

There are many reasons for growing a home vegetable garden. Growing food for the table is just the beginning. Some people garden as a hobby, for exercise, or for the love of working outdoors. There's a trend toward growing chemical-free food that we know is safe. We all know that fresh just tastes better. And it couldn't hurt to save money while we are enjoying all these other benefits.

When planning a new garden, how much should you plant for a family of four? That depends on so many factors. Are you going just eat fresh food or will you preserve some? There are some vegetable plants that can be grown in succession so that every 2-3 weeks there's a fresh crop to eat. Companion planting makes it possible to get more use of space by planting different crops together.

Vegetable gardening isn't always a bowlful of cherry tomatoes. In fact, many people have called with tomato problems this year. The plants have grown well, looked healthy, bloomed, but failed to produce a crop. Squash plants without proper bee pollination show similar crop failure.

The tomato crop failure is likely due to high night time temperatures we experienced earlier this summer. We often have a tendency to over water and over fertilizer to solve plant problems, but in this case, these actions would only make this problem worse. Yes, we deal with more than our share of pests and weather problems in our Florida vegetable gardens.

Growing food for the table, however, can be a very rewarding family project. I have wonderful memories of my little boy carefully plucking blackberries from a thorny vine, gently planting a bean plant that he grew at school, and happily sharing his just-picked watermelon as we sat beneath the shade tree.

Get 'Back to Basics' this fall by growing a garden with your family. The University of Florida Extension is offering an eight session course on 'Home Vegetable Gardening'. Sessions are offered in both Fort White and Lake City and will cover a variety of topics. Call the office at 752-5384 for more information. Sessions will be held on Tuesdays beginning July 26<sup>th</sup>. (Publishes 7-24-11)