

If you're thinking about growing a spring vegetable garden this year, why not take advantage of this wonderful weather and get your beds prepared? Some gardeners agree that the planning, preparation and anticipation of producing a crop is the best part of gardening. Others say the exercise, fresh air and mental therapy of the work is the best.

Even if you want a spring garden simply to grow delicious and nutritious vegetables, there still are some planning and work tasks to do in preparation. Find a location for your garden close to a water source. The site should get at least six hours of direct sunlight, and have well drained soil. Vegetable plants may also be included in the landscape among ornamental plants if they get sun and water.

Have your soil pH tested. 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. Obtain a free soil pH test by bringing a soil sample to the Extension Office. The Master Gardeners will perform the test and call you with the results and recommendations on adjusting the pH, if needed.

Spade or plow the ground at least three weeks before planting. Working in a couple inches of compost or organic material at this time is highly recommended for our sandy soils. Much of our sandy soil drains water like a sieve. This organic material will help hold water and nutrients longer which is vitally for plant and environmental health.

Applications of organic materials may include animal manure, rotted leaves, compost, and cover crops. Three weeks later, at planting time, rework the top inches of soil into a fine seedbed. Vegetable plants utilize lots of nutrients, so a pre-plant broadcast application of a balanced fertilizer is beneficial.

Now the vegetable bed is ready and your plans are being made. The next step is to join other gardeners and UF/IFAS Master Gardeners at an informative Spring Vegetable Gardening workshop presented at the Fort White and Lake City Public Libraries. Learn some good gardening techniques from other gardeners and have questions answered. It's fun, too.

Join us for "Spring Vegetable Gardening" at the Lake City Downtown Library on Saturday, Feb. 16th at 1:30, or at the Fort White Public Library on Thursday evening, Feb. 21st, at 5:45. For more information, call 752-5384. (Published 2-10-13)