

It's January - Time To Start Your 2019 Garden

Leimone Waite, Master Gardener, Jan. 15, 2019

Q: One of my new year's resolutions is to grow a garden but I don't have much gardening experience. Do you have any advice on how I should start my garden so that my plants will grow and produce food?

A: I can't think of a better way to kick off the new year than starting a garden! There's tons of research that touts the many benefits of gardening. In addition to providing fresh produce to improve your diet, gardening has been shown to elevate your happiness, reduce stress, strengthen your immune system and reduce your chances of getting dementia — all while giving you a good workout. There are even a couple of studies that claim daily gardening will increase your life expectancy by 14 happier years.

To successfully start a garden, you should do a bit of planning first.

You'll need to choose a spot that gets at least 6 hours of sunlight. Here in Redding the best spot would be in the morning sun with some shade after 2 p.m. as it gets so hot during the summer.



Be sure to check if the vegetables you want to plant are cool- or warm-season ones. (Photo: Getty Images)

You want to have well-draining soil on this site. Check drainage by looking at the site a couple of days after it has rained. If it is wet and soggy several days after it has rained, it is not a well-draining spot. If this is the case, you may want to build raised garden beds and fill with purchased garden soil or move the garden site to an area that drains better.

You'll also want to make sure you can easily get water to the garden for summer irrigation, and that you can protect it from critters such as deer, dogs, cats and rabbits.

Once you have a site selected, dig up the soil and amend it with some compost or aged manure, if using manure add it now for spring planting. I like to add alfalfa or cottonseed meal, bone meal and kelp into the soil at the same time as I add compost this provides the plants with important nutrients such as nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium and calcium. It's best to work the soil when it's just moist and crumbly. Do not work up the soil if it is too wet; it can damage the structure of the soil and cause drainage problems later.

Once you have the soil prepared in the garden bed, it's time to determine what you'd like to plant. Pay attention to the time of year that you're planting, and if the vegetable you're planting is a cool- or warm-season one. Cool season vegetables include carrots, lettuce, peas and broccoli and can be planted in February with a little frost protection. Warm season vegetables, such as tomatoes, peppers and beans, should only be planted after all danger of frost; usually mid-April for the Redding area. For help with this check out the [Master Gardener's handy vegetable starting calendar](https://bit.ly/2smhoUk): <https://bit.ly/2smhoUk>

To learn more about gardening, attend our spring garden workshop in March, or if you have time, take a class.

The Shasta Master Gardeners Program can be reached by phone at 242-2219 or email mastergardener@shastacollege.edu. The gardener office is staffed by volunteers trained by the University of California to answer gardeners' questions using information based on scientific research.