

Gray Barn Green Thumb Guide



Vegetable Gardening



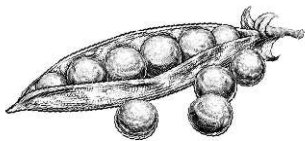
Growing your own vegetables is perhaps the most rewarding type of gardening. Not only do you get to harvest what you've grown, you get to eat it too! In addition to being rewarding, growing and eating your own veggies is safer than store bought produce, convenient, money saving and healthy!

Site Selection:

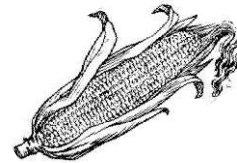
In order to have a productive veggie garden, site selection is the first decision to make. The three most important factors are:

1. **Sun:** Vegetables need six to eight hours of direct sun a day. Less than this will produce small, stunted or no fruit.
2. **Proximity to your house:** Choose a spot that is close to your house for quick, easy harvesting and near a hose spicket.
3. **Well-draining soil:** Make sure the area you choose to grow your vegetables in has well draining soil. An area that is slow draining or pools water can potentially rot your vegetable plants.

Soil: Loose, rich soil is the key to happy plants, including vegetables. If you already have a vegetable bed dug, add three to four inches of compost to the top of it each spring. Doing so will add nutrients to the bed and replenish what might have washed away with the winter rains. If you are starting a veggie bed from scratch, you've got a bit more work to do! If your new vegetable bed is going in an area that is currently grass, you'll need to dig out the grass. Do so in chunks or strips or use a pickaxe to tear it out. Once you have your space defined, dig into and loosen the soil beneath. Now add your three to four inches of compost. If you wish to do a soil test to determine the ph, do so at this point. Otherwise, broadcast a tomato/vegetable fertilizer over the bed, 10 pounds per 100 sq ft. You'll also place a bit of this same fertilizer in the hole before you put your plants in the ground.



Seeds or Starts:



Some vegetables can be grown easily in the ground from seed, while others perform best from a transplant or start. Lettuce, peas, carrots, and radishes are easily started from planting the seeds directly into the ground. When you are just beginning a vegetable garden, stick with vegetable starts. These are vegetable plants that are already started and growing. Transplant these into your beds or pots at home and you save yourself starting plants from seed. As you become more comfortable with vegetables, you'll want to experiment more with seed starting and growing your own from the beginning of the plant's life cycle.

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Choosing the Right Variety:

There are a couple important things to remember when choosing your seeds or starts. Read the back of the seed packet or plant stake to find out the ultimate plant height and size so you can place it in the right spot. Also check to see if it tells you the number of days to harvest. The fewer the days, the quicker to harvest. This is especially important when choosing tomatoes. Those big, beautiful beefsteaks are usually 90 days or more. So unless you have a green house, pick a tomato with a maximum of 75-80 days. Be brave as you become a more experienced vegetable gardener. Choose unusual and unique varieties to diversify your garden and your garden and your dinner menu!

Watering and Weeding:

Like the rest of your yard, vegetables need adequate water in order to grow and produce. Be sure to water regularly in the heat of summer and pay attention to what the plants are telling you. Droopy leaves usually mean dry plants but be sure to stick your finger in the soil. Droopy leaves can also mean saturated soil. It isn't difficult to tell the difference, you just need to pay attention. Vegetables don't like to compete with other plants for the nutrients they need to grow. Make sure your vegetable garden stays well weeded so all the water and nutrients go to straight to making food and not beefing up weeds.

Harvest:

Finally! Harvest time! There aren't too many things that are as satisfying as bringing in a bowl of vegetables from your backyard. Because the time you plant and the number of days to harvest will vary from vegetable to vegetable, things will be ready for harvest at different times. Read the back of the seed packet or plant stake in order to determine this. Some veggies like lettuce and broccoli will let you harvest on them multiple times. When you cut the main head off the broccoli, leave the plant in the ground and it will make smaller heads off the sides of the stalk. If you trim leaf lettuce, leaving 3-4 inches of growth, you'll be able to cut on it a couple more times. One of the references for this handout is [Growing Vegetables West of the Cascades](#) by Steve Solomon. This is perhaps the most informative and comprehensive book on vegetable gardening for our area. There is a wealth of information in this book, including more on harvesting.

Vegetables in Pots:

There are many varieties of vegetables that can be grown in pots. Look for words like mini, dwarf and bush in the descriptions. Growing edibles in pots is easy as long as you plant the starts knowing their ultimate size. Know that the tomato is going to get 2-3 feet tall and place it in the middle of the pot with smaller veggies like lettuce or a bush bean in the front. You can grow anything in pots as long as you plan for the ultimate size. Make sure you pick soil designed for containers.

References

[Growing Vegetables West of the Cascades](#) by Steve Solomon