

5 Simple Ways to Start Up a Vegetable Garden

Gardening can be good for the budget, good for the body, and good for the soul! Never gardened before? No worries! Green thumbs aren't a requirement, because savvy growing advice is as close as your computer or local garden center guru.

1. Pick the right site.

Three critical elements are necessary for a successful garden: (1) **Sunlight**, at least 6 hours a day throughout the growing season; (2) **Water**, the closer to a faucet or hose the better; and (3) **Soil**, something between rock-hard clay and soft sand. Fortunately, soil is something that you can easily improve with a home compost pile.

2. Start small, grow over time.

Big gardens can overwhelm anyone. A smart strategy is to grow your garden slowly, as you learn what works best in your location and what your family likes to eat. Start with a few containers or a small theme garden. Try a salad garden (lettuce, greens, herbs, and tomatoes) or a pizza garden (Roma tomatoes, garlic, basil, and peppers).

3. Pick the right seeds or plants.

Some vegetables grow well from seeds (carrots, radishes, beans, and peas). Others do best with an indoor or greenhouse start, such as tomatoes, peppers, and herbs. While most garden varieties will do fine anywhere, you may want to choose something special, such as seeds for your specific location or heirloom vegetable varieties.

4. Feed and water with care.

During the growing season, plants need the right amount of moisture and the right balance of nutrients. Getting both right will depend on the soil and weather. Too much water or fertilizer can be as big a problem as too little. Instructions on seed packets are a good place to start. Check with your local Extension office for more specific advice.

5. Pick the fruits and veggies of your labor.

While planting and watering can be fun family activities, harvesting is the best part of gardening. Freshly picked produce can be so tasty that it never makes it to the kitchen! Want to grow a garden successfully from year to year? Keep a simple garden journal to track what you planted, how it grew, and what your family enjoyed the most.