

The veggie garden: Good taste, less waste

Home grown produce just seems to taste better...and there's a reason. Corn, beans, peas, tomatoes and other vegetables taste best when they're fresh-picked. Store-bought vegetables often have to be picked days ahead of when they appear on the produce shelves, and sometimes that means they're picked a little greener, and allowed to "ripen" in transit. With your own vegetable garden, you can pick them when they're at the peak of perfection. Yum!

The best vegetable gardens start with two solid foundations: good soil and a good plan.

Your soil can be improved by ensuring there is good drainage, and lots of organic matter present. Compost is one of the best soil improvers you can possibly find. If you don't have compost, try adding Green Earth Premium Compost into the garden.

Take the time to measure your garden area, and draw it out on paper. That way, when you're at the garden centre, standing in front of the seed packet display, you won't be tempted to pick and choose like you would at the salad bar. This approach is a recipe for frustration.

Here are a few things to consider when laying out your garden:

1. Relate choices and number of plants to timing. A dozen heads of lettuce may not sound like a lot, but it is if they're all ready on the same day. If you need more, consider earlier and later-maturing varieties. You could also plant the same variety at one or two-week intervals.

2. Plant vegetables your family will enjoy eating. (ie. you can probably get Junior to weed the peas more easily than

the turnips, if you're making the garden a family project).

3. Make sure you allow enough room for each type of vegetable to get the light it needs, and grow to the full size. Once the risk of spring frost has passed, you can plant seeds or seedlings from the garden centre directly into the garden. Or if you prefer, you can start them indoors in containers and then transplant. Be sure to use a special liquid fertilizer called Wilson Transplanter with Roots if you go this route - it will reduce transplant shock and result in higher yields.

Once the soil has warmed up (later in the spring) it's a good idea to mulch around the plants to conserve moisture and prevent weed growth. Use a high-quality mulch (the Hillview line of Professional mulches are great) as it will last longer and look much better than cheaper products.

Once the garden is established, it will benefit from regular weeding, watering and feeding. Be sure to use a premium quality fertilizer like Plant-Prod Tomato & Vegetable Fertilizer 15-15-30 to provide the balanced nutrition your vegetables will need. This will pay off at harvest time with greatly improved crop yield.

You'll have to keep a constant watch for all kinds of pests, too. Fences will keep out the larger types, while a variety of options are available for insects. If you can, control insects by picking them off by hand or use Green Earth Insecticidal Soap. You can also use pyrethrin-based sprays on vegetables, such as Green Earth AIM Flower and Vegetable Spray.

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