



## Vegetable Gardening Tips

Vegetable families have unique soil, water, and fertilizer needs. However, here are some general guidelines to help you start your home vegetable garden in Ventura County.

### Choosing the Right Location

Most vegetable plants need 6-8 hours of sunlight a day – but here are some guidelines if you have less sun:

- **Leafy vegetables** (lettuce, spinach, kale, basil, cilantro) do well with as little as 3 hours – can be in shade.
- **Root vegetables** (beets, carrots, radishes) **or flowers** (broccoli, cabbage, artichokes) need about 4 hours.
- **Harvested fruit** (tomatoes, melon, peppers, squash) need sun and warmth – optimally 6 to 10 hours.

### Preparing the Soil

- **Amend with Compost** – Incorporate compost into the soil to improve fertility and water retention.
- **Avoid Digging or Tilling** – Instead of digging or tilling, simply mix compost in and let nature work it in over time.
- **Mulch the Soil Surface** – Apply a 3-4-inch layer of organic mulch like wood chips or leaves around plants.
- **Level the area** – create a smooth, even planting surface.
- **Using Raised Beds or Containers** – Fill beds with a high-quality potting mix or blend of compost, topsoil and vermiculite. Put netting in the bottom to keep out small critters, but don't add rocks in the bottom of the pot.

### Planting – Seeds or Transplants

- Planting seeds directly into the soil has several advantages
  - Greater variety and cost effectiveness
  - Control over growing conditions
  - Stronger root system – not distributed by transplanting
  - Suitable for certain plant (root vegetables)

However, they require more attention and time. And there is a greater risk of failure from pests or weather. Depth of planting is 2 to 3 times the width of the seed.

- Planting transplants or seedlings started indoors or purchased from nurseries, offer their own benefits:
  - Earlier harvests
  - Extended growing season
  - Stronger seedlings (only the strong will be transplanted)
  - Higher success rate

The main drawbacks are higher cost and potentially limited variety (unless you start your own seedlings).

- How to choose?



- Plant type – root vegetables do better from seeds to ensure the tap root is not bent.
- Growing season length
- Time – not only time of the year (is it at the end of the planting season) but also your time to dedicate to your garden.
- Experience level.

In many cases a combination of both methods can be used in a garden to maximize variety and success.

**Basic Care:** QR code will take you to the Soil to Sprouts slide deck on the Ventura County Master Gardener website

- Seeds or Transplant – Transplants produce earlier harvest, look for multiple plants per pot.
- Mulch the Soil Surface – Apply a 3-4-inch layer of organic mulch.
- Watering – water deep - overhead watering can lead to diseases.
- Support - trellis, stake, or cage.
- Fertilizer – Use a General Purpose (10-10-10) fertilizer. High nitrogen fertilizer will increase green growth – not fruit.
- Using Raised Beds or Containers? – use potting soil or blend of compost/topsoil/vermiculite.



### **When to Harvest**

1. Harvest in morning or evening, when temperatures are cooler.
2. General Harvesting Tips:
  - a. Use clean, sharp tools to avoid damaging the plants.
  - b. Harvest regularly to encourage continued production.
  - c. Don't remove more than 1/3 of the plant at once.

Learn more about the Ventura County Master Gardener using this QR to visit the website.

