

## 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 out on paper before planting, including which vegetables you intend to plant and where. Make a list of everything you will need and where you might find them.

**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. If your soil's pH is between 5.5 and 7.0, you do not need to adjust the pH. The Master Gardeners are offering pH testing this year. You can reach them at 752-5384 on Tuesday and Thursday mornings for more information on this testing service.

**Prepare the soil.** Spade or plow the ground at least three weeks before planting. Working in a couple inches of compost or organic material is highly recommended for our sandy soils. Applications of organic materials may include animal manure, rotted leaves, 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 into a fine seedbed. 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.

**Consider cover crops.** Off-season summer planting and spading in of crops such as cowpeas or hairy indigo is beneficial because it suppresses weeds, prevents erosion, and adds nutrients to the soil. Ryegrass and hairy vetch are good cover crops to use in winter.

**Compost your organic waste.** As a home garden composter, you can help reduce the amount of yard waste going to landfills while providing your own compost. Composting is easy to do and yields a manure-like organic fertilizer/soil conditioner which is highly beneficial to Florida soils. A small cubic foot pile of compost is easily made. 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 source of water nearby. Vegetables grown in sandy soils need water two or three times a week. Mulch between the rows to conserve water and help suppress weed growth. In small gardens, weeds can be controlled well by pulling, hoeing, and mulching.

Learn much more about Florida Vegetable Gardening by attending the Spring Vegetable Workshop at the UF Columbia County Extension Office on February 28<sup>th</sup>. There will also be a Rain Barrel 'Make and Take' Workshop at the Extension Office on February 19<sup>th</sup>. Space is limited so call the office at (386) 752-5384 for more details and to preregister for these workshops.

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