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Planning a Vegetable Garden

Layout considerations for a bountiful harvest.

If you've never had a vegetable garden before, this is the year to devote part of your yard to fresh, healthy vegetables! It's hard to beat the flavor and high nutritional value of vegetables harvested ripe from the plant. Taking a little time to plan the layout of your vegetable garden can save you heartache when harvest approaches. By properly planning a vegetable garden, you're more apt to have a bountiful harvest this summer and fall. Consider the following information before you break ground on your garden.

Location

Choose the sunniest, brightest spot in the whole yard. Vegetables require at least six hours of sun each day. Avoid areas that are too shady - only leafy crops will grow in limited sun. If your yard is primarily shade, containers are the way to go. You'll be amazed at how many vegetables you can grow in small spaces.

Method

Are you going to plant directly in the soil, or used raised beds? Raised beds are preferred, because the soil warms quicker, remains warm longer, and provides for better drainage. You can accomplish a raised bed by simply mounding the soil or by enclosing the soil in wood frames, cinderblocks, etc. We recommend raised beds about 3-4 feet wide, so you can easily reach the middle of the bed. Build a frame that is 8-12 inches tall and fill with 2/3 soil, 1/3 compost. Stay away from wood that has been treated with chemicals - they will leach into the soil and harm your plants.

If you are planting directly into the soil, be sure to amend the soil with compost prior to planting. Compost will loosen the clay soil predominant in Colorado and allow roots to move freely in search of nutrients. You can also use peat moss, or aged manure for your garden, but do not use fresh manure. Clear away any debris including rocks and sticks, and then rake the surface smooth.

Choosing crops and how much to grow

Base your vegetable garden on your family's eating habits. Aim to utilize every inch of space by growing crops that meet your needs. If you don't like broccoli, don't grow it. Choose varieties that grow well in the Front Range and those that are disease and insect resistance. Remember the benefits of companion planting – planting herbs and flowers with vegetables to deter pests. The following is a guideline for the vegetable needs for a family of 4:

Asparagus - 30 plants	Lettuce - row 10-15 feet
Beans - row 15-25 feet long	Peas - row 30-40 feet long
Beets - row 10-15 feet	Pumpkins/Squash - 1-3 plants
Broccoli – 10-15 plants	Radishes - row 4 feet long
Brussel Sprouts – 10-15 plants	Rhubarb - 1-3 plants
Cabbage – 10-15 plants	Spinach - row 10-20 feet
Carrots – row 20-30 feet long	Tomatoes - 10-15 plants
Corn – row 20-30 feet long	Peppers - 10-15 plants

Layout

Now that you've selected a location and what crops to grow, it's time to decide where they best fit in the garden. The tall crops, such as peas, beans and corn should be planted on the north side of the garden. This way they will not shade the rest of the vegetables from sunlight.

In the center of the garden, plant medium-sized crops, like cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, tomatoes and squash. At the southern end of the garden is where low-growing vegetables belong - radishes, carrots, lettuce and onions.

For best exposure, rows in a vegetable garden should run north and south. If rows run east and west, the first row tends to shade the second row, the second row shades the third row and so on.