

Steps for Success with Vegetable Gardening

1. Select a sunny location.

Most vegetables require full sun (6 hours or more). Locating the garden near the house and a water supply makes it easier to maintain and simplifies harvesting. For more information, see:

[Where to Put your Vegetable Garden - PM 814](#)



2. Begin with good soil!

Vegetables grow best in a well-drained, fertile soil. A well-drained soil is one through which water moves rapidly. When drainage is poor, water replaces the air in soil and roots suffocate. Roots will not develop without a constant supply of oxygen. Do not work the soil if it is wet!

Container or raised gardens require a growing medium that drains well, yet does not dry out too fast. Soilless potting mixes have several advantages over soil. They are free of plant disease organisms and weed seeds, are less likely to compact, hold moisture and plant nutrients well, and are light weight—making the container more portable.

An excellent soil mix can be prepared by mixing equal parts topsoil, organic matter (well-rotted manure, compost, or peat), and coarse sand.

If you need to test your soil for fertilization needs, visit the Jasper County Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Office or our website for soil testing resources.

<https://www.extension.iastate.edu/jasper/yard-gardenhorticulture>

3. Proper drainage is essential.

If you are unsure about your garden site drainage, test by digging a hole (coffee can size), fill with water, let it drain, fill again, time how long it takes the water to drain. You want it to drain 1 inch per hour or faster. For more information, see: [Garden Soil Management - PM 820](#)

4. Start small.

Garden size depends on the desired kinds and amounts of vegetables, suitability of available land, and amount of time available for garden chores. A manageable size is 100 square feet (10 ft. by 10 ft.). The garden should be large enough to be enjoyable, but not so large that it becomes a burden. Space saving techniques in the garden can allow for a lot of produce from small spaces. This can include vertical gardening, wide rows, container gardening, or square foot gardening. If the garden is successful, you can increase in size next year. For more information, see:

[Small Plot Vegetable Garden - PM 870A](#)

[Container Vegetable Gardening – PM 870B](#)

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5. Protect your garden.

Analyze your space to determine if animals (wildlife and domesticated) will be threats. Deer and rabbits will need different fencing solutions. Keeping deer out requires 8 foot fencing, where as rabbit fencing is more tightly woven wire. Rabbits are capable of digging under most fences. It is important to bury your fence at least a foot to prevent rabbits from simply digging under it. If fencing is needed, an alternate location may be a better choice.



6. Add flowers to help your garden grow and make it beautiful.

If your garden has a few flowers or plants with visual interest, decorative and functional structures, and other elements that make you want to spend time there, you will. In addition to their beauty, flowers will attract the beneficial insects needed to help pollinate your vegetables.

7. Grow the vegetables you want to eat.

If your family doesn't eat green beans, don't plant them, or plant a small amount. First-year gardeners may prefer to select easy-to-grow vegetables, such as lettuce, onions, peas, spinach, tomatoes, snap beans, beets, and summer squash. For more information see:

[*Suggested Vegetable Varieties for your Home Garden - PM 607*](#)

[*Planting a Home Vegetable Garden - PM 819*](#)

[*Planting and Harvesting Times for Garden Vegetables - PM 534*](#)

8. Start your own transplants or buy them to get a jump on growing your garden.

You can start your own or purchase transplants that are hard to start or to get a jump start on the gardening season. (Herbs, tomatoes, peppers, and eggplants are usually readily available) Most perennial crops are available as transplants. If you want to start your own, most of them should be started 6 weeks before the average last frost date, which in Iowa is mid-May.

For more information, see: [*Starting Garden Transplants at Home -PM 874*](#)



9. Regularly Water and Weed

A deep watering once a week should be adequate for vegetable gardens. Apply 1 to 1 1/2 inches of water per week. (More water may be needed in hot dry weather.)

It is easier to pull small weeds. If controlled before they go to seed, there will be fewer weeds next year. Mulching will reduce watering and weeding. For more information, see: [*Weed Management in the Home Garden -PM 666*](#)

10. Don't forget to clean up!

At the end of the growing season, clean off the garden of plant debris as it can overwinter insects and disease organisms. Remember to rotate the vegetable families to reduce disease.

Planning a Raised Bed

When planning a raised garden bed, you must first consider size and accessibility.

