



## Vegetable Gardening

### Location & Preparation

Choose an open, sunny spot away from the shade of tall buildings and trees. Most vegetables need a minimum of 6 hours of sunshine a day, especially between 11 am and 3 pm. Good air flow is also important to help prevent and control fungal diseases.

If you are planning a full year ahead for a new garden site, turn over the soil and throw in a mix of winter peas and clover. They are wonderful for building up nitrogen in the soil. Add some organic matter, such as well-rotted manure and compost, along with the peas and clover. By the end of the season you will have made a significant improvement to your soil. Don't let your existing garden stay bare over winter – plant some fall rye or Rejuvenation Mix (winter wheat and winter peas) to help protect and enrich the soil.

### Watering

Water your vegetables in the morning rather than late in the day. Plants absorb moisture more efficiently in the period of time just as the sun rises. Water the soil, rather than the whole plant. Putting water on the foliage can lead to fungus problems such as blight or mildew, which have ruined many crops over the years. Drip irrigation systems are great because they water plants at ground level making good use of water and keeping the foliage dry. Water thoroughly and deeply to encourage roots to reach down for the moisture. Watering too frequently creates shallow, more fragile root systems.

temperatures don't dip below -18 C (0 F). Release them at night, allowing them to get into the soil without sunlight hitting them. Water them into the soil and let them get to work.

Plant flowers and shrubs that attract birds, and install a birdbath or two. This may be your best form of insect control.

Silicon dioxide, otherwise known as diatomaceous earth, is a powder made from deposits of ancient creatures called diatoms. Many companies are producing it under different labels for use in controlling crawling insects.

There are many soap products available, and the broad spectrum types, often including pyrethrins, seem to be the most successful. Pyrethrins and many other products have been available for years, and they do a fairly good job.

The secret for any of these methods is careful observation. When your plants are half-eaten and the insect population is booming, it's already too late. The time to catch them is when they're on the rise; hit them before they get out of control. Make a note on your calendar if you have problems, and next year, begin taking preventative measures a couple of weeks ahead of time.

### Companion Planting

Companion planting is a great idea that's being rediscovered and improved upon in many quarters. The idea is to group together plants that aid each other's growth and help protect from disease and insects as well. There is not a lot of scientific research in this area, but this technique seems to result in better growth and fewer insect problems.

One of the most important reasons to use this method is to attract pollinating insects to the garden. Tomato flowers must be pollinated continuously, even in rainy weather, or we simply won't get any fruit. Fragrant heliotropes or blue petunias planted nearby work like magic to attract bees, even on cloudy days.

Beneficial insects can also be attracted to ward off problem insects. Ladybugs won't be too far behind a heavy infestation of aphids, but to attract them earlier, a few special weeds, like lamb's quarters

(Chenopodium album), certainly help. This plant is widely known as an annual weed that can spread quickly, but in small numbers it's a benefit to any garden. A close relative of spinach, it tastes just as good and is even richer in vitamin C.

Many plants can act as insect decoys to protect other plants. Nasturtiums, for instance, attract aphids so well that apple growers plant them under their trees to keep woolly aphids off the trees. If sown in a greenhouse they help repel whitefly. If you're growing nasturtiums just for their gorgeous flowers and aphids are a problem, simply dust the nasturtiums with lime to discourage the aphids.

You can't talk about companion planting without mentioning garlic – one of the best repellents you'll find. Grown near roses, it is said to repel aphids. Around tomatoes, it may help keep spider mites away during dry, hot summers. You do have to use some caution with garlic, though. It can inhibit the growth of both peas and beans.

Parsley is supposedly good for repelling carrot rust fly. Plant it in the same row as carrots. Parsley also seems to give extra vigour to asparagus and tomatoes.

Certain plants develop a synergy when grown together. Basil, for example, enhances plants growing near it, with the exception of rue. Radishes and carrots grow well together, as do corn and lettuce.

Some plants are allelopathic, which means they adversely affect the growth of nearby plants. For example, sunflowers and walnut trees have properties that are phytotoxic to other plants. Some plants are bad together because they are susceptible to the same insect or disease. For instance, potatoes and tomatoes should never be planted near each other because they are both susceptible to blight; if one crop gets blight, the other won't be too far behind.

### Community Involvement

If you grow a bounty this season, consider donating some to your local Salvation Army as part of the Plant a Row, Grow a Row Program. For details, visit growarow.org. Another great local initiative is Food Matters Chilliwack foodmatterschilliwack.com.

When it is hot people tend to overwater. But you can prepare your plants early in the growing season for the hot months ahead by encouraging them to send roots deep into the ground. Water them once a week to a depth of at least 10 to 15 cm (4 to 6 inches) from the start of the growing season. If you do this religiously, plants will develop root systems deep enough to protect them from drought when the hot weather hits in June or July.

