

Veggies and herbs spice up gardens

Growing your own vegetable garden is a great way to spice up your annual flowerbeds and add a little zing to summer meals at the same time. Canadian gardeners should plan well ahead and begin planting seeds and seedlings now — this way you'll soon be enjoying juicy tomatoes, crunchy cucumbers and aromatic rosemary.

"Nothing beats the taste of fresh picked veggies and herbs," says Aaron Mahoney, a gardening expert with The Home Depot Canada. "Why pay high prices at the salad bar when you can grow your own ingredients in your own backyard?"

Garden centres, like The Home Depot, have a wide variety of vegetables, herbs and other "crop plants" that you can grow from seeds or small plantings. If you decide to start your veggies from seeds, keep in mind that they take longer to grow — 50 to 100 days from the date of planting — than if you start with seedlings. Excellent choices for spring planting in Canada include tomatoes, as well as cucumbers, radishes, onions, peppers, sweet corn and squash.

When planting seeds, follow package directions exactly. Don't start too early in the season or seedlings will get leggy. Nearly any container punched with drainage holes will do to begin your seed garden — an egg carton, clear plastic produce containers or paper cups should work fine.

Begin with a rich planting mix for

your vegetable garden, choosing only a mix made specifically for seeds. Regular potting mixes or soil from the garden tend to cause rot or disease in seeds.

When the plants are ready to be placed in your garden, divide your plot into rows and plant each type of vegetable in its own section. Tomatoes should be grown away from the rest of your plants to avoid over watering, Mahoney says.

Follow the tag or packet instructions to ensure planting at the correct depth and remember that most vegetables require a sunny location.

Depending on your crops, you may wish to fertilize your vegetable garden during the growing season. Choose an all-around vegetable fertilizer, either liquid or granular, and apply according to the manufacturer's directions.

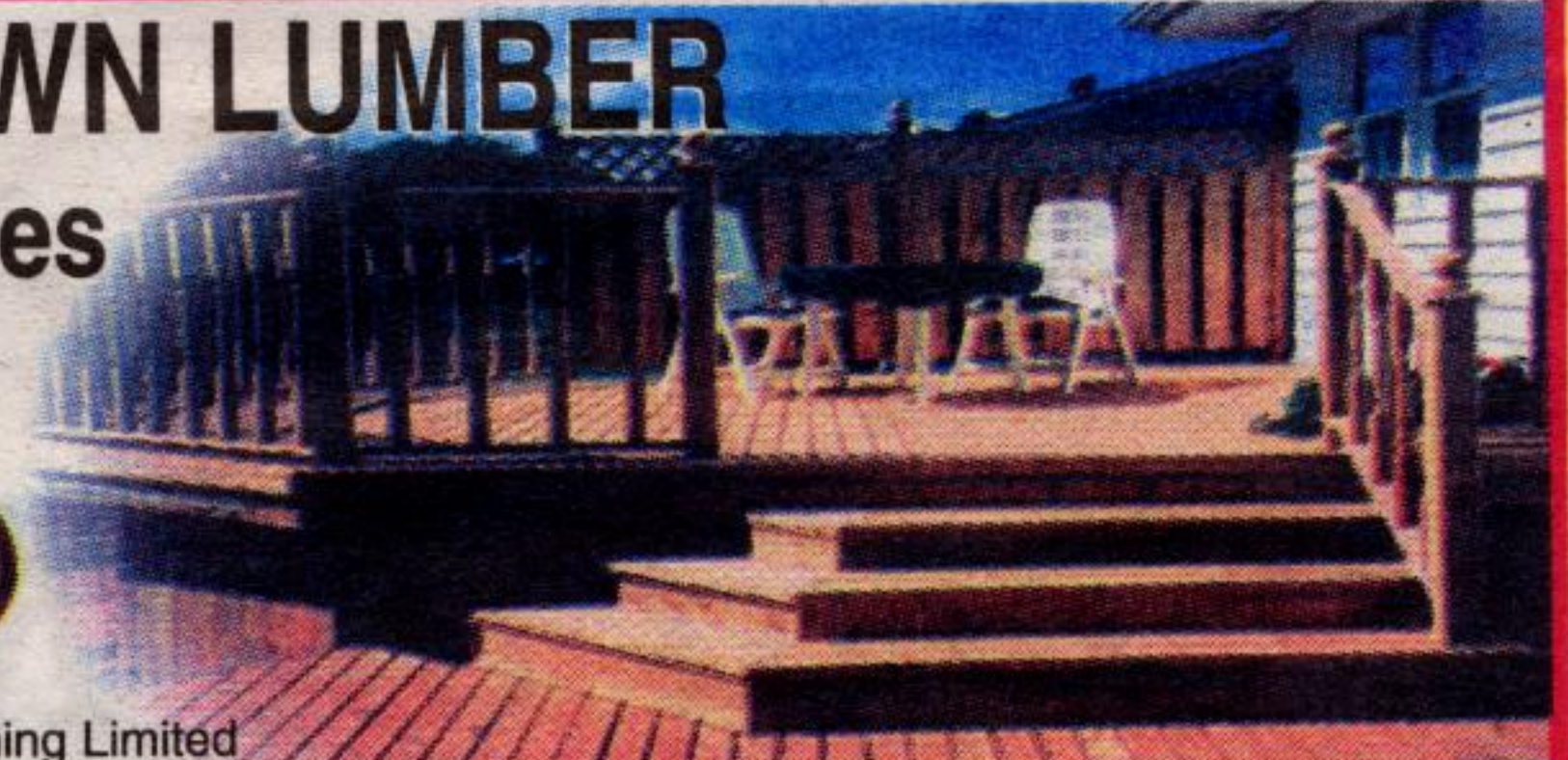
One of the advantages of having a home garden is a pesticide-free crop, but bugs and other pests are a common problem. Some gardeners use a spray of three tablespoons of dish soap to one gallon of water to control aphids and other insects. Remember to spray the underside of the leaf where bugs usually hide. You can also release beneficial insects like ladybugs to help eradicate the problem.

