

**CARVER SCOTT EXTENSION MASTER GARDENERS****2017****BEGINNING VEGETABLE GARDENING, GETTING STARTED****ADVANTAGES**

Home-grown vegetables are a great way to stretch the food budget, and growing your own can ensure high-quality, local food that has received little, if any chemical spray. Nothing can beat the taste of a sun-warmed tomato picked and eaten right out in the garden!

CHOOSE YOUR LOCATION

Most vegetables require full sun (6-8 hours per day), with ample moisture (locate the garden close to a water source). Garden size will be determined by how much you want to grow, available space, and the tools necessary to prepare the soil.

INVEST IN TOOLS

Identify the tools you have on hand and purchase those that will make your gardening experience enjoyable and easy. At bare minimum, you will need a shovel, rake, and hoe, but there are many other options to explore that may suit your gardening style.

SELECT VARIETIES

Start by growing vegetables your family likes to eat. Once you've decided to grow a certain veggie, you'll find many named varieties to choose from. Use a suggested variety list to get started and keep notes about your preferences to help you with future selections. It's always a good idea to grow at least two kinds each year for comparison.

DEVELOP A PLAN

Whether your garden is a 3 X 3 foot raised bed or a large country-sized in-ground plot, you will need to plan your plantings to be sure all your crops receive ideal sunlight, space, moisture, and air circulation. Plant spacing is also key to controlling weeds, with closer spacing best for hand weeding, and further distances necessary for power equipment.

PREPARE & IMPROVE THE SOIL

We highly recommend a soil test, form available at: www.soiltest.cfans.umn.edu/
Follow instruction to send a soil sample for evaluation to the University of Minnesota Soil Testing Lab. The results will be returned within a couple weeks and will let you know your soil type along with the amendments needed to grow vegetables. All soils benefit from increased organic matter, so plan to start a compost pile (*see 1. Composting Guide*) to keep your future garden alive and healthy.

In brand-new garden space, remove sod as soon as possible. Work up the underlying soil only when it is no longer muddy, and a clump squeezed in your hand will break apart when dropped back on the ground. This magic condition generally arrives in May throughout most of MN. Whether turning the soil by hand or using a power tiller, be sure to add any amendments before you start and work them into the soil well.

If you opt for raised beds, you may build the frames early, and fill them with compost or compost/soil blend as soon as you are able to obtain them in the spring.

PLANT

Sow seeds directly in the garden following guidelines for timing. Transplants that have been carefully hardened off are generally set out later in the season, so be sure to save a place for them while you are sowing your seeds.

PROVIDE STRUCTURE

Many plants will look tidier and do better with support. It's always best to place supports as you plant so you don't trample growing plants later in the season or compact the soil by walking on it when it is too wet.

PREVENT WEEDS

They compete with your precious veggies for light, moisture, and nutrients. Mulch well or hoe out young seedlings. And never let a weed go to seed or you will be dealing with hundreds of them for years to come!!

RESOURCE

1. www.extension.umn.edu/garden/yard-garden/soils/backyard-composting-guide/

Jackie Smith – Carver-Scott Extension Master Gardener

Carverscottmastergardeners.org

CSEMG Help Line 952-466-5308