

# Vegetable Garden Planning for Beginners

If you're a **beginner vegetable gardener**, here are basics on vegetable garden planning: site selection, plot size, which vegetables to grow, and other gardening tips.

Remember this: *It's better to be proud of a small garden than to be frustrated by a big one!*

One of the common errors for beginners is planting too much too soon and way more than anybody could eat or want. We also tend to place vegetable plants too close and don't allow for mature size. Unless you want to have zucchini taking up residence in your attic, plan carefully. Start small.

## The Very Basics

First, here are some very basic concepts on topics you'll want to explore further as you become a vegetable gardener extraordinaire:

- Do you have enough sun exposure? Vegetables love the sun. They need at least 6 hours of full sun every day, and preferably 8.
- Know your soil. Most soil can be enriched with compost and be fine for planting, but some soil needs more help. Vegetables must have good, loamy, well-drained soil. Placement is everything. Avoid planting too near a tree, which will steal nutrients and shade the garden. Decide between tilling and a raised bed. If you have poor soil or a bad back, a raised bed built with nonpressure-treated wood offers many benefits.
- Vegetables need a lot of water, at least 1" to 2" inches of water a week. Deeper watering, less often is better than light watering every day.
- You'll need some basic gardening tools. These are the essentials: spade, garden fork, hoe, hand weeder, and wheelbarrow (or bucket) for moving around mulch or soil. It's worth paying a bit extra for quality tools.
- Decide if you're going to start with seeds or buy grown seedling. Indoor seed starting requires a lot of sun and patience. Many seeds can be directly sowed into the garden.
- Know your frost dates. Some of your cool weather plants like lettuce, peas, broccoli, spinach, etc. can be planted in early to mid April. Plants that prefer the hot weather like tomatoes, peppers, eggplant and squashes need to be planted in mid May when the soil has warmed and the nights become warmer.
- Vegetables like string beans, lettuce, radishes and carrots can be planted through out the summer when your broccoli or early lettuces are done. Fall crops like broccoli, cabbage, lettuce will go through the fall and can be planted in late summer.
- Weeds can be a nuisance and can easily get out of hand. Weekly hand pulling or a cultivator helps. Mulch your aisles or use a weed preventer like Preen. (If using a weed preventer, make sure to read the package label.)

## Deciding How Big

A good-size beginner vegetable garden is about 16x10 feet and features crops that are easy to grow. A plot this size, planted as suggested below, can feed a **family of four** for one summer, with a little extra for freezing (or giving away).

Make your garden 11 rows wide, with each row 10 feet long. The rows should run north and south to take full advantage of the sun.

## Suggested Plants for 11 Rows

The vegetables suggested below are common, easy to grow and do well in our area. Think about what you like to eat as well as what's difficult to find in a grocery store or farmers' market.

- Tomatoes—5 plants
- Zucchini—4 plants
- Peppers—6 plants
- Broccoli—6 plants
- Bush Beans
- Lettuce
- Beets
- Carrots
- Spinach
- Radishes
- Marigolds—to discourage rabbits and insects

Tomatoes and Zucchini will take up a wider row, while the other vegetables will take up a narrower row.

(Note: If this garden is too large for your needs, you do not have to plant all 11 rows, and you can also make the rows shorter. You can choose the veggies that you'd like to grow!)

Sources: [www.almanac.com/vegetable-garden-planning-for-beginners](http://www.almanac.com/vegetable-garden-planning-for-beginners)  
[www.cornell.edu/search/](http://www.cornell.edu/search/)