

Massachusetts Master Gardener Association

FACT SHEET

Have gardening questions? Contact the **Master Gardener Help Line.**

Two locations / two ways to contact us:

At *Mass Hort, Wellesley*: mg helpline@masshort.org, 617-933-4929

At *Tower Hill Botanic Garden, Boylston*: hortline@towerhillbg.org, 608-869-6111 x104

Please visit our web site for Help Line open hours <http://massmastergardeners.org/what-i-do/>



Choosing Vegetable Varieties

We've all been tempted by the large displays of vegetable seeds at the big box stores – but how do you choose the right vegetables for your garden?

Start by thinking about four things:

- What do you like and will use?
- Any special limits related to where you will be planting?
- Who will be involved in your garden?
- Why are you growing vegetables?

If children will be involved in your garden, you may want to include crops that mature quickly and are easy to grow, such as leaf lettuces and radishes. Carrots are a fun crop but take a long time to mature; this makes them a good choice for school gardens because they can be planted in June and harvested in September when students return to school.

Once you have an idea of what kinds of crops you want to grow, you can look at specific varieties. Many gardeners prefer to order seeds from seed catalogs to be certain they get just the varieties they want. To help identify the exact variety, look for the full name, which should include the common name, scientific (or Latin) name, and variety. EXAMPLE: Cress (*Lepidium sativum*), Persian.

To help you choose the right variety for your garden, good seed catalogs have useful information, including germination and cultivation requirements, disease resistance and special characteristics. EXAMPLE: You might know you want to grow radishes but be torn between Easter Egg and Rover. By comparing their catalog descriptions you will learn that Rover is more tolerant of summer heat than Easter Egg.

Some catalogs may list a “growing” or “hardiness” zone. This information is useful to help you determine which plants will do well in your climate. While there is some variation based on your exact location, most of Massachusetts is in Zone 6 and Zone 5. If you do not know

your Plant Hardiness Zone, there is an interactive map at <http://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/PHZMWeb/#>.

Some vegetable varieties may include the designation (F1) as part of their full name. This means they are hybrids, naturally produced by crossbreeding two open-pollinated (non-hybrid) parents. Many gardeners prefer hybrids for their improved disease resistance or other special qualities. However, hybrids are not suitable if you want to save seeds to plant next year, as offspring will not grow true to their parents.

In addition to different varieties, some common vegetable crops also come in different types:

- **Tomatoes** can be either determinate (fruits ripen all together in a short time period) or indeterminate (plants keep growing taller and setting new fruits until killed by frost). Determinates are handy for home-canning; but if you grow tomatoes for eating fresh from the garden, you can be overwhelmed when determinates all ripen at once.
- **Green beans** may grow as pole beans (long vines that need a pole or tall trellis for support) or bush beans (short bushy plants that need little or no support).
- **Onions** come in three types: long-day (require 14-16 hours of daylight to form bulbs); intermediate-day (require 12-14 hours of daylight); and short-day (require 10-12 hours of daylight). Short-day onions are not suitable for New England but are grown as fall and winter crops in the southern U.S.

Variety selection can also help you solve garden problems. For example, if you have a soil-borne disease like Verticillium wilt, you may want to choose tomatoes that are resistant to this disease. If you have a small garden, you may want to select compact bush-style summer squash instead of vining varieties.

For a list of our favorite vegetable varieties, please turn this fact sheet over. This list is especially good for first-time vegetable gardeners.

The Massachusetts Master Gardener Association is a non-profit organization whose mission is to share knowledge and experience with the public through outreach programs in education, horticulture and gardening; to provide the Master Gardener Training Program to interested members of the public; and to provide graduates of the Master Gardener Training Program with educational and practical opportunities to extend their knowledge and interests in gardening and related topics.

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Choosing Vegetable Varieties (cont'd.)

The vegetable varieties below are some of our favorites:

Common Name (<i>Scientific Name</i>)	Cultivars/Varieties	Why We Like It
Fava Bean (<i>Vicia faba</i>)	Windsor	A sturdy, early spring crop; easy to grow; enriches the soil
Green Bean (<i>Phaseolus vulgaris</i>)	Fortex (Pole), Provider (bush)	Fortex produces all season long; tolerates delayed picking. Provider good for small spaces
Beet (<i>Beta vulgaris</i>)	Boldor (yellow), Detroit (red), Red Ace (red)	Both the roots and the greens can be eaten; Boldor greens are very tasty
Carrot (<i>Daucus carota sativus</i>)	Bolero, Napoli	Bolero is very sturdy and tolerates poor soil; Napoli is fast growing and tolerates crowding
Swiss Chard (<i>Beta vulgaris</i>)	Bright Lights, Fordhook	Can be eaten at all stages of growth; Bright Lights has attractive multicolored stems
Cress (<i>Lepidium sativum</i>)	Persian, Cressida	Fast maturing cool weather crop; Persian has wide flat leaves; Cressida is curly
Cucumber (<i>Cucumis sativus</i>)	H-19 Little Leaf	Disease resistant; tolerates stress; good tasting 3-5" fruits to eat raw or pickle
Garlic (<i>Allium sativum</i>)	Music	A hardneck garlic; tolerates variable weather; has edible scapes, large yields
Kale (<i>Brassica oleracea</i>)	Scarlet	Unusual red color; heat- and cold- tolerant; edible at all stages of growth; baby leaves are good in salad
Lettuce (<i>Lactuca sativa</i>)	All-Star, Black Seeded Simpson, Summertime	All-Star is a lovely cool weather blend of leaf lettuce; Black-Seeded Simpson and Summertime are heat-tolerant and can be used as leaf or head
Onion/Scallion (<i>Allium cepa</i>)	Walla Walla	A sweet onion that is usable at all stages of growth (scallion, green onion, mature)
Pea (<i>Pisum sativum</i>)	Super Sugar Snap (pod), Feisty (tendrils and shell)	Super Sugar Snap is edible pod and all; Feisty is grown for shoots and tendrils but also has edible peas
Potato (<i>Solanum tuberosum</i>)	Yukon Gold, Keuka Gold, Kennebec	"Gold" potatoes have a creamy, buttery flavor: Keuka Gold stores well; Kennebec is a full size white potato with some disease resistance
Radish (<i>Raphanus sativus</i>)	Easter Egg, Rover	Easter Egg radishes are multicolored, but don't tolerate hot weather; Rover will grow in cold or hot weather
Spinach (<i>Spinacia oleracea</i>)	Space, Tyee	Space has a long season and will grow in heat: Tyee has large leaves well suited to cooking
Summer Squash (<i>Cucurbita pepo</i>)	Ambassador (zucchini) Dixie (yellow)	Ambassador bears well, resists powdery mildew; Dixie bears early on compact plants
Tomato (<i>Solanum lycopersicum</i>)	Sungold (orange cherry), Mountain Magic (salad)	Sungold is delicious and prolific all season but needs support: Mountain Magic resists blossom-end rot and many diseases

To learn more about growing vegetables, visit the Massachusetts Master Gardener web site, www.massmastergardeners.org. Click on the **Horticultural Information** tab and select **Fact Sheets**.