be organic, you can use Jonathan Green Organic Weed Control or Preen Organic Weed Prevention. These products are organic, safe and effective. Please note that because they are natural, to get good results. You must spread the product liberally and also use it multiple times a season.
- To get a head start on your tomato/pepper season, use plastic Grow It Now Plant Protectors. These plastic caps will allow you to plant 7-14 days before last frost. Just cover the plants at night or on colder days and remove as daytime temps rise.
- Try growing your cucumbers from seed. They are large, easy to do and you can pick the variety that best suits your needs. Indoors plant two seeds into a Jiffy pot in early spring. Plant when all danger of frost has passed. Outdoors plant 4 to 12 seeds in a grouping known as a hill. A hill is a small patch of raised soil about 8-12” across. This allows the plants to have good drainage and stronger roots. The seeds will germinate in about ten days. When the seeds are 4” high thin to only four plants per hill. To get an early start plant around May 1st and cover seeds with a plastic Plant Protector.
- Tomatoes and Peppers should be staked or caged. This helps support the plant and helps keep fruit off the ground. Try the Glam style cages. These are sold in bright colors and are usually stronger than typical tomato cages. They will last for many years because of their painted coating and they add color and whimsy to the garden.

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- As your tomato plant grows, it is a good idea to hill soil around the stem. Tomatoes are one of a few vegetables that will grow roots from the stem of the plant. This will help support the plant's growing weight.
- Do not over water your garden as this will encourage disease. Try to water during the day and avoid very early morning and early evening if possible. Consider using a soaker hose or inexpensive drip system. This will save water and limit water on foliage, thus reducing the risk of disease.
- Try not to do work in the garden early in the morning when the plants are wet with dew as this might spread disease.
- To control slugs and snails use a shallow tin of beer, covered with a tilted pot over in the garden. They will be attracted to the beer and fall in and drown. A tilted pot will keep rain out and provide shade drawing slugs and snails in.
- To chase away deer and birds, a string line between two stakes with strips of Mylar (from balloons available at dollar store) attached, will flap and shine in the sun scaring away your garden adversaries.
- To ward off insects, plant plants such as mint, rosemary and/or French marigolds. These will give off scents that are deterrents to some insects and also draw predatory insects such as ladybugs. These are just a few tips to make life easier as you plan this year's garden. The great thing about gardening is we are always trying new things, continuously learning and sharing our discoveries with friends and neighbors. So, have a healthy and productive vegetable garden season!