The size of the bed is determined by space limitations, personal preference, and convenience.

Raised beds should be constructed so everything can be reached without stepping into it.

If a raised bed is only accessible from one side, the maximum width should be 2 feet. Beds that are accessible from both sides can be 3 to 4 feet wide.

Elevated raised beds are more convenient for elderly gardeners or physically challenged individuals who have difficulty bending over to the ground. The raised height of the garden allows these individuals to continue their gardening activities. For more information, see:

[Therapeutic Gardening: Creating Raised Bed Planters -- Reiman Gardens - RG 111](#)

Raised Bed Soil Requirements

Raised gardens require soil that is light, crumbly and drains well.

You can purchase a raised bed potting mix or make your own by mixing equal parts topsoil, organic matter (well-rotted manure, compost, or peat), and coarse sand.

How much soil you need, depends on the size and depth of your bed.

To calculate how many yards are needed to fill a raised bed, measure the length, width and depth of the bed in feet (you can convert inches to feet by dividing them by 12). Multiply the length x width x depth. Then divide this number by 27, which is how many cubic feet are in a yard of soil. The answer is how many yards of soil you will need.

Examples of average raised bed sizes and amount of soil required:

4 x 8 feet (12 inches deep) = 32 cubic feet

4 x 4 feet (12 inches deep) = 16 cubic feet

Before filling raised beds, remove any grass sod and loosen the existing soil. Add a few inches of the soil mix, then work it into the existing soil. Continue to add and work in additional soil mix until the raised bed is filled. Incorporating the soil mix into the existing soil prevents the formation of layers in the raised beds. Distinct layers of soil impede water movement and discourage root growth.

Grow Another Row

Gardeners: Your help is needed!

Due to the current uncertainty many now live in; food insecurity is a major community stress. It likely will not end as quickly as it began.

Please help.

If you have extra produce, please donate it (community food banks/pantries, meal programs, family members, people you know, shelters, church/religious groups, etc.).

If you have the time and space to grow more than you need, please consider an increase in your garden plantings. Just one extra plant or one more row can make a difference to families in our community.

Resources for your Home Gardening Questions

Horticulture and Home Pest News Website <https://hortnews.extension.iastate.edu/>

Horticulture Frequently Asked Questions: <https://hortnews.extension.iastate.edu/faq>

First stop for resources, be sure to use those dropdowns to select subject or month.

Spend Smart Eat Smart <https://spendsmart.extension.iastate.edu/>

Recipes, budget-friendly meal planning, exercises, blogs, & how-tos

AnswerLine: Phone: 800-262-3804 Email: answer@iastate.edu;

Monday– Friday 9 am-Noon, 1-4 pm.

Questions relating to home and family www.extension.iastate.edu/answerline

Preserve the Taste of Summer

<https://www.extension.iastate.edu/humansciences/preserve-taste-summer>

***The ISU Extension and Outreach Gardening and Horticulture Publications referenced here and more are available to download at no cost at <https://store.extension.iastate.edu/>**

[Where to Put your Vegetable Garden - PM 814](#)

[Planting a Home Vegetable Garden - PM 819](#)

[Garden Soil Management - PM 820](#)

[Small Plot Vegetable Garden - PM 870A](#)

[Container Vegetable Gardening – PM 870B](#)

[Suggested Vegetable Varieties for your Home Garden - PM 607](#)

[Planting and Harvesting Times for Garden Vegetables - PM 534](#)

[Weed Management in the Home Garden –PM 666](#)

[Harvesting and Storing Vegetables - PM 731](#)

[Starting Garden Transplants at Home –PM 874](#)

[Preserving the Taste of Summer -Canning: Vegetables - PM 1044](#)

[Preserving the Taste of Summer—Freezing: Fruits and Vegetables - PM 1045](#)

[Top 13 Vegetables to Donate to Food Pantries –HORT 3068](#)

[Therapeutic Gardening: Creating Raised Bed Planters -- Reiman Gardens - RG 111](#)

Questions?

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Jasper County Office Hours

Monday-Thursday 8:00 am - 4:30 pm

Friday 8:00 am -12:00 pm



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- [Jasper County Master Gardeners](#)

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