

Home Grown Vegetables

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Well it's almost that time of year. The temperature can't figure out whether to stay cool or be warm. My truck is coated more and more every day with yellow pollen, as I sniffle and sneeze my way into spring. And farmers and homeowners are itching to plant stuff into the ground. But before you put those vegetable seeds or transplants into the ground, a few helpful hints can mean the difference between an abundance of produce and a complete disaster.

Planning is not something many of us like to do. When it's time to plant vegetables, we want to put something in the ground, and it's going to live and produce. That might or might not be the case. The first step is to select a site that receives at least 8 – 10 hours of sunlight a day. It should be convenient to the house and to a water supply. If you can't see the garden because it's behind a shed or if you have to move 3 water hoses to water it, chances are you will stop going to it. Ideally it should be well drained and not in an area with hard-to-control weeds like nutsedge or bermudagrass.

The second and probably most important step is to make the plan. Draw out the area on paper before ordering seed or picking up plants. Rotation between vegetable plant families is the key to a successful vegetable garden. If you plant the same family of vegetables in the same spot year after year, disease pathogens build up and eventually smother your plants. It's best to only plant vegetables from the same family in an area once every 3 to 5 years. Solanaceous plants like tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, and white and red potatoes are especially susceptible to these stem and leaf diseases like fusarium and verticillium wilts. Commonly grown vegetables and their plant families are listed in the chart below.

Alliaceae	Brassicaceae	Cucurbitaceae	Fabaceae	Solanaceae
Chives	Broccoli	Cantaloupe	All beans	Eggplant
Garlic	Brussels sprouts	Cucumbers	English peas	Peppers
Leeks	Cabbage	Honeydew melons	Southern peas	Potatoes
Onions	Cauliflower	Pumpkins		Tomatoes
	Collards	Squash		
	Lettuce	Watermelon		
	Mustard			
	Radish			
	Rutabaga			
	Spinach			
	Turnip			

Asteraceae	Poaceae	Malvaceae	Chenopodiaceae	Apiaceae
Lettuce	Corn	Okra	Spinach	Carrot

Another factor to consider when making your plan is to take a soil sample. If you've been growing vegetables in the same location for several years and every year you put out a bucket of lime and a handful of 10-10-10, you may not be maximizing your garden's potential. A soil sample will tell you how low your pH is and how much fertilizer to add. A pH of 6.0 to 6.5 is recommended for all vegetables except Irish potatoes (which like a pH of 5.0 to 6.0). Different vegetables require different amounts of fertilizer at different times, so this is something you can plan for to make the most produce you can. Your local county extension office can provide instructions on taking a soil sample and can send it off. Results typically come back within 1 to 2 weeks and provide recommendations for how much lime and fertilizer is needed for your garden.

Selecting varieties can be a difficult decision as well, because there are sometime hundreds of varieties of tomatoes or peppers or whatever you want to grow. It is a good idea to select one of our UGA Extension recommended varieties for your main planting. These are proven varieties that are known to produce well with fewer instances of disease or insect problems. New varieties or heirloom varieties can be introduced on a small scale to determine if they work for you and your environment. Some do, and others quickly flame out and die from disease.

While this information won't get you through the entire vegetable gardening season, it is enough to get you started. Additional information and several publications are available from your local county Extension office or my office at the Webster County Extension Office in Preston or online at ugaextension.com.