Broadleaf plants exposed to the sun can lose a lot of water through evaporation. Spray the foliage to remoisten the leaves, but do not water the leaves when the sun is at the burning stage, between 11am and 3 pm.

## Raised Beds

Raised beds are very popular for growing vegetables and with good reason. In wet conditions raised beds provide better drainage. They also create warmer soil, which gives plants a boost early in the season.

Landscape ties are popular for creating raised beds, but make sure you know what you're using. Wood sold as 'landscape ties' in garden centres or lumber yards is often just dimension lumber which has been treated with a preservative. You can line the inside of your beds with plastic to be sure nothing leaches from the ties.

Another option is to use bricks or interlocking blocks rather than wooden ties. As the soil expands in volume from the annual addition of organic material, you can add another layer of blocks to raise the beds. Bricks or blocks look nice in the garden and you don't have to worry about leaching. The bricks also allow you to create an attractively shaped garden that blends in with your landscape.

## Container Gardening

Container gardening has become increasingly popular over the last few years, and fruits and vegetables can often be found popping up in spaces where flowers ruled in the past. Plant breeders are responding to this demand by creating more container-friendly varieties. Here are the general guidelines:

- ◆ Use as large a container as possible: 25 litres (7 gallons) is the minimum for tomatoes, squash and cucumbers. You can grow lettuce in a 25 cm (10") pot.
- ◆ Use sterilized soil as a base and add composted organics (well-rotted manure and compost) for valuable nutrients. Make sure the soil is well drained and the container has drain holes. Don't use garden soil in containers.
- ◆ Be sure to select vegetable varieties that are suitable for containers.
- ◆ If you want to have a carefree container garden, set up a drip irrigation system connected to a timer.
- ◆ Plants in containers require more frequent applications of nutrients. Whether you choose to stay organic or use a mix of both organic and chemical, you should fertilize at least weekly during the active growing season.
- ◆ Put castors underneath heavy containers so that they can be moved to take advantage of the sun, or shifted out of the way if you need space.

## When to Plant

If you live in a moderate climate (zone 6 or above), your gardening year can begin in January, by brushing the snow aside and harvesting hardy herbs such as chives and parsley, or winter vegetables like corn salad, lettuce or endive. Cold and frost-tolerant vegetables, such as broad beans, peas, and onions, can be set out while light frosts are still being experienced. Main crop vegetables like early brassicas, radishes, and Swiss chard should be planted when all danger of frost is past.

Know which vegetables are sensitive to cold, and which ones are hardier. Heat-lovers – tomato, pepper, cucumber, and squash – should only be planted when the weather warms up to an average night-time temperature of 10 C (50 F). As a general rule, the May long weekend is the time for planting tender varieties in coastal areas. In colder zones, plant when all danger of frost is past.

Seed catalogues are a good guide for seeding times in your area, but keep notes to adjust dates for subsequent years. Remember, too, that weather patterns vary from year to year, so a little guesswork is necessary.



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## Organic Growing

Keep a weed-free garden. Weeds are a prime habitat for insects during different stages of their life cycles. If you don't like weeding, use the effective and inexpensive weed barrier cloth. Once you try it, you'll wonder how you ever gardened without it.

Make sure your soil is in top shape. Light and sandy soils are excellent. They are far less inviting to many insects, which prefer heavy, wet soils. Sand (just not too much), bark mulch or sawdust (fir or hemlock only) go a long way to lightening heavy soils.

Be sensible about garden planning. If you are having trouble with cabbages, radishes, and turnips, why grow them? Have the vegetables you enjoy, but concentrate on those with fewer problems. Pole beans, broad beans, parsnips, and cucumbers are usually resistant to insects. If you have a disease problem in one area of your garden, don't plant the same crop in the same location next year. Many diseases stay in the soil and will be picked up again the following year.

Use row covers, one of the best weapons in the bug war. They are cheap, easy and effective. Drape Remay covering over young seedlings, leaving plenty of room for expansion. Hold it in place with soil, and it can remain until the plants mature. The plants will be warmer, grow faster and longer into the season, and insects won't be able to get at them. The only downside to protective cloth is that it might cut down on air circulation and increase humidity, leading to disease problems.

Organic pesticides may be part of the solution. B.T. (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) is one of the best controls for chewing insects. It has to be used about once a week when those moths and butterflies are flitting about, but it works. If you choose to use B.T. or any other insecticide, read the directions carefully.

Many places sell ladybugs by the package, and they're happy to eat those annoying aphids. Another weapon in the arsenal of living things used to control nasty pests is friendly nematodes, a type of parasitic worm. We've had good success with them in the control of weevils, maggots and insects that spend part of their life cycle in the soil. They will survive up to 15 months in the soil as long as it stays moist and