

LEARNING MADE EASY



3rd Edition

Vegetable Gardening

^{for}
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand



Find out how to plant, care for,
and harvest your own veggies

Discover how to combat pests
and other common problems

Explore innovative gardening
techniques and ideas

**National Gardening
Association**

Charlie Nardozzi



Vegetable Gardening

3rd edition

**by National Gardening Association
Charlie Nardozzi**

**for
dummies®**
A Wiley Brand

Vegetable Gardening For Dummies®, 3rd edition

Published by: **John Wiley & Sons, Inc.**, 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774, www.wiley.com

Copyright © 2021 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey

Published simultaneously in Canada

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning or otherwise, except as permitted under Sections 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without the prior written permission of the Publisher. Requests to the Publisher for permission should be addressed to the Permissions Department, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, (201) 748-6011, fax (201) 748-6008, or online at <http://www.wiley.com/go/permissions>.

Trademarks: Wiley, For Dummies, the Dummies Man logo, Dummies.com, Making Everything Easier, and related trade dress are trademarks or registered trademarks of John Wiley & Sons, Inc., and may not be used without written permission. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. John Wiley & Sons, Inc., is not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book.

LIMIT OF LIABILITY/DISCLAIMER OF WARRANTY: WHILE THE PUBLISHER AND AUTHOR HAVE USED THEIR BEST EFFORTS IN PREPARING THIS BOOK, THEY MAKE NO REPRESENTATIONS OR WARRANTIES WITH RESPECT TO THE ACCURACY OR COMPLETENESS OF THE CONTENTS OF THIS BOOK AND SPECIFICALLY DISCLAIM ANY IMPLIED WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE. NO WARRANTY MAY BE CREATED OR EXTENDED BY SALES REPRESENTATIVES OR WRITTEN SALES MATERIALS. THE ADVICE AND STRATEGIES CONTAINED HEREIN MAY NOT BE SUITABLE FOR YOUR SITUATION. YOU SHOULD CONSULT WITH A PROFESSIONAL WHERE APPROPRIATE. NEITHER THE PUBLISHER NOR THE AUTHOR SHALL BE LIABLE FOR DAMAGES ARISING HEREFROM. SOME OF THE EXERCISES AND DIETARY SUGGESTIONS CONTAINED IN THIS WORK MAY NOT BE APPROPRIATE FOR ALL INDIVIDUALS, AND READERS SHOULD CONSULT WITH A PHYSICIAN BEFORE COMMENCING ANY EXERCISE OR DIETARY PROGRAM.

For general information on our other products and services, please contact our Customer Care Department within the U.S. at 877-762-2974, outside the U.S. at 317-572-3993, or fax 317-572-4002. For technical support, please visit <https://hub.wiley.com/community/support/dummies>.

Wiley publishes in a variety of print and electronic formats and by print-on-demand. Some material included with standard print versions of this book may not be included in e-books or in print-on-demand. If this book refers to media such as a CD or DVD that is not included in the version you purchased, you may download this material at <http://booksupport.wiley.com>. For more information about Wiley products, visit www.wiley.com.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2021932173

ISBN: 978-1-119-78207-0

ISBN: 978-1-119-78208-7 (ebk); ISBN: 978-1-119-78209-4 (ebk)

Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents at a Glance

Introduction	1
Part 1: Digging Into the Basics of Vegetable Gardening	5
CHAPTER 1: Vegetable Gardening 101	7
CHAPTER 2: Eyeing the Popularity and Benefits of Vegetable Gardening	15
CHAPTER 3: Planning Your Veggie Garden	23
Part 2: Focusing on All Things Veggies	43
CHAPTER 4: Tomatoes: The King of Veggies.	45
CHAPTER 5: Meeting the Tomato's Cousins: Peppers and Eggplants	63
CHAPTER 6: Growing Underground Crops: Carrots, Onions, and Potatoes	79
CHAPTER 7: Sweet and Simple: Beans and Peas	99
CHAPTER 8: Vigorous Vines: Cucumbers, Melons, Pumpkins, and Squash	117
CHAPTER 9: Cool Weather Staples: Broccoli, Brussels Sprouts, Cabbage, and Cauliflower	137
CHAPTER 10: A Salad for All Seasons: Lettuce, Spinach, Swiss Chard, and Specialty Greens	151
CHAPTER 11: Sweet Corn and an A to Z of Other Worthy Veggies	167
CHAPTER 12: Edible Landscapes: Fruits, Herbs, and Pretty Things to Eat	197
Part 3: Getting Down and Dirty in Your Vegetable Garden	215
CHAPTER 13: On Your Mark, Get Set . . . Grow!	217
CHAPTER 14: Workin' the Dirt	239
CHAPTER 15: Maintaining Your Vegetable Garden	257
CHAPTER 16: Surveying Some Cool Planting Techniques	287
CHAPTER 17: Keeping Your Plants Healthy.	301
CHAPTER 18: Containing Your Veggies	319
CHAPTER 19: Harvesting, Storing, and Preserving Vegetables	329
Part 4: The Part of Tens	339
CHAPTER 20: Ten Tools of the Trade	341
CHAPTER 21: Ten (or So) Ways to Extend Your Growing Season	351
Appendix: Planning Guidelines and Other Resources	359
Index	383

