

Make Plans for Your Spring Veggie Garden

Don't miss out on all the benefits of a spring vegetable this year. Make plans now for a garden that will reward you with fresh air, sunshine, exercise, enjoyment, mental therapy, nutritious fresh vegetables, and economic savings. And gardens may be grown year-round in Florida, but spring is the preferred season.

The following recommendations are adapted from the UF Florida Vegetable Gardening Guide.

Locate a site. Place your garden close to a water source. The site should get at least six hours of direct sunlight. Vegetable plants may also be included in the landscape among ornamental plants if they get sun and water.

Plan the layout. Plan things on paper, including which vegetables you intend to plant and where. Make a list of everything needed.

Adjust Soil pH. Soil pH is a measure of the soil acidity. The best pH range for vegetable gardens in our sandy soil is between pH 5.8 and 6.5. The Master Gardeners are offering free pH testing this year. Call them at 752-5384 on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday mornings for more information.

Prepare the soil. Work the ground at least three weeks before planting. Working in a couple inches of organic material is highly recommended for our sandy soils. Organic materials may include composted animal manure, rotted leaves, home compost, and cover crops. Thoroughly mix organics into the soil well in advance of planting, preferably three to four weeks before seeding. At planting time, rework the top inches of soil. Vegetable plants consume lots of nutrients, so applications of a balanced fertilizer may also be beneficial. Be sure to include micronutrients if soil pH is higher than 6.3.

Compost your organic waste. As a home gardener, you can help reduce the amount of yard waste going to landfills while providing your own organic material. Composting is easy to do and yields a manure-like organic fertilizer/soil conditioner which is highly beneficial to Florida soils. Find more information on building and making your own compost, visit <http://solutionsforyourlife.com>

Irrigating and weeding. Your site should have good drainage and a nearby source of water so plants can be watered two or three times per week. Mulched pathways conserve water and help suppress weed growth. In small gardens, weeds can be controlled well by hand pulling and mulching.

Learn much more about growing vegetables in North Florida by attending one of several Vegetable Gardening Workshops being offered this February. Check our Horticulture class offerings on the calendar at <http://columbia.ifas.ufl.edu> (Published 2-12-12)

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