



Creating a Vegetable Garden

Starting a vegetable garden helps each of us have access to healthy food as well as contributing to environmental sustainability.



When planning a vegetable garden, there are things you need to consider: Space, available sunlight, access to water sources, what plants to incorporate, soil, physical access to weeding and harvesting and you may need to consider an area that is out of the wind to avoid damaging plants.

Plan out your space whether it is a community garden, backyard or smaller spaces such as decks and balconies. Think about what plants you would like to install and create a map of you space. This will help you plan while being a great way to keep track of your plants and harvest times.

Make sure you have easy access to your water source either by hose, watering can, built-in irrigation or rain barrels...you want watering to be an enjoyable task and not a “chore” so having your water source handy is important.

The soil should be rich and well-drained so if the area you decide on to grow vegetables is too wet another option is creating raised beds or in a smaller space, pots. Vegetable plants need four-to-six hours of sunlight a day, consistent watering (more during drought). Properly space your plants as well (seed packages tell you all you need to know) so that air and light circulate to keep them healthy.

To enhance the soil, making it healthier for growing, add organic matter such as compost, worm castings, or well-rotted manure, to name a few. A great way to create pathways to your plants as well as keep weeds at bay is by putting down a layer of straw in between the rows.

It does not have to be expensive to enjoy some home-grown vegetables. Find planters and tools at local thrift stores or garage sales. If you are walking along the local trails, pick up sticks you find to use as tomato or bean stakes in your garden. Be creative!!

What should I plant?

When purchasing seeds or seedling plants, consider what vegetables you and your family like! There will not be any benefits to your hard work, if you do not want to eat half of your garden, so plant what you like to eat! There are fast-growing (leafy lettuce, radishes, kale) and slow-growing (tomatoes, potatoes, zucchini) vegetables but you do not have to plant once and harvest only what is left, you can use a system called intercropping, which will have you enjoying your garden and harvests all season.

What is intercropping?

This is a method where you plant rows of both fast and slow-growing plants. When your radishes are ready to harvest (fast-growing) you can then plant new ones in those spaces while your tomatoes, peppers or cabbage continue to grow. You can also incorporate herbs such as rosemary, chives and/or coriander within your crop. These plants not only add spice to your cooking, they also help resist pests in your garden. It is also important to plant species that attract pollinators!

What are pollinators and why are they important?

Pollinators are bees, moths, butterflies, wasps, beetles as well as bats and birds. Planting herbs and flowers such as Nasturtiums, Marigolds or wildflowers attract insects that pollinate your garden and can also be deterrents to pests and disease. The insects carry pollen from one plant to another fertilizing the eggs of another plant that eventually produce seeds helping plants to reproduce and supporting a healthy ecosystem!

How can you maximize your harvest?

Intercropping is the first step. Having plants rotating in your garden ensures that you will be able to enjoy the fruits of your labor throughout the season. Feed your garden with organic matter such as mushroom compost or from your own compost bin. Pinching off the small shoots on tomato plants help them stay healthy and thrive. Water consistently, and extra during drought conditions when there has not been much rainfall. Too much watering or not enough may cause stress on plants, which leave them susceptible to disease or death. Remember to harvest often, when the fruit of your plants is ready...don't leave them over-ripening on the vine!

How do you care for a vegetable garden?

Check your garden daily for weeds and/or pests or any discoloration. Most pests can be removed when found early before damage is done to the plant. Pinch off leaves that are yellowed or have pests on them...look at the underside of the leaves if you notice discoloration...some, like aphids, can be removed with a spray of water or soapy water from a spray bottle.

Read the instructions on your seed packages/pots. They tell you everything you need to know about the plants you want to grow. Talk to the people at the local gardening centers, they will be able to answer your questions and advise you.

Water consistently! With tomato plants, it is wise to make it practice directing water to the base of the plant to keep moisture off the leaves as this could lead to mold, blight, blossom rot and other diseases. If you are tomato lover, there are more kinds of tomatoes to choose from than you can imagine, many of them available locally.

Most importantly, enjoy the process from planning to harvest while giving your plants what they need most: sun, water, good soil and air!

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For more information visit our website at: <https://pecmastergardeners.ca/>

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