

Dear Aggie, What Are the Easiest Crops to Start with on a Small Hobby Farm?

Starting a small hobby farm is an exciting and rewarding adventure, and picking the right crops can make all the difference for a smooth start. One of the keys to early success is choosing beginner friendly crops. Ones that are resilient, easy and quick to grow, and require minimal specialized equipment or care. This is especially true when starting a hobby farm in Jefferson County, where the region's rich agricultural heritage, fertile soils, and productive growing seasons provide strong foundations for success.

To select the right crops for your hobby farm, it is important to consider local climate and environmental factors that influence plant growth. This area is known for its cool spring temperatures, mild summers, cold winter weather, and plenty of rainfall. Choosing crops that can thrive under these conditions will greatly increase the chance of having an abundant harvest. Lastly, before planting (especially for new farmers), it is helpful to have your soil tested. These tests allow you to gather information about the soil's pH, nutrient levels, and how to amend your soil for optimal crop success.

Leafy greens such as lettuce, kale, or spinach are great examples of popular cool season crops ideal for the region's climate. Leafy greens grow best in the spring and fall when temperatures are cooler, making them perfect for early planting and late harvests. Leafy greens are quick to mature, some even as little as 30 days with the nutrient rich soil of the region.

Other crops well suited for beginning hobby farms are zucchini and summer squash. These are prolific plants that love the full sun and can handle cooler nights during the summertime. Due to their large size and fast growth, they require adequate spacing to ensure healthy productivity. Once established, zucchinis and squash are low-maintenance and practically grow themselves, making them a favorite for hobby farmers.

Garlic is another easy and rewarding crop for Jefferson County hobby farmers. It is typically planted in the fall before the ground freezes and is protected with mulch and straw to shield it from the harsh north country winters. This crop requires little attention and minimal to no equipment or care, making it a go-to option for hobby farmers.

Sweet corn is a fun and classic addition to a hobby farm. It only requires full sun and good soil, which is not hard to find in this region! It can be planted after the last frost, then harvested by late summer.

It can be surprising just how much you can grow on a small amount of land. Even with only a ¼ acre or less, you could comfortably grow a diverse selection of crops such as 3 beds of leafy greens, 20-30 tomato plants, 4-6 zucchini or summer squash plants, 2-3 beds of bush beans, 10 x 10 corn block, one bed of potatoes, one bed of garlic and a 10-inch herb container. Bottom line, even with only ¼ acre, you have plenty of space for a well-planned, diverse hobby farm including room to spare for other ideas or future expansion. What makes these crops so appealing to beginning hobby farmers is not only the ease of growth, but also how easily they

can be expanded as your hobby farming skills and ambitions grow. These plants scale well, from small backyard gardens to field rows, hoop houses, or raised beds with minimal changes in equipment or technique.

Starting a hobby farm in Jefferson County can be both easily managed and fulfilling when you select the right crops. By focusing on resilient, easy-to-grow crops that offer flexibility for expansion, you can set yourself up for ongoing success and harvests. Whether you are growing for your family or with the hopes to share your harvest with the community, these crop selections provide a strong foundation for your hobby farm.

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