

Gardening for beginners



PHOTO BY VICKI MCALISTER

The Master Gardener's Victory Garden, located near River Forks Park.

Question: I have always wanted to have a vegetable garden and now that I have the room, I don't have a clue on how I start. And I don't want to fail. Could you help me get started?

Answer: One amazing thing about gardening is that a beginner's garden can be just as successful as an expert's garden. As you learn and develop, so will your garden improve.

It's a good idea to keep a garden journal. This will be for planning as well as taking notes on what worked and what did not. Gardening is very much trial and error as well as good research.

Select a site with the following attributes: eight to 12 hours of sun, little or no wind, a fairly flat location with loose, well-drained soil and a convenient water supply.

After you have selected your site, and decided what to plant, plan out your garden on paper. Consider where and when to plant each selection based on the plants' needs.

Group vegetables together according to their family such as tomatoes and peppers together,



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Master Gardener

melons, squash and cucumbers together, beans and peas together and broccoli, cabbage and kale together. This way, you can more easily plan rotations annually of these groups to reduce disease and pests.

As we are still in the winter season, your soil is too wet to work now but there are still things to do in preparation for your first garden. You may want to put up fences, wind barriers or gates. Also, clean and sharpen gardening tools for use.

I have found that putting clear plastic sheeting over the planting area will give you a head start on weed control. As the days get warmer, the plastic magnifies the heat and that kills the weeds and prevents new ones from germinating.

At this time (still several weeks before planting) some gardeners prefer to use



PHOTO BY BONNIE COURTER

Vegetables harvested by Master Gardener Bonnie Courter

slow-release additives to prepare the soil. Some of these include limestone, aged manure and green manure.

Before planting, clear all growth — especially weeds — from the area. Till the soil with a rototiller if you have a large area or turn it over with a garden fork or shovel. Be careful not to over-till it if using a tiller. Over-tilling can destroy the soil structure. If you did not amend the soil earlier and want to do it right before planting, work in soluble fertilizers or finished compost.

As you continue your gardening journey, you will learn that there are several different ways to do the same thing. You will learn what works best for you.

Now, are you ready to plant? This is the fun part! Again, choices and preferences abound. You can buy already-started plants, start from seeds, start in the ground or germinate seedlings in the house and transfer to the garden. Whatever you choose, follow the directions on when to plant, because soil and air temperatures, both day and

night, are critical for success.

If you plant from seeds, you will be told to thin out the plants. This means pull and throw away some! I could not do this when I first started. I loved every little seedling that came up. I soon learned that thinning them is doing the best for them. You will get healthier and more productive plants when they do not have to compete with too many plants for air, sun and nutrients. Survival of the fittest!

Keep your garden well-weeded and well-watered. Check for pests and remove and treat immediately. Applying mulch will help, but depending on the size of your garden, that is probably not necessary. As you will be in the garden every day, it is very easy to keep weeds out. As soon as you see one, pull it.

Enjoy your gardening journey!

Do you have a gardening question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners via email at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu, by phone at 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg.