



Vegetable Gardening

What can I do in the 4-H Vegetable Gardening Project?

- Design and plant a vegetable garden.
- Learn how to prepare the soil for a successful vegetable garden.
- Start vegetables from seed in a garden or in containers.
- Buy vegetable plants and grow them in your garden or in containers.
- Find out the right way to plant, water, fertilize and manage weeds, insects and diseases in your vegetable garden.

Planning and Preparing

Growing fresh vegetables for you and your family can be fun and rewarding. The first step in vegetable gardening is to select a suitable site. To grow well, plants in your vegetable garden must:

- Receive at least 8 hours or more full sun every day.
- Be located as far as possible from tall trees to prevent shading and root competition,
- Be near as possible to a water source.

Also, be sure that the garden you plan is not too large. Choose a size you can easily care for.

Once you know where the garden will be and how large it will be, draw up a plan. Sketch a map of the garden—you can draw it to scale by using a ruler and making each foot of distance in the garden equal an inch on paper. Then photocopy several copies of the map so you can try out several planting arrangements.

Using a copy of the map, try plotting out where you will place every plant, remembering to:

- Take into account how much space each plant will take—don't guess, look it up!
- Think about what you and your family like to eat and grow those things.
- Grow only as much as you can use or share.
- Place taller plants on the north side of your garden so they do not shade the shorter plants.

When you have a plan you like, then you're ready to order seeds and supplies. Choose varieties that will do well in our short growing season. Warm-season plants, like tomatoes and peppers, should be started indoors 6-8 weeks before you plant them outdoors.

Preparing the Soil

Properly preparing the soil is the key to a successful vegetable garden. You can prepare your garden soil either in late fall or in early spring, as soon as the soil thaws out. Soil must be fairly dry before you work it, however. You can tell if the soil is dry enough by squeezing a handful and flicking at it with your finger. If it breaks up like chocolate cake, it is dry enough to work.

Eliminate weeds like quackgrass and dandelions since they will compete with your vegetable plants for water and nutrients. Have the soil tested to determine the proper amount of nutrients to add. Work in as much compost or aged manure as you can—organic materials like these will give the soil just the right qualities to grow good vegetables.

Planting

Plant cool-season vegetables in early spring and warm-season vegetables after danger of frost is past. Learn the proper way to plant seeds and plants and how to harden off any plants grown indoors so that they are not harmed by a sudden change in environment.

Care

Learn the different needs of your various vegetable crops. Some may require additional fertilizer at certain times, while others may want only water and weeding to thrive. Learn which plants grow best with a cooling mulch, such as wood chips, and which prefer a soil-warming mulch, like black plastic.

Many different kinds of insects or diseases can show up in a vegetable garden. While many insects are beneficial or do no harm, others may cause problems. If you think you may have an insect or disease problem in your garden, use your resources to determine what the problem is and the best way to manage it.

Resources

- Master Gardener Volunteers. Contact via the Yard & Garden Line at: (888) 624-4771.
- University of Minnesota Extension Service publications, available through your local Extension Service office or on the web at: www.extension.umn.edu
- School and public libraries.



What do you do now? Look for ideas below.

Write your own ideas for preparing, doing, and sharing in the open areas.

Preparing

What tools will I need?

Start now filling out your 4-H record and planning calendar.

Learn about mulch.

Design a vegetable garden.

What varieties will grow best in my area?

Design and build a raised-bed garden.

Grow a vining plant up a trellis to save space.

Be creative: plant herbs and flowers in the vegetable garden.

Learn the difference between cool- and warm-season vegetables.

Doing

Start tomato plants indoors, harden them off, then sell them.

Sharing

Grow vegetables for a local food shelf.

Help at a community garden.

Exhibit your vegetables at a county fair.