

# PLANNING, PREPARING, PLANTING, & MAINTAINING YOUR GARDEN

For those looking to participate in more traditional gardening, the following information will provide a basic overview of what one would need to consider and implement as he or she begins the gardening process.

## 1. Planning Your Garden

- Consider what space you have available. Some fruits and vegetables can be grown in a fairly small space.
- What do you want to grow? Make a plan related to what types of vegetables you will want to grow and what you will want to eat.
- Draw a plan of your garden, to scale if possible (graph paper can help), and begin to plot various sections of your garden on the plan. Use a measuring tape to get approximate measurements.
- Calculate the hours of sun and shade your garden area gets as this will be important to know and to understand which seeds will best grow in your space. Typically the more sun, the better, but 6 hours a day is typically the minimum.
- As you make your plan, try to find an area for your garden that is protected from the wind and can dry out the soil quickly.
- What questions do you have? As you think of questions, write them down so you can ask an expert or go online for answers.
- Do some research on soil types and what kind is best for what you want to grow. You might think dirt is dirt, but it's not. Your garden will only be as good as the soil you use.
- Research "companion planting." It is helpful to understand that some plants are "friends," while others are "enemies." There are some plants that compliment each other well and thrive when planted close together and other plants that may not have a strong overall chemistry. Some circumstances exist where one type of plant may attract a certain kind of bug or insect that is known to destroy another type of plant that is planted nearby. That would make for a poor combination. Understanding "companion planting" in the early stages of your planning will help ensure a sturdy crop.
- "Succession planting," following one crop immediately with another, is another important consideration a gardener needs to make when making plans for their garden. Some plants may only take 35 to 40 days to yield, and "succession planting" will allow one to keep their garden full throughout the season, maximizing the full potential of the garden.



## 2. Preparing Your Garden

- Once you have a plan in place, you will want to make sure you have the tools you need for the type of gardening you wish to do.
  - Gloves, garden rake, hoe, and shovel will be important items to have available.
  - You may also need string and wooden stakes, depending on what you decide to plant.
- Next, you will want to loosen the soil to 12-18 inches deep (if you are doing traditional gardening).
- Depending on the condition of the soil, you may have to add some water and let it soak before continuing with digging. Work with the soil when it is dry enough to crumble easily. Don't saturate the soil with water.
- Eliminate weeds and remove any rocks and roots from the area.
- More seasoned or serious gardeners will test the soil to determine its condition. Too much sand may make it dry and too much clay may make it wet. Your soil needs to be a combination of earth, sand, and clay. Some local garden centres will analyze it for you.
- Add any organic material to fertilize the soil. Composted manure works really well.

## 3. Planting Your Garden

- Different plants require different depths in the soil, but generally, plant seeds at a depth that is twice their diameter. The smallest seeds will be planted just beneath the surface.
- Take into consideration the depth and space. Generally speaking, seeds should be planted in a row 2-3 inches deep and 4-5 inches apart.
- A row of seeds should be planted 2-4 feet from the next to avoid overcrowding.
- You can extend your harvest further into the summer by planting seeds every 2-3 weeks. Seeds such as lettuce, peas, beans, carrots, and radishes can be planted in a rotation.



## Suggested Plants For A Vegetable Garden

Different plants may grow more productively in different geographic areas, but the following plants generally grow well in backyard or community gardens. If you have enough room for 11 rows, at 10 feet long each (may be bigger than most will have available), you could plant the following:

- Tomatoes – 5 plants staked
- Zucchini squash – 4 plants
- Peppers – 6 plants
- Cabbage
- Bush beans
- Lettuce, leaf and/or Bibb
- Beets
- Carrots
- Radishes
- Marigolds to discourage rabbits

### 4. Maintaining Your Garden

- **Watering** is key to strong results in your garden, although it can be tricky. Be consistent in your watering. If the plants are wilting, they don't seem to be growing, or the leaves are brown or dead, the garden is likely too dry. If the soil around the plant stem is soaked, or if you notice mold or moss growing on top of your soil, these are signs the garden has been getting too much water.
- **Mulch** is a helpful maintenance product that has several helpful purposes:
  - Improves soil retention of moisture.
  - Regulates soil temperature.
  - Prevents soil from eroding.
  - Reduces diseases.
  - Reduces weed growth.
- **Control the weeds** – Weeds, while competing with the plants for food and water, can also bring insects and disease. If you weed regularly, particularly at the beginning of the growing season, it can be easier to keep the weeds at bay.
- **Clean your garden tools** – By doing this, a gardener keeps diseases from spreading to other plants.
- **Prevent overheating** – If a heat wave persists, a gardener may need to provide more shade for the plants. A cheesecloth can provide great shade cover during intense heat.
- **Feed your plants** – Vegetables are big eaters. If you have enriched your soil at the beginning of the growing season, you may not need to feed them much during the season. Organic fertilizer, applied once or twice in the season may help keep the plants healthy.