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
About This Book	1
Foolish Assumptions	2
Icons Used in This Book	2
Where to Go from Here	3
 PART 1: DIGGING INTO THE BASICS OF VEGETABLE GARDENING	 5
CHAPTER 1: Vegetable Gardening 101	7
Having a Garden: Yes or No	7
Planning a Veggie Garden	8
Growing a Cornucopia of Vegetables	9
Tomatoes	9
Peppers and eggplants	9
Carrots, onions, and potatoes	10
Peas and beans	10
Cucumbers, melons, pumpkins, and squash	11
Broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, and cauliflower	11
Lettuce, spinach, Swiss chard, and specialty greens	12
An array of other great veggies	12
Non-vegetable edibles	12
Getting Down to Growing	13
Choosing between seeds and transplants	13
Working the soil	13
Keeping your garden growing and enjoying the rewards	14
Trying for a bigger bounty	14
 CHAPTER 2: Eyeing the Popularity and Benefits of Vegetable Gardening	 15
Food Gardening: It's Popping Up Everywhere	15
Identifying a Few Good Reasons to Grow Your Own Food	17
Better tasting and higher quality food	17
Improve your health	18
Save some cash	18
Help the environment	20
Increase your quality of life	21
Self-reliance	21

CHAPTER 3:	Planning Your Veggie Garden	23
	Deciding Where to Put Your Vegetable Garden	23
	Considering different sites	24
	Letting the sun shine	26
	Checking your soil's drainage	27
	Understanding Veggie Varieties	28
	Timing Your Planting Wisely	30
	Some like it cool, some like it hot	30
	Frost dates and the length of the growing season	31
	Your local forecast trumps frost dates	33
	Designing Your Garden	33
	Deciding on hills, rows, or raised beds	34
	Spacing your plantings properly	36
	Following the paths	37
	Sketching it out	37
	PART 2: FOCUSING ON ALL THINGS VEGGIES	43
CHAPTER 4:	Tomatoes: The King of Veggies	45
	Checking Out Tomato Varieties	46
	Categorizing tomatoes	46
	Classifying tomatoes by their appearance	48
	Enjoying classic red, round tomatoes	48
	Surveying all the other colors of tomatoes	50
	Sweetening the pot with cherry, grape, and pear tomatoes	51
	Considering some saucy tomatoes	52
	Introducing the tomato's relatives	53
	Growing Tomatoes with Ease	54
	Jump-starting tomatoes	54
	Planting, trellising, and pruning	55
	Fertilizing and maintaining your plants	57
	Eliminating pests and other problems	59
	Harvesting tomatoes	61
CHAPTER 5:	Meeting the Tomato's Cousins: Peppers and Eggplants	63
	Producing Plenty of Peppers	64
	Those sweet bells	64
	Long and round sweet peppers	66
	Peppers that turn on the heat	67
	Pretty peppers: The ornamentals	71
	Distinguishing Eggplants by Shape	71
	Large and oval	72
	Cylindrical	72
	Small and round	73

