

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/>



Getting Started with Vegetable Gardening

Are you new to gardening? Growing vegetables at home can be a wonderful introduction to gardening. Or perhaps you've done other types of gardening in the past and want to branch out into vegetables.

CONSIDER THE BASICS

Vegetables have the same basic needs as other plants:

- **SUN:** With a few exceptions, vegetables need full sun, so start by looking for a space with at least 8 hours of sunlight daily. If you don't have enough sun on your property, check with your city or town to see if they offer community garden space.
- **SPACE:** Decide what kind of a garden you want. The most common choices are in-ground, raised beds or containers.
- **WATER:** Make sure you have a way to get water to the garden and decide how you will distribute it to your plants. Remember that over-watering can be worse than under-watering!
- **NUTRIENTS:** Have your soil tested for pH, nutrients and lead and follow test recommendations if amendments are needed.
- **SOIL:** Prepare the garden area for planting: clear away any old plant material, break up clumps of soil, and remove sticks and rocks. Soil should be smooth and easy to work with.

PLAN YOUR PLANTS

Ask yourself...

- What kinds of vegetables do you and your friends and family enjoy eating?
- Why are you growing vegetables? For instance, if you are hoping to save money, you might want to focus on crops such as lettuce and herbs which are relatively inexpensive to grow at home and produce well. Tomatoes can be fussy to grow, and it might even be more economical to purchase them. But if you are looking for the great taste of a just-picked tomato, growing your own

is the way to go!

SIZE YOUR SPACE

When planning your plant selections, you should also consider the amount of space your crops will need.

A vegetable garden doesn't have to be large. A small garden is easier to tend and may be more successful for a first-time gardener. A 4' x 4' spring garden can provide greens, radishes, beets, turnips, peas and more. In summer the same bed can be planted in tomatoes, cucumbers and basil; in the fall, chard and spinach.

A small garden is also easier to protect:

- You may need to put up fencing or netting to keep out unwanted visitors.
- Manage weeds when they're young – weeding is easier in a small garden.
- Small gardens are also easier to check for problems: if plants don't look healthy, check for signs of insects or disease.

Here are a few ways to make the most of your space:

- A home garden doesn't need to have wide empty rows between plants the way a farm does, but your plants do need room to grow. If plants are too crowded, they won't do well.
- Seed packages usually tell you how far apart plants should be "thinned to," by pulling out some young seedlings to create more space between mature plants. In a home garden you can save yourself work by just planting seeds at the recommended spacing. Do be sure to follow package directions regarding when to start each crop and how deep to plant seeds.

There is no one best way of vegetable gardening – try it and see what works for you! To learn more about vegetable gardening, explore our other fact sheets at <http://massmastergardeners.org/horticultural-information/fact-sheet-test/>.

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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