



The Kitchen Garden
By
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Vegetable gardening is not hard. In order to be successful, one must think about a few simple growing tips. Provide your plants with a minimum of 6 hours of afternoon sun. Secondly, good drainage is crucial; plants succumb to certain root diseases in poorly drained soils. Tomatoes and peppers benefit from a heavy blend of compost mixed within the native soils. Lastly, hand water or irrigate the garden three times a week at a rate of a 1" but that could change based on weather conditions.

Current gardening trends include the square foot garden. The concept of a square foot garden began in the 1980's to assist gardeners with planning and creating a small, often raised, vegetable garden. By taking a plot of land and sectioning the plot into 1 foot squares, gardeners can identify how many plants or how many seeds are needed to place within the squares. The number of plants per square depends on the size of the plant at maturity. Smaller plants should be placed on the south or front side of the bed and taller or vining plants should be placed in the back to prevent shading. Another concept is to create a companion garden such as marigolds dispersed throughout to repel insects and small critters.

Don't be afraid of pests and diseases and thoughts of being organic or not. But, more importantly, do not give up. Some of the safest products out there that aid in deterring pests and critters can be solved by incorporating companion plants. If the above growing tips are achieved, insects should not be a big factor. Companion plants include ones that give off a strong odor if brushed or when the leaves are crushed. Often, herbs, marigolds and scented geraniums are planted throughout the kitchen garden to keep pests at a minimal. Also, plan a pollinator garden nearby to introduce good bugs who munch on the bad bugs. Pollinator plants also include herbs, but look for large showy flowers such as coneflowers, black eyed Susan, even lilies, sunflowers or dahlias. If you try all these simple tricks, chemical usage can be close to none. However, in some cases, Sevin dust or neem oil may be needed in order to combat a bad Japanese beetle or aphid season. Remember, you control your garden and you can be satisfied with the results.

Try incorporating heirloom vegetables into the Kitchen Garden. The tried and true varieties that our ancestors grew have put smiles on many faces. In addition to the smiles, comes the question "Can I keep them alive?" In the last several years, growing a vegetable garden at home has become popular. Unfortunately, growing heirlooms has not. Historically, Heirlooms are not pest or disease resistant, however, good drainage, plenty of flowers to attract the good bugs and the proper amount of moisture retention is key to their survival.

Lastly, consider saving seeds from many of the vegetables you grow. Allow the seeds to dry overnight, place the dry seeds in an enclosed, plastic baggie and store the seeds in your fridge until next season. Seeds can be stored up to 10 years as long as they remain in a dry, cool and dark place. Always look for seed exchanges to share and learn new varieties. In the Piedmont region of North Carolina, we are fortunate to have Old Salem, Reynolda Gardens and Bethabara Park as our neighbors. There is an incredible amount of knowledge, examples and places to learn. Every winter, these gardens and Master Gardens take part in a large seed exchange. This day takes place on "National Seed Swap" day. Simply, bring your labeled seeds and take others back with you. It's an opportunity to share successes, grab unique and heirloom seeds and meet other plant nuts with the same passions.