

VEGETABLE GARDENING

Nothing tastes better than vegetables picked fresh from your own garden. There's a certain satisfaction to serving and eating food that you yourself have grown and harvested. But a successful and manageable veggie garden requires some advance planning as there are many factors that can affect the success and manageability of your vegetable garden, as well as your enjoyment of it.

The traditional method of vegetable garden design was to plant long, orderly rows. Most home gardeners now opt for planting in beds rather than rows. This method allows you to concentrate your compost on the area where the plants are growing rather than wasting it on the paths between the rows. Walking between the rows also ruins the soil structure, so beds are really a better way to go. The beds do need to be small enough so that you can easily reach in to weed and harvest all the plants without stepping on the bed itself. Also, if you raise your beds about 8 to 12 inches, you will have improved drainage and the soil will stay warmer in colder weather, such as early spring.

Another popular style is the potager garden, which mixes flowers with herbs and vegetables in an ornamental fashion so that the garden is both functional and esthetically pleasing. And if you think you don't have enough room, remember that many vegetables will thrive in containers, so in fact you don't even need a garden in order to get those garden-fresh veggies – you could grow them on your deck! If space is a problem, try planting vegetables next to each other that mature at different times. This way, you have already harvested one when it's neighbor is becoming mature, so both have plenty of space and sun when they need it most.

Location is another consideration when planning your garden. Many people tend to want to hide the vegetable garden away in a corner and save the spotlight for the flowers. Vegetable gardens, however, need sunny, open spaces in order to produce successful crops, so you won't reap a bounty if you are not willing to devote some prime real estate. Putting some extra effort into preparing your beds before planting will save you time and effort in the long run. Dig the bed up to break up compacted soil, removing rocks and weeds as you go. This is also a good time to amend your soil -- compost is a great way to add organic matter to your veggie garden, as is well-rotted manure.

Now you're ready to plant your favourite veggies – tomatoes, peppers, beans and more. Then it's just a matter of water, weed, and wait for the unforgettable taste of that first home-grown tomato!