Growing Peppers and Eggplants.....	73
Starting and planting.....	74
Fertilizing and watering tips.....	75
Patrolling and controlling pests.....	76
Harvesting peppers and eggplants.....	76
CHAPTER 6: Growing Underground Crops: Carrots, Onions, and Potatoes	79
A Rabbit's (and Gardener's) Favorite Root: Carrots	80
Classifying carrots by type	80
Examining some varieties	81
Onions: The Bulbs with Layers of Sweet and Pungent Goodness ...	82
Choosing your onion varieties.....	83
Looking at scallions and perennial onions.....	85
Potatoes: No Longer a Boring Spud	87
Potatoes classified.....	87
Selecting a few potato varieties.....	87
Growing and Gathering Root Crops	89
General guidelines for all your root crops.....	89
Cultivating carrots	90
Growing onions	91
Producing potatoes.....	92
Keeping Your Root Crops Healthy and Pest Free	95
CHAPTER 7: Sweet and Simple: Beans and Peas.....	99
A Bevy of Beans: Filling Your Rows with Bean Family Plants	100
Bushels of bush beans	101
Pole beans: The long and tall crop	102
The versatile shell and dried beans	103
Miscellaneous beans not to be forgotten	104
Growing Peas, Please!.....	106
English peas: The reliable standby	107
Sweet and tender snap peas	108
An earlier harvest: Snow peas	109
Get 'Em in the Ground: Growing Beans and Peas	109
Planting legumes for an ample harvest	110
Thwarting pests and diseases	113
Keep on pickin': Harvesting your crop	115
CHAPTER 8: Vigorous Vines: Cucumbers, Melons, Pumpkins, and Squash	117
Checking Out Cool Cukes.....	118
Before you choose: Brushing up on some cucumber vocabulary	118
Surveying common cucumber varieties.....	119

Melons: The Sweet, Juicy Vining Plant	121
Distinguishing different types of melons	121
Perusing popular melon varieties	122
Unearthing the Humble Squash	123
Identifying different squash types	124
Recognizing popular squash varieties	125
Great Pumpkins: Counting the Uses for This Versatile Squash	127
Growing Those Vines	129
Planting and feeding	129
Watering and watering some more	131
Ensuring proper pollination	132
Controlling pests and diseases	133
Harvesting your vining crop	135
 CHAPTER 9: Cool Weather Staples: Broccoli, Brussels	
Sprouts, Cabbage, and Cauliflower	137
Paying Attention to the Often-Overlooked Cole Crops	138
Easing into cole crops with broccoli	138
Brussels sprouts: The little cabbages	140
Choosing cabbage: The age-old and dependable cole crop	141
Considering cauliflower in a rainbow of colors	143
Growing Your Own Cole Crops	145
Giving cole crops what they want	145
Nurturing cole crops	146
Putting a stop to pesky pest problems	148
Harvesting cole crops	149
 CHAPTER 10: A Salad for All Seasons: Lettuce, Spinach,	
Swiss Chard, and Specialty Greens	151
Lettuce Get Together	152
Crisphead lettuce	153
Romaine lettuce	154
Loose-leaf lettuce	154
Popeye's Pal: Spinach	155
Savoy spinach	156
Smooth spinach and some spinach-like friends	156
The Attractive and Hardy Swiss Chard	157
Going Wild with Specialty Greens	158
Growing Great Greens	160
Timing is everything: Determining when to plant	
your greens	160
Putting your greens to bed	162
Adding nitrogen-rich fishy fertilizer	163
Thin and bare it: Thinning your greens	163

Watering to win the war against wilt	163
Working out the bugs (and other common ailments)	163
Your bowl runneth over: Harvesting greens	164

CHAPTER 11: Sweet Corn and an A to T of Other

Worthy Veggies	167
Sweet Corn and Its Relatives	168
Sweet corn	168
Popcorn	170
Considering Other Great Vegetables	171
Arugula	171
Asparagus	172
Beets	174
Bok choy	175
Broccoli raab	176
Celeriac	176
Celery	177
Chinese cabbage	178
Collards	179
Endive	179
Escarole	179
Florence fennel	180
Garlic	180
Globe artichokes	183
Gourds	183
Horseradish	184
Kale	185
Kohlrabi	186
Leeks	186
Mizuna	187
Okra	187
Parsnips	188
Peanuts	189
Radicchio	190
Radishes	191
Rhubarb	192
Rutabagas	193
Shallots	194
Turnips	194

**CHAPTER 12: Edible Landscapes: Fruits, Herbs,
and Pretty Things to Eat**

and Pretty Things to Eat	197
Sweetening Your Garden: Berries and Trees	198
Strawberries	198
Blueberries	199

Blackberries and raspberries	199
Unusual fruits	200
Focusing on Herbs	201
Basil	203
Chives	204
Cilantro	205
Dill	205
French tarragon	206
Mint	207
Oregano	208
Parsley	209
Rosemary	210
Sage	210
Thyme	211
Blossoming Edible Flowers	212

