



Plant Your Summer Vegetable Garden

by Michelle Le Strange, Master Gardener Program

Growing vegetables in your garden is good for you and can be done in a single pot on your patio or on a larger scale depending upon the space and time you have available. Good planning and preparation will reduce the workload in your garden. For example, if you install a drip system or soaker hose that can accommodate all of your beds, you will never have to drag an irrigation hose around. If you apply a heavy layer of coarse mulch between the beds, your weeding will be minimal. If you build raised beds, your garden will be more organized and less likely to degrade to weeds.



Start by choosing the best spot for a garden, preferably in a location that is easily accessible from your home. Make sure the site receives 6 to 8 hours of full sun per day. Avoid planting where shade from trees or buildings limits light for part of the day because it will decrease yield and increase disease problems in many plants. If shade is a problem, plant leafy crops in those areas and save the full sun areas for crops that bear fruit (tomato, peppers, squash, etc).

Select a level area with well-drained soil. Soil can be amended with compost or other organic matter to improve soil water relations. A water source near the garden is important.

The size of your garden depends on available space, the time that you have to garden and the food needs of your family. Generally, a packet of seeds will fill a 15 ft. row for many crops.

Small Gardens: When planning a garden 15 x 15' or smaller, the goal is to produce the most possible in a small space. Be clear about the needs of your family relative to specific vegetables and avoid the temptation to grow crops that need lots of room such as corn, melons and pumpkins. List the crops to be grown, specific spacing between plants, trellising needs, planting and approximate harvest dates, and bed widths.

Medium Gardens: A medium size garden 25 x 30' can include corn and melons as well as small space plants in larger quantity or sequential plantings of the same crop for a longer season of production.

Large Gardens: A large garden can include all of the above as well as room for planting crops such as sweet potatoes, perennial crops such as artichokes and asparagus and multiple varieties of melons, pumpkins and winter squash.

When and What to Plant: California has a unique vegetable growing climate and we can grow many different types of vegetable crops throughout the year. Crops are classified as warm season or cool season crops. It is important to plant each crop at the right time of year for easy growth, successful plant development, and optimum yield.



Cool season crops grow best and produce the best quality when the average temperatures are 55 to 75 degrees F. They are usually tolerant of slight frosts. Plants in this group include root crops such as: beets, carrots, parsnip, radish and turnips; stems such as asparagus and white potato; leafy crops such as cabbage, celery, lettuce, onion, and spinach and plants whose immature flower parts we eat, such as broccoli, cauliflower, and globe artichokes.

Warm season veggies grow best when the days are long and hot between 65 and 95 degrees F. These include crops with mature fruit such as tomatoes, cantaloupe, winter squash and watermelon or immature fruit such as corn, squash, and snap beans.

There are many resources to help you plan the perfect garden for your home and family. Download more information and our local vegetable planting guide from <http://cetulare.ucdavis.edu> click on Master Gardeners, local gardening information, and vegetable gardening. Find out when to seed and transplant both cool and warm season crops and their approximate harvest periods.

The number one rule of vegetable gardening is to plant only as large a garden as you can easily maintain. That said, consider including an extra row to share with your neighborhood, church, or local food bank.

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