

## BEST PRACTICES

**Mulch** between rows and around the base of plants to discourage weeds and encourage preservation of water. You can purchase bagged mulch or use shredded leaves or dried lawn clippings. Decaying mulch is free fertilizer!

**Weed** regularly, once or twice a week in peak season in order to reduce competition for water and nutrients. Use a hand-held claw or trowel to help loosen weed roots. Follow the directions on the label.

**Water** if it doesn't rain. Vegetable plants need one inch of rainfall a week. Avoid watering leaves as this encourages diseases. Instead, deliver water to the root zone using a soaker-hose, a water wand, or watering can. Plants grow better if you water once a week deeply, rather than lightly and frequently. Deep watering encourages deep sturdy roots that withstand heat and drought better.

**Feed plants** with compost if available or commercial fertilizer. Fertilizer comes in slow-release formulas that are usually granular or powdered and quick-release formulas that are added to water and sprinkled on. Follow the directions on the label: too much of a good thing can be bad!

### **Pest Management (insects & diseases)**

Check plants once or twice a week for various types of pests. Consult with CCE horticulture hotline for identification and/or recommended remedies. Give us a call: 845-278-6738

**Stake** tomatoes and give vining plants, like cucumbers and pole beans, a trellis or fence to climb on so fruit doesn't rot on the ground.

Fact Sheet developed by Challen Armstrong,  
Master Gardener Volunteer, Putnam County



### **Plant Diagnostic Lab and Horticulture Hotline**

Monday—Friday 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon

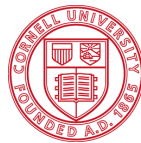
**Ask a Master Gardener:** How to Start, Grow and Maintain a Healthy Garden

Have a problem? Submit a sample! We do:

- Plant Pathology
- Insect Identification
- Weed Identification
- Soil pH Testing

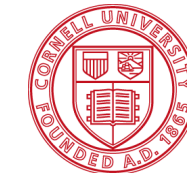


Please call our office, or visit our website for sampling instructions and forms. Samples are accepted 9 to 5, Mon-Fri (summer hours, 8 to 4, July-Aug)



**Cornell University**  
Cooperative Extension  
Putnam County

**1 Geneva Road • Brewster, NY 10509**  
**Ph: 845-278-6738 • Fax: 845-278-6761**  
For additional information see website:  
**[www.cce.cornell.edu/putnam](http://www.cce.cornell.edu/putnam)**



**Cornell University**  
Cooperative Extension  
Putnam County



# Beginning a Vegetable Garden



## Why Grow a Vegetable Garden?

Because it's fun! You and your children will benefit from a wonderful family project where everyone contributes. Not only that, but you will enjoy fresh vegetables at peak season and maybe even save some money on your grocery bill.

**Growing season:** Most vegetable plants are annuals: they complete their growing cycle in one summer so peak growing season runs from May to October. However you can sow lettuces, spinach and other cold-tolerant vegetables as early as March (if you have your bed prepared) and as late as September. Preservation season runs from June to October (canning, freezing or storage).

**What tools you need:** shovel, rake, trowel, hand-held claw or cultivator, watering can or other water source, weed-whacker, pruning shears, stakes, twine, weeding basket or wheel barrow. You may also need poles and plastic mesh or wire fencing to create an enclosure.



**Choosing a site:** Start small with a 4' x 4' up to 10' x 10' site with direct south, southwest, or southeast sun exposure for a minimum of 6 hours per day. This means no overhanging trees or shade.

Make sure your garden is close to a water source. You will need to water your plants often.

**Preparation of site:** Have the soil tested at the Cooperative Extension to determine pH. (See our website for more information on how to take and submit a soil sample.) Amend soil as necessary if directed.

Prepare the site at least a month before you want to start planting. Use a shovel to establish an edge. You can mark the boundary of the bed with a garden hose or string to make the outline.

Clear the site of grass and weeds. You can use a weed whacker to remove the weeds to the soil level and a hand-held claw to clear rocks, roots and other large bits of debris. Leave the trimmed plant debris on the surface of the soil: it's free fertilizer.

Cover the trimmed plant material with a layer of damp newspaper about 4-6 sheets thick. Add compost, peat moss, or leaf clippings on top of the newspaper up to 24" thick. Then cover the bed with a 3" to 4" layer of mulch. Let this pile rest for a month before planting. This process, called lasagna composting\*, preserves the soil microorganisms so vital for healthy root systems.

If the site is exposed to deer, fence to 8' high to prevent deer and other animals from entering your garden.

\*Lanza, Patricia. *Lasagna Gardening : a New Layering System for Bountiful Gardens: No Digging, No Tilling, No Weeding, No Kidding!.* Emmaus, Pa.: Rodale Press , 1998.

**When to Plant:** Mid-March for Spring vegetables such as lettuce and spinach; mid-May for other seeds; Memorial Day for seedlings. Simply part the mulch to create rows or spaces for your seeds or seedlings. Plant according to the seed packet instructions or the directions on the plant tag for seedlings purchased at a garden center. Instructions will vary depending on the type of plant. For example, squash plants are large and need several feet of space while carrots need only narrow rows.

**What to Plant:** Here's the fun part: Plan to put in vegetables your family loves! Carrots from seed are fun for the youngsters and tomatoes are a favorite of adults! Just be sure to check and see how long it takes each type of vegetable to bear "fruit." You have a limited peak growing season of about 120 days. For example, some tomatoes mature in 74 days, while others mature in 90 to 100 days. Read the seed packet or plant tag for these details.



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