

Ready, Set, Vegetable Garden!

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A couple of months ago, I wrote about planting the vegetable garden. At that time, I encouraged gardeners to consider growing cool season vegetables. I am now enjoying spinach and leaf lettuce from the garden and looking forward to harvesting broccoli, cabbage, onions, and potatoes.

It now appears that warm weather has arrived for good, and I'm ready to begin planting warm season vegetables. I have purchased tomato and pepper plants, along with a few herbs, to set out soon. Green beans and lima beans will be next, followed by sweet corn and okra. I will complete the summer planting with sweet potato slips. How much space do you need for your vegetable garden? If you have just over 1,000 square feet of space, you can grow most of the vegetables for two people for one year. You want to remember that squash, watermelon, and other vine crops require larger areas. If you don't have that much space, you might consider using raised beds as a means to conserve space and for the ease of care. Finally, homeowners with a very small space available may use containers for a few select vegetables.

Sun exposure influences the ability for plants to be healthy and productive. At least six hours of direct sunlight per day will insure the plants will be able to manufacture the food needed for growth. Watering is very important. Plants need one to one and one-half inches of water a week, maybe even more, during the hottest and driest part of the summer. That amounts to about a pint per square foot per day. Providing a small amount of water every day is not recommended. The shallow watering will encourage plant roots to stay near the surface and lead to stress on plants. It is best to water deeply once or twice a week to encourage plant roots to reach deeper for soil moisture. It is also recommended to water the soil beneath the plant, not the plant. Diseases are more likely to attack wet leaves.

Fertilizer should be applied to the soil prior to or at planting. Organic fertilizers are dependent on soil microorganisms to release their nutrients, and this requires a longer period of time than synthetic fertilizers. High nitrogen plant users, including tomatoes and sweet corn, require additional applications during the growing season.

