Steps to Planning & Preparing Your Vegetable Garden

LOCATION

1. Light. Vegetables need a minimum of 8 hours of direct sunlight a day.
2. Soil. Good drainage is important. Improve poor soils by incorporating organic matter or build raised beds for planting.
3. Level Ground. Level ground is easier to work however slopes will do as long as you run the rows across the slope, not up and down.
4. Close to Home. Gardens are easier to maintain and water when they are near your home.

EFFICIENT USE OF SPACE

1. Size. Large spaces are not always needed. Even a 3 foot square plot can produce several varieties of vegetables with proper planning.
2. Cool and Warm Season Crops. Cool season crops are grown for their roots, leaves or stems. Their natural planting and harvesting period is during the cool time of year. In mild coastal areas these crops can be grown all year and in hot inland valleys can be planted in late summer for a winter crop. They can also be grown in light shade in the summer. Warm season crops are grown for their fruit (peppers, squash, corn, etc.) and need warm temperatures and long days to set and ripen.
3. Rotation. In mild climates the growing season can be extended to include 3 crops within the same space. This can be accomplished by rotating cool and warm season crops and by paying attention to the maturity for each crop grown and establishing a rotation period.
4. Intercropping. A gardening technique that involves planting two different crops at the same time with different maturing dates. One can be harvested long before the second one matures. Refer to our information tear sheet for cool and warm season crops and maturing periods.

SOIL PREPARATION

1. Tilling. Soil should be worked to a depth of at least 6 inches (12 inches for root vegetables). Soil can be formed into raised beds if desired.
2. Compost. Adding organic amendments improves the soil and should be added each time you plant. Use your own compost or purchase composted organic amendments that are weed free. Avoid manure that has not been composted.
3. Fertilizing. Inorganic fertilizer can be incorporated into the soil. Choose a balanced product with an NPK of 5-10-5 or 5-10-10 or equivalent. Apply 1 to 2 pounds per 100 square feet. Avoid products that are high in nitrogen.

MULCHING

Regular mulching should be a part of your gardening habits. Mulching with composted organic matter discourages weeds and helps retain moisture especially during warm months.

SEED STORAGE

For best results seed should be used as soon as possible after purchase. High moisture and high temperature shorten seed life. Seed should be stored in a cool, dry place. A moisture proof container in a refrigerator is ideal.