

Vegetable Gardening in Small Spaces

If you want to have a vegetable garden but think that you don't have enough space in your yard, think again. While traditional vegetable gardens are laid out with rows for each type of vegetable there is a more intensive planting plan called "Square Foot" gardening. This plan allows you to grow a broad variety of vegetables in a very compact space. The scale of this garden works well for small households that mainly want to eat fresh picked vegetables and have lots of variety in their menus.

Your garden can take several forms. You dig it directly into the ground, you can create a raised bed with 6" sides or you can create a 12" deep box and elevate the bed to be accessible for anyone with physical limitations. Because there are no paths through your garden, the width is important. You need to be able to reach into the garden to easily harvest your crop and to pluck out any weeds. Leave yourself enough room to stand on all four sides. The garden can be 36 or 48" wide and as long as you wish.

All vegetable gardens should be in full sun. Lightly incorporate organic compost and composted manure at the start of each season to ensure that you have rich fertile soil. I place bamboo stakes to measure out 12" increments around the perimeter and run string between them to mark out the squares. (These are all removed once the garden is planted.)

So now the question becomes what to plant. I have created a model garden with three raised beds, each 3' x 3'. The total cost of seeds plus tomato bedding plants came to \$75.00 and will produce many times that value in lovely, fresh produce. You may prefer to plant other vegetables, but the costs should be about the same. The only caveat is that large or spreading plants like zucchini, squash, cucumbers, Brussel sprouts, watermelon or pumpkins need more than one square foot per plant and are not suitable for this plan. A handy guide for how many plants can be accommodated in each square is available at "My Square Foot Garden", <http://www.mysquarefootgarden.net/plant-spacing/>.

Box A			Box B			Box C		
Cell	Vegetable	# in Cell	Cell	Vegetable	# in Cell	Cell	Vegetable	# in Cell
1	Tomato	1	10	Bush bean	9	19	Beets	9
2	Tomato	1	11	Bush bean	9	20	Beets	9
3	Tomato	1	12	Bush bean	9	21	Swiss Chard	4
4	Basil	1	13	Carrot	16	22	Swiss Chard	4
5	Pepper	1	14	Carrot	16	23	Spinach	9
6	Pepper	1	15	Parsnip	16	24	Spinach	9
7	Pepper	1	16	Parsnip	16	25	Kale	1
8	Eggplant	1	17	Leaf Lettuce	4	26	Kale	1
9	Eggplant	1	18	Italian parsley	1	27	Black Kale	2

The vegetables in my plan have been grouped with consideration for plant family and good companion plants. For instance, basil deters aphids and tomato hornworms and is thought to improve the flavour of tomatoes that are growing nearby. Every spring, rotate the vegetables allocated to each planting bed to help kill off any soil borne diseases such as Verticillium or Fusarium Wilt. Each plant family takes and contributes different nutrients to the soil so a three year rotation will aid overall soil health.

by Gail Walker