PART 3: GETTING DOWN AND DIRTY IN YOUR VEGETABLE GARDEN 215

CHAPTER 13: On Your Mark, Get Set . . . Grow! 217

Choosing Seeds or Transplants	218
Deciding on Your Seeding Method and Decoding a Seed Packet	219
Starting Seeds Indoors	220
Picking a pot to plant in	221
Using a mix that doesn't include soil	222
Sowing your seeds	222
Providing the right amount of light and heat	225
Watering your seedlings	225
Thinning and transplanting indoors	226
Feeding your seedlings	227
Transplanting Indoor Seedlings and Starter Plants	228
Buying starter plants	228
Toughening up all types of transplants	229
Making the big move to the ground	230
Sowing Seeds Directly in Your Garden	232
Deciding on a seed-planting method	233
Thinning seedlings in your garden	237

CHAPTER 14: Workin' the Dirt 239

Razing Your Garden Spot	239
Killing weeds and aggressive grasses	240
Stripping sod	242
Analyzing and Improving Your Soil	243
Distinguishing different types of soil	244
Testing your soil	245

Adjusting soil pH	247
Adding organic matter (aka the dead stuff).	249
Turning Your Soil	251
Making Your Own Compost	252
Building a compost pile	253
Avoiding materials that don't belong in a compost pile	255
Moistening and turning your compost pile	255
CHAPTER 15: Maintaining Your Vegetable Garden	257
Addressing the Basics of Watering	258
Knowing when your veggies need a drink	259
Discovering ways to water your vegetable garden.	260
Conserving water with a few handy tips	266
Keeping Your Plants Cozy and Weed Free with Mulch.	267
Spreading organic mulch	267
Laying inorganic mulch.	269
Deciding which mulch to use.	271
Determining Important Nutrients Your Soil Needs	272
Macronutrients	273
Secondary nutrients and micronutrients.	274
Fertilizing Your Vegetable Garden	275
Examining a fertilizer label.	275
Choosing a fertilizer	276
Side-dressing	277
Supporting Your Vegetables	281
Beans and peas	282
Melons and cucumbers	283
Tomatoes	283
Fighting Weed Wars	283
Making a preemptive strike on weeds	284
Battling weeds after planting.	285
CHAPTER 16: Surveying Some Cool Planting Techniques	287
Adding Nutrients and Stability with Cover Crops and Green Manures	288
Eyeing the advantages of cover crops	288
Choosing cover crops	289
Planting cover crops	290
Giving Your Plants Some Friends: Companion Planting	291
Making Your Garden Work Double Time with Intercropping	292
Extending Your Harvest with Succession Planting	293
Rotating Crops to Preserve Soil Nutrients and Maintain a Pest-Free Bed	295
Planting by the Phases of the Moon.	296
Building a Hügelkultur-Raised Bed	297

Growing Plants in Strawbales	297
Adding an Herb Spiral to Your Yard	298
Combining Fish with Plants: Aquaponics	299
CHAPTER 17: Keeping Your Plants Healthy	301
The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Controlling Pests	302
Recognizing the good bugs	302
Rounding up the bad bugs	303
Considering the best form of attack	309
Gardening to Eliminate Diseases	312
Avoiding diseases with good habits	312
Watching out for common diseases	313
Keeping the Animal Kingdom at Bay	315
CHAPTER 18: Containing Your Veggies	319
Considering a Few Container Characteristics	320
Filling Up Your Container: Potting Soil Made Simple	322
Knowing Which Vegetables Grow Well in Pots	323
Identifying some common container veggies	323
Some bee-u-tee-ful vegetable combos	325
Planting Your Veggies in Pots	326
Caring for Container Veggies	327
CHAPTER 19: Harvesting, Storing, and Preserving	
Vegetables	329
Knowing When to Harvest	329
Putting Away Your Vegetables	332
Freezing, Drying, and Canning Veggies	335
Saving Vegetable Seeds	336
PART 4: THE PART OF TENS	339
CHAPTER 20: Ten Tools of the Trade	341
Watering Hoses and Cans	342
Hand Trowels	343
Hand Cultivators	343
Garden Hoes	343
Spades and Shovels	345
Garden Forks	345
Garden Rakes	345
Buckets, Wagons, and Baskets	346
Wheelbarrows and Garden Carts	347
Power Tillers	348