By starting your garden now, you'll have fresh, nutritious and delicious vegetables and herbs to enjoy all summer long.

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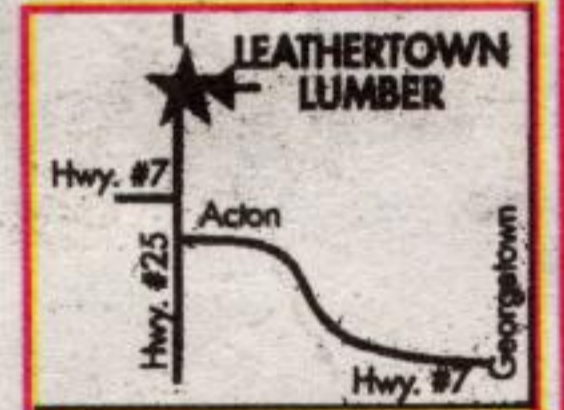
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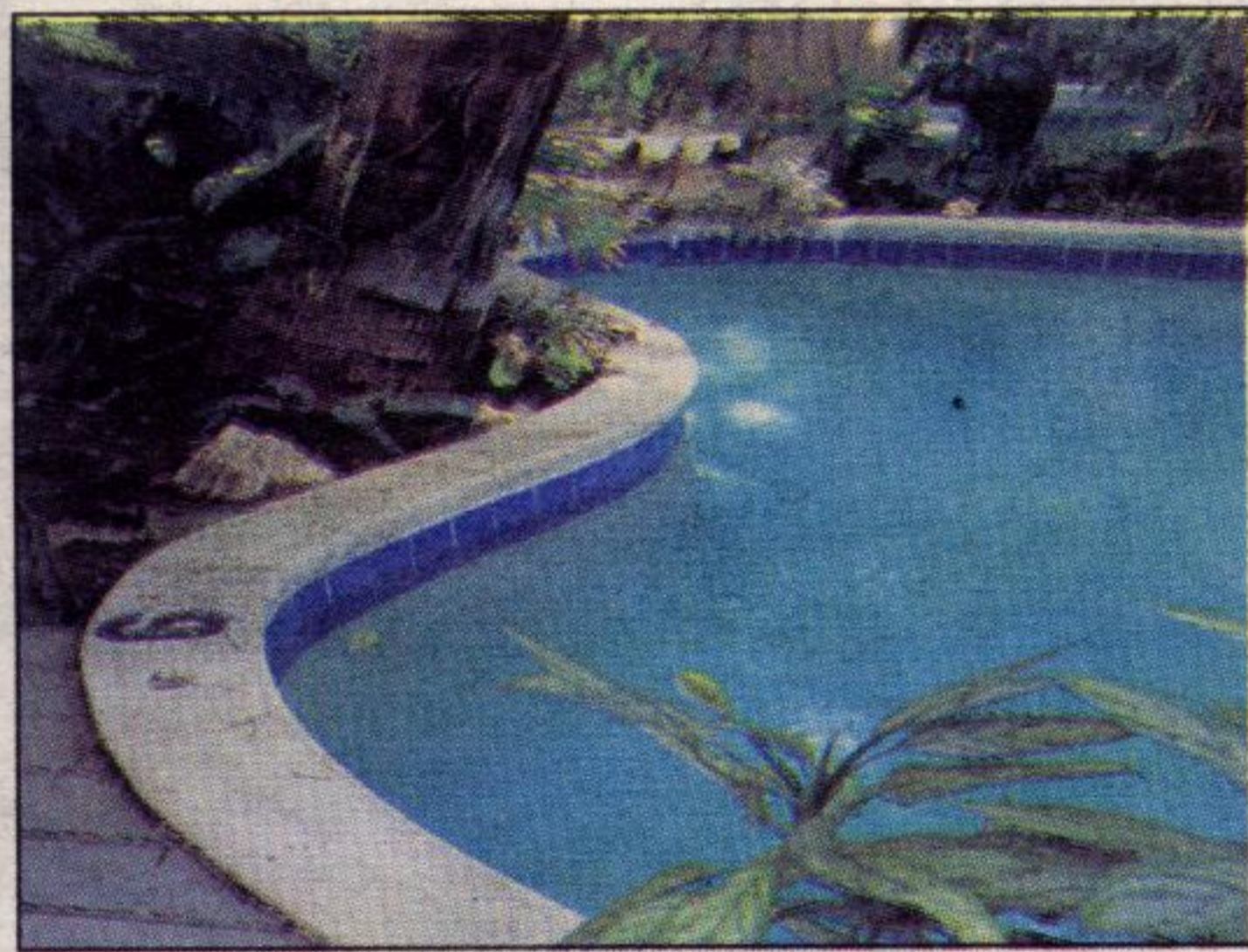
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