

PLANNING A VEGETABLE GARDEN

(Including Planting and Harvest Calendar)

A well-planned vegetable garden provides an economical and continuous supply of fresh, nutritious vegetables throughout the season. An urban gardener with a fairly small plot can expect to raise a substantial amount of fresh vegetables from a good garden. A suburban or farm gardener with plenty of space can raise quantities of vegetables to can, freeze, or otherwise store.

A successful garden begins with planning. First of all, plant what you enjoy. If space and time are limited, select crops that are especially tasty when freshly picked and difficult to buy in your area.

There are many techniques for making the most of garden space, including succession planting of the same crop at different planting dates, interplanting of quick-maturing crops next to long-season crops next to long-season crops, and double-cropping one crop after another has been harvested.

Gardening is fun, but it's also hard work. Planting and caring for a family garden is easy during the first few weeks of spring. The real work starts when the weather gets hot. Weeding, thinning, replanting late crops, and many other jobs are essential to maintain a good garden.

Location and Soil

Urban gardeners have little choice as to garden location, but rural gardeners should give careful consideration to these important points:

- (1) The garden should be convenient to the house, water and tools.
- (2) Soil should be well drained and the best available.
- (3) For maximum sunlight, locate the garden away from trees and buildings.

The size of a family garden depends on the number in the family, the time available, and the amount of canning, freezing and storing to be done. It's better to do a good job with a small garden than a poor job with a large garden.

The Garden Plan

A good gardener plans the garden on paper long before spring. The early arrival of seed catalogs stimulates this desire.

An important reason to plan is to stretch the harvest season. A well-planned garden provides a continuous supply of vegetables from early spring to late fall. Spinach planted in the fall will live over winter and can be picked in early spring. Delaware Cooperative Extension HG-34.1. Vegetable Planting/Harvest Calendar suggests such a planting.

Careful planning also reduces the need to can, freeze and store great quantities of food. Vegetables picked over a seven or eight month period not only decreases the amount of preserving necessary, but also provides a continuous source of fresh vegetables for the family table.

In planning your garden, keep in mind the area available and the needs, likes and dislikes of the family. A rough sketch will do, but it must be fairly accurate to be useful. Make the plan to scale if possible, using 1/8-inch to 1 foot. Determine the shape, length and width of the garden, the space between rows, vegetables to be planted in each row, and late vegetables that will follow the early ones. Consider these factors:

- (1) Perennial crops such as asparagus, strawberries and rhubarb should be located at one side of the garden.
- (2) Tall crops such as corn should not shade small crops such as beets and carrots.
- (3) Include succession crops, a fall garden, small fruits, and over wintered crops to mature in the spring.
- (4) Crops and varieties to be planted. Consider planting dates, whether seeded or transplant crops. Use HG 34.1 to assist you.
- (5) Rotate crops so similar vegetables are not planted in the same location consecutively, if possible.
- (6) Choose varieties that are disease resistant.
- (7) Your Delaware Cooperative Extension Office has additional Facts Sheets on specific crops to assist you.

Your diagram may resemble the simple plan [Del Coop Ext HG-36.2] following this section.

Other Sources of Gardening Information

The HG (Home and Garden) series of fact sheets are intended to be a useful guide for Delaware gardeners. However, there are hundreds of creative and reliable sources on vegetable gardening. Newspapers and magazines often contain good information. The Internet has volumes of material as well as local libraries. Garden and farm supply stores are valuable resources. One of the best sources of gardening know-how is a friend, neighbor, or relative who has gardened a long time. Also, the Delaware Master Gardeners staff the Garden Line in each of the three counties to answer your gardening questions. New Castle County 302-831-8862

Prepared by NCCo Master Gardeners assisted by
University of Delaware Cooperative Extension Service Agents and Specialists

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