CHAPTER 21:	Ten (or So) Ways to Extend Your Growing Season	351
	Plant in Clever Locations	352
	Time Your Planting Wisely	352
	Protect Plants with Hot Caps	353
	Add Elegance to Your Garden with Glass Cloches	353
	Buy or Build Cold Frames	354
	Drape Row Covers over Veggies	355
	Place Wall O' Waters around Plants	356
	Try Portable Greenhouses and Hoop Houses	357
APPENDIX:	PLANNING GUIDELINES AND OTHER RESOURCES	359
INDEX		383

Introduction

Everyone loves good food. Fresh, tasty, nutritious food is our birthright. And what better way to have great food than to grow it yourself? You don't have to be a farmer to do so either. Whether it be a plot of land in the yard that's tilled up to grow vegetables, a few vegetables planted amongst your flowers and shrubs, or containers loaded with attractive, edible choices, growing your own food is a satisfying and rewarding activity.

Vegetable gardening isn't rocket science either. Heck, people have been growing their own vegetables for thousands of years. Like any pursuit, you just need some direction, good advice, and inspiration to get started. *Vegetable Gardening For Dummies*, 3rd Edition, is for anyone who already grows vegetables or who has ever dreamed of growing some of their own food. All it takes is some resolve to get started. You're already halfway there just by picking up this book!

About This Book

In *Vegetable Gardening For Dummies*, 3rd Edition, you can find all the basic information you need to grow a vegetable garden. I've been vegetable gardening my whole life, so throughout the book I try to impart some practical wisdom that's easily accessible. I also include some special tips and tricks that I've discovered over the years and information on hundreds of vegetable varieties, many of which are beautiful to look at as well as tasty to eat.

In addition, I include this new and revised information in this book:

- » A thorough review and update of all technical details and gardening techniques
- » An update of vegetable variety recommendations to reflect the current most popular varieties available
- » Discussion on new innovative gardening techniques based on permaculture and other sustainable practices
- » A completely rebuilt appendix with up-to-date planting guides, frost charts, company recommendations, and more

Of course, none of this matters if you can't grow the vegetables successfully. That's why a large part of this book is devoted to building soil, starting seeds, maintaining the garden, controlling pests, growing through the seasons, and harvesting. I like to encourage happy, healthy, successful gardeners who are willing to experiment, make mistakes, and enjoy sharing their bounty with their friends, family, and neighbors.

Foolish Assumptions

Before I even put one word to the page, I was thinking about who may read this book. Here's what I assume about you, the reader:

- » You want to create a vegetable garden that's filled with healthy, nutritious, beautiful plants to eat.
- » You want to understand the basics of vegetable gardening and, for experienced gardeners, find new tricks to help you garden better.
- » You want to grow vegetables in an environmentally friendly manner.
- » You want to try vegetable gardening even if you only have a deck or patio to grow a few plants.
- » You want to share your love of gardening with friends, family members, and neighbors because you feel that if more people grew some of their own food, the world would be a better place.

Icons Used in This Book

Like all *For Dummies* books, this book has icons that highlight great tips, warnings, and other specific topics. Here are the ones in this book:



REMEMBER

This icon highlights important information that helps you garden better. Don't forget this stuff!



TECHNICAL
STUFF

If you want to go a little deeper in your knowledge of a plant or technique, read information marked with this icon.



TIP

This icon highlights information that saves time and money. Even experienced gardeners can learn something from these tidbits!



WARNING

Sometimes you can make mistakes in the garden, and that's okay. To help minimize your mistakes, this icon alerts you to potential pitfalls.

Where to Go from Here

Start with the basics by taking in the information in Part 1 about seeds, plants, soil, your site, and garden planning. Then dive into your list of dream vegetables that you want to grow in your garden. Come back to the book periodically throughout the growing season to find out more about pest solutions in Chapter 17 and season extending in Chapter 21. And don't forget to keep harvesting the fruits of all your fine work.

Feel free to read the book from front to back cover or scan the Table of Contents or Index, find topics that pique your interest, and flip to those chapters.

This book is just the beginning of your vegetable garden experience. Many resources are available for vegetable gardeners (the appendix can get you started). The key is to get started and keep learning. After tasting one of your first home-grown peas, you'll be hooked for life.

To find some more relevant information that you can refer to again and again, go to www.dummies.com and search for "Vegetable Gardening Cheat Sheet" for a handy Cheat Sheet.

1

Digging Into the Basics of Vegetable Gardening

IN THIS PART . . .

Get your vegetable gardening juices flowing and discover the environmental, social, and health reasons for growing some of your own food.

Plan all aspects of your garden plot deciding where you want it, consider different vegetables to include, and figure out how you want your garden to look.

