

Plan a Great Vegetable Garden!

I know it is August and too hot to work outside; however, this time of year is just like January in Wisconsin! It is time to plan the best garden of the year, right now!

Our fall garden produces the biggest variety of vegetables and now is the time to plan the garden and begin transplants. Check seed catalogs for new varieties that perform well under south Texas heat, in USDA Hardiness Zone 9b, or hit the local stores for seed. Additionally, decide what your family eats. Don't plant 6 rows of beets if you are the only one who eats beets! Instead, plant a small amount of beets every two weeks, so that you can enjoy beets from November through April.

Locate your garden in the sun. Vegetables, especially those producing a fruit, or a root crop, need a minimum of 6 hours a day of sunlight. A partly shaded area can support lettuce and some herbs. The shady spots will also support flowers that feed the pollinators and beneficial insects.

Raise high the growing beds. Vegetables require good drainage. Build raised beds with landscape timbers, cedar, or cement blocks; or, till the native soil. Either way, planting beds should be a minimum of 8 to 12 inches higher than the surrounding soil and 3 to 4 feet wide. Build beds you can reach into the center to harvest. Anything wider is not practical. Pathways need to accommodate tools and carts.

Choose the line-up carefully. Our climate allows for a long harvest season. Plant most crops every two weeks to extend harvest. If space is an issue, plant varieties you can trellis, like cucumbers, peas, and beans. If you want to can vegetables, plant those varieties in abundance. For a vegetable planting schedule, go to <http://hidalgo.agrilife.org>, click on horticulture, then "vegetable planting guide."

Plant some insurance. Some years the weather does not cooperate with our plans. So plant favorite vegetables in more than one place. For tomatoes, purchase transplants of varieties that have a good track record and plant them on both sides of the house, or the front flower bed. If you are going to try seeds of tomatoes, plant now, in partial shade, and monitor for insects and moisture on a daily basis.

Rotate your crops. Plan everything on a three season rotation and write it down. Insects and diseases never take a nap in south Texas, so add lots of compost for healthy soils and do not plant the same crop family in the same place. Plant squash where you planted tomato last season and next season plant crowder peas or beans; then follow with beets or carrots. You reduce disease problems by rotating.

Want to learn more? You can also go to <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu> . Once you are on aggie-horticulture, you can select Lawn and Garden, then Vegetables and find a fact sheet on every kind of vegetable with plenty of information on each one.

Watch my column for the announcement next week on our Hydroponic/Aquaponic Workshop which will be held on the morning of August 17th in Weslaco.

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