

Beginner Guide to Growing Your Own Vegetables

For years it has been an accepted fact that gardening brings with it many health benefits. These include reducing stress, improving hand strength, burning calories, strengthening your heart and boosting vitamin D. It has also been shown to help fight depression and build self-esteem. Now, many seniors (and others) have found a way to take these health benefits to a whole new level with the planting and nurturing of a vegetable garden.

Growing your own food can help you eat healthier. If you have a vegetable, herb or fruit garden, you're getting fresh produce that you know hasn't been treated with pesticides. It's as farm-to-table as it gets. It's also a great way to save money while you get up close and personal with nature. Plus tending your vegetable garden counts as exercise!

The internet is filled with lots of suggestions and basic "how to" tips for starting a vegetable garden (a good online resource is the good old Farmer's Almanac (<https://www.almanac.com/vegetable-gardening-for-beginners>)).

Here are a few tips that everyone agrees on:

- ✂ Start small. It's better to be thrilled by what you produce in a small garden than be frustrated by the time commitment a big one requires. Plus, it makes sense to learn gardening basics before investing tons of time and money in this new hobby. A good size for a beginner's vegetable garden is 10x10 feet (about the size of a small bedroom).
- ✂ Keep it simple. Select up to five types of vegetables to grow, and plant a few of each type. If a plant/crop does poorly the first time you plant it, try again because different varieties grow best under different conditions.

- ✂ If you don't have a yard, consider going smaller and growing vegetables in containers: a sunny deck or balcony work fine.
- ✂ Grow what you love. If you won't eat a crop, don't grow it and instead focus on the fruits, vegetables or herbs that your family enjoys the most.
- ✂ Some other tips to get started include choosing the right location, investing in basic garden tools, testing and preparing the soil and choosing the right seeds for your environment. And they all offer reminders of how important it is to "plant with care" and to "nurture your garden" to keep it strong and healthy.

Here's the best part: while you are keeping your garden strong and healthy, the garden is doing the same for you. More than one study has shown that people who grow their own food are likely to make better food choices and eat more fresh produce. It only makes sense that after you've put time and effort into a plant, you're going to appreciate what it produces a lot more and be less likely to have food go to waste.

Besides these physical benefits, many people say that they just feel better emotionally after spending time in their garden. It turns out that experts are catching on to the healing combination of plants and dirt and have even coined the term "dirt therapy" to describe all of the benefits that getting in the dirt and digging in the ground can produce. In fact, exposure to dirt has been linked to numerous health benefits, from reducing allergies to autoimmune diseases.

Remember, you won't know what works best for you and your garden until you try. If things don't work out right the first time, there's always next year. There are dozens of different ways to do just about everything, but you won't know what works best for you and your garden until you try