Examine important growing conditions for your vegetable garden, such as the right sun, soil, and shade.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Understanding why people grow veggies
- » Surveying some great vegetables to grow
- » Keeping your garden growing well

Chapter 1

Vegetable Gardening 101

I've been vegetable gardening my entire life. I've followed my grandfather picking stones out of the potato patch, weeded my mother's garden, taught my daughter to plant her first seeds, and built cold frames to maximize the amount of food my wife and I can grow in our yard with edible landscaping. I can attest that after you start, vegetable gardening becomes part of your life.

Here I start you off with the basics on site preparation, and I tell you what to grow and how to grow it. All the details that follow in subsequent chapters build on the information you need to know to be a successful vegetable gardener. Along the way I hope you are inspired to get some dirt under your fingernails and start your own garden. Dig in!

Having a Garden: Yes or No

Over the years people had drifted away from vegetable gardening in the spirit of progress and affluence because of living busier lives and having smaller available spaces for gardening. However, more recently people are once again realizing that growing their own food, although not as critical to survival as it once was, is an important part of a healthy body, mind, spirit, lifestyle, and community. More people are again turning to vegetable gardening as a means of food and as a hobby. Veggie gardening is officially back!

Who can resist the flavor, smell, and texture of food literally picked minutes before you eat it? It you've ever sunk your teeth into a sun-warmed, ripe tomato and felt the juices and flavors explode in your mouth, you'll know what I mean.



REMEMBER

But vegetable gardening isn't just about taste. It's about safe food that's produced close to home. It's about knowing what has been sprayed on that food. It's about feeding your friends and family nutritious food that's high in vitamins and *anti-oxidants* (cancer-fighting compounds). It's about connecting with your neighbors and community as you experiment with ethnic dishes using exotic ingredients grown in your not-so-exotic backyard. It's about reducing pollution by not buying produce that's shipped hundreds (or thousands!) of miles to your local grocery store. Finally it's about reclaiming your ability to grow some of your own food, even if it's just a container of basil, to have a little more control in your life. If you're interested in finding out more about the popularity and benefits of vegetable gardening, be sure to check out Chapter 2.

Planning a Veggie Garden

When's the best time to start vegetable gardening? Right now! Here are the basics on how to decide where to grow yours:

- » Find a spot close to the house that you walk by daily so you don't forget about your project.
- » Find a spot that gets at least 6 hours of direct sun a day.
- » Find a spot that has great soil.



TIP

Don't bite off more than you can chew! Keep your new garden small. You can be just as productive in a small raised-bed garden, container, or small kitchen garden as you would be if you tilled up your whole backyard. Start small, be successful, and then get bigger (if you want).

What should you put in your new garden? Well, you have many vegetable options when it comes to deciding what you can grow, so it's going to be tough deciding which ones to plant. The most important rule I can tell you is to grow what you like to eat. Yes, folks, this is all about taste. So no matter what people say about how easy beans are to grow, don't grow them if you hate to eat them. (Of course, after tasting fresh green beans from the garden, you may change your tune.) Grow a mix of varieties of favorite vegetables that you and your family will love. Also, try a few different ones to stretch your imagination. Chapter 3 has plenty of pointers to help you plan your garden wisely.

Growing a Cornucopia of Vegetables

You can grow many different types of veggies in your yard — and not just in the backyard. These days they're pretty enough to be front and center. The following sections describe some of the most popular to get you started.

Tomatoes

Tomatoes are by far the most popular vegetable grown — and for good reason. The difference between a vine-ripened fruit and one picked green, gassed, and shipped hundreds of miles to your grocery store is incomparable. You can choose from container varieties that produce fruit the size of a pea and giant plants that grow to the height of a garage and produce fruits the size of a softball! You can even grow varieties of tomatoes with fruits every color of the rainbow except blue (however, I wouldn't be surprised to see that color someday either).



REMEMBER

Tomatoes love the heat and sun and require fertile soil and support. Unless you're growing the dwarf varieties, stakes, cages, trellises, teepees, and arbors are essential for keeping plants growing upright and strong. You only need a few plants to keep your family in tomatoes most of the summer. Chapter 4 has the full scoop on growing tomatoes.

Peppers and eggplants

Peppers and eggplants are related to tomatoes, but they're a little more homogeneous in their plant size. However, what they lack in plant variety, they make up in fruit uniqueness. Pepper fruits come shaped as bells or as long and thin tubular shapes. Some are as sweet as candy and others are hot enough to burn your mouth.

