



Creating a Garden Plan

A well thought-out Garden Plan drawn up in winter months is essential for any successful garden.

Take the time to look at your garden from bird's-eye and worm's-eye views and plan accordingly. These plans can serve as valuable records for this growing season and in years to come.

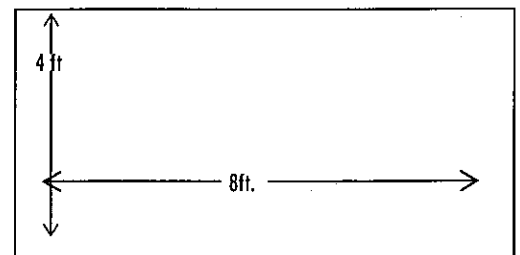
Observe the Site

Walk around and observe the site. It may be helpful to draw a map of the site as you find it. Consider the following factors:

- Existing structures - locations of walls, trees, rock outcrops, fences, paths, work-benches, sheds, trellises, perennial plants, water faucets, raised beds, compost heaps, greenhouses, cold-frames, and other significant features.
- Resources available - list anything and everything at the site. It is possible to work creatively with old tires, doors, containers, stones, etc.
- Accessibility - Is it open to all members of the community? Is there space to hold gatherings or workshops? Is it located near a bus or train route?
- Sunlight - pay particular attention to areas that get full sun (at least 6 hours) and places that are shadier. Visit the site at different times of day and during different seasons to get the best idea of the amount of light it receives.
- Soil condition - loose/compacted, well-draining/damp, trash or weed - covered, nutrient-rich/depleted, pH levels, lead/otherwise contaminated.
- Contours of the surface (level or uneven).
- Dimensions of food growing area.

Measure Your Total Planting Area

- Measure and stake the corners of your garden so that you can see what you are working with. Run string around all 4 stakes just a few inches above the ground to clearly identify your boundaries.
- Determine your total area (length x width). See diagram.
- Knowing the total area will help with your planting plan.



Production Goals & Planting Plan

Now that you have assessed the space and resources available, consider your production goals for the year.

- Who are you growing for? (families, donation, markets, restaurants)
- What crops will best meet the needs and preferences of these groups? (foods people like and use often, specialty crops for restaurant markets, crops for early spring, through

summer, fall, winter-storage, unique and unfamiliar crops, crops with cultural significance, foods for preserving and processing)

- ❑ An efficient garden should be planned in advance, according to when each variety of vegetable or flower should be planted, maintained and harvested, and plotting where each crop will grow best in a given space with available resources.
- ❑ Consult records from previous years as a reference (if available).
- ❑ Make a list of crops and specific varieties you are planning to grow this season. Make special note of what has grown well in previous years.

For each crop, consider:

- Will it be grown once a season (tomatoes, eggplants)? Will it be planted early and late? Can it be planted in succession for continual harvest?
 - Will it be grown from seed or transplant?
 - Will you be starting the transplant? If so, what is needed? (see *"Starting Garden Transplants"*)
 - How much will you plant/harvest?
 - When will you direct seed/plant? (refer to *"Urban Planting Calendar"*) Plant during suggested time periods to make the most of each crop.
 - When do you expect to harvest?
 - Where will you plant each vegetable? In which bed? Crop-rotation is important to keep in mind when deciding where you plant different vegetables (see *Minimizing Vegetable Disease* tip-sheet in this tool-kit).
- ❑ When you have a reliable calendar for planting, thinning, and harvesting, draw a garden plan to scale so that you can intelligently decide what to plant, where to plant it, and how much seed to purchase.
 - ❑ Keep your garden plan at-hand throughout the season. Remember to plant, thin, and harvest on a timely basis.

Soil and Bed Preparation

- ❑ Turn the soil over with a spading fork or spading shovel the first year. From year to year, you may want to double dig compacted soil or simply use a spading fork to cultivate the soil so as not to disturb the soil layers.
- ❑ If you are breaking ground for the first time you may consider doing a full nutrient test in addition to testing your pH. Your pH should be tested every few years. (Essential for maintaining healthy soil).
- ❑ Knowing your pH as well as the nutrient requirements of your crops will help when adding compost. In some cases other amendments may be necessary, such as lime or fertilizer.

- ❑ Caring for the soil is one of the most important aspects of successful food production. Adding manure and compost to working beds helps to improve soil quality. Consider Cover-crops when a bed is not in production (see Cover Crops tip-sheet in this tool-kit).
- ❑ Soil preparation is crucial to good vegetable production. Be sure to remove all rocks, weeds, and grass.
- ❑ Level the garden with a rake.
- ❑ Now you have a spot with healthy, loosened and leveled soil and you are ready to plant.
- ❑ Before planting, lay out all of the rows with sticks and string according to your garden plan. These markers are important. They are straight lines used as guides for your rows.

Get Your Vegetable Garden Started Early in the Season

- ❑ Refer to the list of crops and varieties you would like to grow.
- ❑ "Breaking Ground" for an outdoor garden by April 15 (weather permitting) allows you to grow early season crops from April through June.
- ❑ Do not dig any garden soil that is too wet, even if it is mid-April. Use the "hand test" – squeeze a handful of soil; if it stays as a clump, then soil is too saturated to dig!
- ❑ If your garden has good drainage, such as raised bed or sandy soils, you may be able to begin planting some of the earliest plants like peas in late March or early April because these soils dry out the fastest.
- ❑ Starting crops in spring offers the chance to practice skills that will be needed to meet the challenges of summertime growing.
- ❑ A spring garden makes sense. Rain and cool temperatures work together to provide plenty of water for seedlings, so very little watering is needed. Weeding is also easy, and even the insect pests that begin to feed are hardly a problem at all.
- ❑ Flavor produced by a long, cool growing period is captured in peas, greens, spinach, and other early vegetables.

Use Your Planting Plan!

- ❑ Now that you've taken the time to make a plan, refer to it as a guide throughout the season. It is easy to get busy with one thing and let another slip by!
- ❑ Keep records of successes and troubles throughout the season to use as a reference in coming years.

Source: John Ameroso, Linda Ameroso, Kathleen McTigue & Stephanie Miller