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virginia home food production



FACT SHEET

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PLANNING AND LOCATING THE GARDEN

Planning Guidelines

While planning your garden, it is important to ask a few basic questions:

Who will be doing the work? Will the garden be a group project with family members or friends who will work willingly through the season to a fall harvest, or will you be handling the hoe alone - in between camping and swimming? Remember, a small weed-free garden will produce more than a large weedy mess.

What do you and your family like to eat? Although the pictures in the garden catalog look delicious, there is no value in taking up gardening space with vegetables that no one eats. Make a list of your family's favorite vegetables, ranked in order of preference. This will make a useful guide in deciding how much to plant of each. Successive plantings of certain crops, such as beans, will give you a longer harvest period and increase your yield. List recommended varieties and planting dates.

How do you plan to use the produce from your garden? If you plan to can, freeze, or store part of the produce, this will be a factor not only in planning the size of your garden but also in selecting the varieties you grow. Some varieties have much better keeping quality than others. Care should be used in choosing the seeds, making sure the varieties you select are adapted to your area.

How much space is available? That is, how much area that can be converted into usable garden space - not simply how much empty ground is available.

Some Additional Planning Hints

1. Plan your garden on paper first. Draw a map showing arrangement and spacing of crops.
2. Plan your garden and order seeds by January or February. Some plants may be started indoors in mid-February.
3. In your plan, place tall crops on the north side of the garden so they won't shade the shorter vegetables.

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4. Group plants by length of growing period. Plant spring crops together so that later crops can be planted in these areas when the early crops mature.

Locating the Garden

1. Vegetables grow best in a level area with loose, well-drained soil, and at least six hours of sun (8-10 hours is ideal).
2. Use contour rows or terraces on sloped or hillside sites to avoid erosion. South facing slopes are warmer.
3. Avoid placing in low spots, at the base of a hill, or at the foot of a slope bordered by a solid fence. Such areas are slow to warm up in the spring and frost settles in these places because of lack of air drainage.
4. Avoid windy locations.
5. Locate near a good supply of water if possible.
6. Choose a spot near your home so it is convenient to work in it when you have a few minutes.
7. Avoid planting near trees and shrubs; they compete for nutrients and water.
8. Do not plant related vegetables in exactly the same location in the garden more often than once in three years. This rotation prevents the buildup of insects and disease. Use old plans as guides for rotating crops.