Pepper fruits mostly start green and end up red, but where they go, colorwise, in between is amazing. You can experiment with chocolate-, yellow-, ivory-, purple-, lavender-, and orange-colored fruits that can be eaten raw or used in a multitude of cooked dishes. Eggplants also have burst onto the scene with varieties that produce unique-colored fruits, including white, purple, striped, and even orange.



TIP

If you can grow a tomato, you can grow peppers and eggplants. They need similar growing conditions. Plus, I love them as ornamental edibles. Not only do they look good in flower beds and containers, but you can eat them too! Chapter 5 has more on peppers and eggplants.

Carrots, onions, and potatoes

Get to the root of the matter by growing carrots, onions, and potatoes. (I know, I couldn't resist the play on words!) Carrots, onions, and potatoes love cool soil and cool-weather conditions. Start them in spring for an early summer crop or in summer to mature in fall. Here are a few fun facts on each group (Chapter 6 has more information):

- » **Carrots:** Carrot varieties are either short and squat or long and thin. You can even get colors other than orange, including red, purple, yellow, and white. Because their seeds are so small and take a while to germinate, carrots can be difficult to get started. But once they're growing you'll soon be munching on roots.
- » **Onions:** Depending on the variety, most bulbing onions are day-length sensitive and individually adapted to form bulbs in either the northern or southern parts of the country. Intermediate-day varieties do exist that develop bulbs in most locations, and non-bulbing *bunching type* green onions also can be grown anywhere. Some are sweet and can be eaten out of hand, whereas others are pungent and best for cooking and storing in winter. You can grow onions from seed, sets (bulbs), or plants.
- » **Potatoes:** Potatoes are an easy cool-season crop to grow because you plant part of the potato to get new plants. If you cover the tubers with soil, hill them up, and keep them watered, you'll be rolling in spuds come summer.

Peas and beans

Peas and beans are like cousins. They're in the same family and share traits, but in other ways they're different!

- » **Peas** are cool-season-loving crops that produce either plump or flat pods depending on the variety. With some pea varieties you eat pods and all. With others you eat just the peas inside.
- » **Beans** love the heat. They're one of the easiest vegetables to grow. They come in bush and twining or pole bean forms.



TIP

Both are great vegetables in the garden because they require little to no fertilizer and care once they're up and running. Chapter 7 has details.

Cucumbers, melons, pumpkins, and squash

I affectionately call cucumbers, melons, pumpkins, and squash the “viners.” They love to ramble about the garden, taking up space and producing loads of fruit. But even if you’re a small-space gardener, you can still grow these space hogs. Newer varieties of cucumbers, squash, and melons can fit in a small raised bed or even a container.

One common trait of these vegetables is that they need heat, water, fertility, and bees. Bees? Yes, bees. Most of these squash family crops need to be cross-pollinated to produce fruit, so bees are critical to success. If you’re growing other vegetables, flowers, and herbs, you’re sure to have some bees flying about to do the hard work.



WARNING

Some members of this veggie family can be prolific, so unless you’re planting to preserve your harvest, don’t plant lots of zucchinis, cucumbers, and pumpkins. Then again, if you really want to share the harvest you can plant a bunch to give away! Head to Chapter 8 for plenty of pointers on growing vining veggies.

Broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, and cauliflower

Broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, and cauliflower are similar in how they grow and what they need to grow. However, their differences come in the parts you eat. Here’s the lowdown:

- » After you pick the heads of cabbage and cauliflower, the plant is finished and stops producing.
- » After you pick broccoli heads, you’ll keep getting more broccoli side shoots to eat all season long.
- » Brussels sprouts are like your crazy Uncle Louis. He looks a little strange, and you don’t know where he came from. Brussels sprouts produce cabbagelike balls all along a straight stem. Keep picking the sprouts starting from the bottom to the top of the stalk until it stops producing because of the cold.

This group of veggies is productive and serves as a great addition to a cool-weather spring or fall garden. See Chapter 9 for more information.

Lettuce, spinach, Swiss chard, and specialty greens

If you're looking for quick rewards, go straight to Chapter 10 and grow greens: lettuce, spinach, chard, and wild greens, such as dandelions. Because you don't have to wait for greens to form fruits (you're just eating the leaves), you can pick them as soon as your stomach rumbles and the leaves are big enough to munch. They mostly love cool weather, so start early in spring and then keep planting and harvesting.

