

Getting started

Choosing a garden site is as important as selecting the vegetables to grow in it. All vegetables need sunlight and fertile, well-drained soil, and they will contract fewer diseases if the site has good ventilation. Place the garden so it will be convenient to plant, care for, and harvest. Protect the garden site from invading insects or animals.

Few of us are lucky enough to have the ideal garden site. You might find that the perfect place for your sweet corn is along the back fence, where it becomes a backdrop for dahlias. Or the sunniest site for chard or beets may be along the sidewalk entry. Innovative gardeners will find spaces that fit their plants' needs.

First, select for sunlight. An open, south-facing, gradual slope is best, but at least look for a shade-free place. All vegetables need a minimum of six hours of sunshine. Less will cause the plants to be weak and spindly no matter how much care you give them.

Next, get to know your soil. Good gardening soil warms early in the spring, is loamy enough to provide oxygen to the roots of growing plants, holds water for several days, and is fertile enough to grow a good crop of weeds. Early warming is related to drainage. Poorly drained soil remains wet and cold late into the spring, making it difficult to grow early-season vegetables. If your soil is heavy and remains wet long after rain

has stopped, consider using raised beds or installing drainage. Raised beds will not only be better drained, they also will warm earlier.

An indication of the general fertility of your garden soil is its natural vegetation. The healthier the weeds or grass growing on the site, the better the soil will be for vegetables.

Try to locate your garden away from trees and large shrubs. The roots from nearby woody plants will take nutrients and water away from your vegetables.

Avoid placing the garden where there is little air movement. A natural breeze helps prevent foliage diseases. Stagnant, humid, warm air creates ideal conditions for problems such as tomato blight, mildew on squash, or mold on green beans.

Place your garden where it will be easy to care for. If you have to drag a 50-foot hose to water, it becomes a chore. Because Oregon's vegetable-growing season coincides with the dry season, you may need to water frequently. If irrigation is time-consuming, your enthusiasm about gardening can fade quickly.

The most useful garden site is near the kitchen so the cook can move fresh vegetables quickly to the dinner table. Nothing beats the flavor of corn picked minutes before dinner.

For more information

Vegetable Gardening in Oregon (EC 871)

Available in the OSU Extension catalog:

<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog>

