

Vegetable Garden Series, Part 1: Planning Your Vegetable Garden

Whether you're a seasoned gardener or a wishful novice (or somewhere in between), vegetable gardening may seem a bit intimidating. Gardening success requires planning, but the results - harvest, enjoyment and education - are worth your time.

This is the first of a monthly four-part series on vegetable gardening. Stay connected through May as we step through planning, building, planting and maintaining your garden. Start a gardening journal to keep notes, tips and designs in one place. **Plan** first, **plant** later!



Examine Your Site

Plants need light, water, nutrition and temperature. Consider them when choosing your vegetable garden location.

- **Light:** Most vegetables require full sun (6+ hours of sunlight daily). Avoid areas near obstructive structures or large plantings. Some plants, like those listed in [this OSU Fact Sheet](#) can grow under filtered lighting conditions, but full sun is optimal.
- **Water:** If possible, select an area near a water source, or convenient to some form of irrigation. Consistent watering is critical, especially in dry periods, or when starting seedlings.
- **Nutrition:** The plot should be level and well drained, and the soil loose and rich. If planting directly in the ground, an OSU [soil test](#) will determine pH and soil fertility levels. This will confirm if your soil can support plant growth, and will offer a fertilization strategy to correct deficiencies. They can be performed every three to four years. *Do this soon, as it can take up to three weeks for results.*
- **Temperature:** Vegetables are planted when their needs of soil temperature and frost tolerance are met. More on this in the “Temperature and Timing” section [below](#).

Happy-Sized or Super-Sized?

Unchecked enthusiasm in cool February may dwindle by the searing heat of July. A planned and well-managed smaller garden will produce more than a large one taken over by weeds and insects. Techniques to optimize space will be discussed in later installments, but starting small will ensure today's joy does not become tomorrow's burden.

In addition to site selection, water availability and soil fertility, consider these factors for garden sizing.

- ❑ **Space allocation:** Plan on allowing *feet* between rows for the spreaders. Some vine crops can be grown vertically, other quick-maturing veggies can be planted in between with varying maturity times. There are strategies for compact gardening, but for now, get a general idea.
- ❑ **Mouths to feed:** Are you a small or a large family? Are you consuming fresh or preserving? [The chart to the right](#) from Texas A&M University estimates feet in rows or plants per person in both situations.
- ❑ **Time commitment:** Decide if gardening is a hobby or a necessity. Be honest with yourself. Size your garden for your needs and time commitment. An unnecessarily large garden will quickly take a back seat to job, family and other activities. It's okay to start small at first - with a window box or container garden!

Vegetable Value

Certainly there is much to gain by growing our own food. Consider the yield as return from your investment of time and energy. "Value" can be measured in different ways. Here are three:

- ❑ **Monetary:** How much does this vegetable cost in season at the market? Growing the most expensive at home delivers the greatest value.
- ❑ **Nutritional:** If space is limited, grow vegetables with higher nutritional value and grow a variety if possible.
- ❑ **Area:** Maximize space by using higher yield varieties, and companion planting techniques (which we will cover later).

Making Arrangements

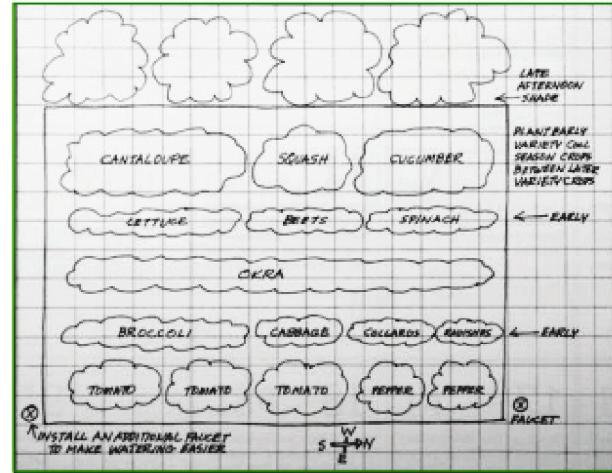
Grab your garden journal (quad spiral notebooks have grids - great for measuring) and sketch out some plans. Document light direction and water sources, and other influencing factors.

Try these tips for arranging or grouping plants in your garden:

- ❑ **Height:** Place tall plants on the north side to keep them from shading shorter plants.
- ❑ **Cultural practice:** Section by frost tolerance and care requirements - fertilization, weeding and watering.
- ❑ **Life Cycle:** Allocate a section at the side or end of the garden for perennial vegetables (e.g. asparagus, rhubarb) to allow them to grow undisturbed.
- ❑ **Maturity:** Group by maturity time to ease harvesting and replanting process.

Vegetable	Use fresh	Preserve
	Approximate amount to plant	
Beet	10 feet	20 feet
Carrot	10 feet	15 feet
Corn	15 feet	50 feet
Bush green bean	15 feet	20 feet
Pole green bean	5 feet	10 feet
Greens	10 feet	10 feet
Leaf lettuce	10 feet	—
Okra	6 feet	10 feet
Onion	5 feet	30 feet
Pepper	3 plants	5 plants
Radish	5 feet	—
Squash, summer	2 hills	3 hills
Tomato	3 plants	5 plants
Turnip	10 feet	10 feet
Broccoli	4 plants	8 plants
Cucumber	2 hills	5 hills
Collard	5 feet	10 feet

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service



Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, Sample Garden Plan

Temperature and Timing

Temperature and timing are two critical factors to maximize production. Frost tolerance will dictate when seeds or plants may be safely placed in the ground, or when mature plants are in danger of frost kill. Timing involves not only when to plant, but when to replant a second crop, based on the time to harvest. See how these work together?

Learn the frost classifications for your vegetables. Generally, they are: very tender, tender, semi-hardy and hardy. Cool season vegetables can be planted when the seed soil depth is at 40°F, while warm season vegetables require 50°F. Check “days to harvest” to ensure optimum conditions through maturity. Reference [this OSU Fact Sheet chart](#) for your favorites.

Until Next Time...

It is only February...but it is already February and your garden awaits!

Until next month's installment, there is much to do, so start with these:

- Acquire a journal - a quad (grid) ruled spiral notebook
- Select your site - do you have what plants need (light, water, nutrition)?
- Get a soil test
- Right-size your garden (be honest with yourself)
- Select the best value...grow what you enjoy eating!
- Learn the frost classifications for your chosen vegetables

Do your homework...and come back for **Part 2: Building Your Vegetable Garden!**

© 2021, Terri Denney. All rights reserved.

Fact Sheets and Resources

[HLA-6440: Homeowner Garden Design Series - Planning the Landscape](#)

[HLA-6004: Oklahoma Garden Planning Guide](#)

[Texas A&M: Planning a Garden](#)

[Tulsa Master Gardeners: Types of Gardens](#)

[Vegetable Varieties for the Home Garden in Oklahoma](#)