Greens are one of the best container vegetables to grow because they're easy and adaptable. You can mix and match lettuce varieties to produce different colors and textures that look beautiful and taste divine.

An array of other great veggies

In the previous sections, I just touch the tip of the iceberg when it comes to what to grow for vegetable varieties. There are so many more vegetables to grow; all you have to do is wander down the produce aisles at the local grocery store and think, do I like to eat that? Chapter 11 describes more than 30 other vegetables to grow — from asparagus to turnips. Watch out or you may get hooked and start growing so many vegetables you'll have to open a restaurant. Veggie gardening can become that much fun.

Non-vegetable edibles

Don't limit yourself to growing just vegetables in the vegetable garden. That would be silly! Berries, such as blueberries, strawberries, and raspberries, and herbs, such as basil, parsley, and chives, are great additions to your yard. They produce fruit, spice up a meal, and look beautiful. Need some inspiration? Here are some suggestions (and refer to Chapter 12):

- » Consider having a strawberry patch in your garden.
- » Landscape your yard with blueberry bushes or a hedge of raspberries.
- » Mix herb plants around vegetable plants or give them their own space in the garden. Herbs also grow well in containers mixed with flowers. I love growing rosemary in a deck planter each year for the attractive foliage and the enticing aroma.

Getting Down to Growing

Are you excited to grow some of your own food? Not so fast! You need a roadmap to get a successful start. Just like driving, if you get off in the wrong direction, it takes lots of time and effort to get back on course. So you have to start out with a plan and stick to it. The following sections are a quick run-through from seed to table of growing vegetables. After you read this section, head to the chapters in Part 2 for all the details that will ensure success.

Choosing between seeds and transplants

The easiest way to start a new garden is to grow those vegetables that can be planted from seed directly into the soil. For veggies that are best transplanted, buy the transplants locally. (Some vegetables can go both ways, too.) Here's a breakdown of the two groups:

- » Some vegetables that can be sown directly into the ground as seeds include beans, peas, carrots, beets, and sweet corn.
- » Some vegetables and herbs you can find in local garden centers as transplants include tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, lettuce, cucumber, squash, basil, and parsley.



TIP

If you have a small garden, go with the transplants. If you're growing a larger garden, you'll find it less expensive to grow veggies from seed. Chapter 13 has details on growing seeds versus growing transplants.

Working the soil

After you have your vegetable seeds or transplants ready to go, the temptation is to simply turn the soil and then plant. However, soil building is one of the most important parts of your gardening experience. Your soil needs to be fertile, loose, dried out, and relatively weed and rock free to grow the best crops. If you take care of the soil in your beds, it'll take care of you by producing healthy, productive vegetables with few insect and disease problems.



TIP

Spend some time working the soil by hand or with a tiller. Amend it every year with compost to keep the fertility high and make it more workable. Test your soil to see if it needs other nutrients. Flip to Chapter 14 for more ways to coddle your soil.

Keeping your garden growing and enjoying the rewards

When your garden is up and running, you can lower your maintenance time and effort and raise your satisfaction level by doing the following (see Chapter 15):

- » Mulch your beds.
- » Water your plants deeply and consistently.
- » Fertilize when necessary.

No matter how well you care for your garden, pests still may attack your plants. It's best to grow insect- and disease-resistant varieties when possible. And be sure to create barriers to block pests from attacking, clean up the garden well to remove overwintering insects and diseases, and only spray as a last resort. I provide more on keeping your plants healthy in Chapter 17.



TIP

After all this serious stuff, comes the fun part: harvesting. Check the garden daily when plants are producing, and pick even if you don't have room in the fridge. With many vegetable plants, the more fruits you pick, the more you'll get. You always can give away the fresh produce to friends, family, and neighbors, so keep picking. Chapter 19 has details on harvesting and storing.

Trying for a bigger bounty

To go further with your vegetable garden, try a few of the following techniques that help improve production and yield:

- » **Use containers.** Growing in containers allows you to grow plants longer into the season and position your plants in the sunniest, most protected spots around your house. Chapter 18 discusses container gardening.
- » **Practice cool farmer tricks, such as succession planting and interplanting.** Succession planting allows you to grow three or more crops in one season from the same spot. Interplanting is where you plant quick-maturing small plants, such as lettuce and radishes, around slow-growing larger plants, such as tomatoes and broccoli. The small plants are harvested before the larger plants shade them out. The gardening world has even more fun and interesting new ideas, and Chapter 16 introduces you to them.