



## **Raíces & Sabores: Grow the Flavors of Mexico in Your Backyard**

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:

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

### **Planting in the Ground - Preparing the Soil**

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

### **Planting in a Container – Choosing the Right Container Size**

What can I grow in my pot? Measure the pot across the top – see below for examples of what will fit:

- a. 8" – 1 lettuce, spinach, kale, or bean, or 3 basil, cilantro, or parsley, or 1 sage, oregano, or mint plant.
- b. 10" – 1 determinate tomato, 1 pepper plant, 1 bush cucumber, or 8-12 green onion, radishes, carrots
- c. 12" – 1 summer squash, 2 pepper plants, 6 pea or bush bean plants
- d. 1' square or 18" – 1 tomato w/ 4 basil or cilantro, 2 summer squash, 4 cucumbers, or 4-6 lettuce

### **Planting the Vegetables**

- a. French Breakfast Radish – quick and easy growers best grown in light soil. Plant seeds  $\frac{1}{4}$ " deep, thin to 2" apart when plants are 2" high – sow seeds every week for continuous production.
- b. Bush Beans – crisp and tasty stringless pods – plants do not require staking. Plant each seed 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  to 2" deep, about 3" apart – harvest when pods are 6"-7" and harvest every day to keep plant productive.
- c. Peppers – thrive in warm weather, so lots of sun – well-drained soil, good to add compost. Space 12-18" – fertilize when planting and every other month to keep healthy.
- d. Cilantro – Does better in shade, keep soil consistently moist but not waterlogged. Plant 2 seeds together  $\frac{1}{4}$ " deep, 2" apart - snip off leaves as needed, can cut back  $\frac{1}{3}$  of plant to encourage growth.

### **How to Keep them Alive!**

1. **Mulch** - 3" – 4" will reduce soil moisture fluctuation, moderate soil temperature, and discourage weeds.
2. **Water** – by hand or set up a drip system. Vegetables need more water than other types of plants – check plants in morning and use a moisture meter to check the moisture level. Water less often but longer (more water) to encourage strong deep roots.
3. **Fertilizer** – a general fertilizer of 10-10-10 NKP (nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium) – follow package.
4. **Pests** - Regularly examine plants for pests and damage, cultivate a garden that supports beneficial insects, hand pick pests or spray with shots of water as control techniques, use pesticides judiciously and only when necessary, following label instructions carefully.



**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 and often have multiple plants in each container - separate by soaking.
- **Mulch the Soil Surface** – Apply a 3-4-inch layer of organic mulch.
- **Watering** – water deep - overhead watering can lead to diseases.
- **Support (indeterminate)** - 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. Use clean, sharp tools to avoid damaging the plants.
3. Harvest regularly to encourage continued production.
4. 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.**

To learn more about the **UC Master Gardener Program** and see a list of upcoming classes, visit our website at <http://ucanr.org/sites/VCMG> or scan the QR code below

