

HOME FOOD PRODUCTION & EDIBLE GARDENS

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Producing your own food can be both healthy and enjoyable. Recent university research reveals a long list of physiological, psychological and emotional benefits of gardening. This quick story will unlock some of the keys to getting started and succeeding at home food production.

The first step to getting a garden off the ground is planning. Start by speaking with people you know that may have kept a garden in the past. You'll want to visit as many gardens as possible. Gardening magazines and television programs go a long way as well.

As your plan comes into focus, you'll need to consider the exposure for the site you're working with. Vegetables will need at least 6 hours of sun a day. This includes window boxes, patios and decks. If you're working with mostly shade, your choices are going to be more limited, but not prohibitive.

Another important factor to consider when getting a garden going is soil. Many beginning gardeners have their soil tested. Bring a sample into a local nursery for some advice. In most cases, you'll need to add some organic fertilizer and some "soil building" compost. The Dr. Earth label is a trusted organic brand of fertilizer. Bumper Crop is probably the best soil builder on the market.

Many gardens get off to a great beginning when started small. If you are starting small or in containers, you have to limit yourself to a handful of plants. If you are growing vegetables, start with what you like to eat and what you can't find fresh locally.

Beginning gardeners should start with "six pack" sprouted trays of vegetables. You will want to water your plants before sinking them in the ground. Bury your plants to the same depth they were in the pot. As soon as you've planted, you'll need to water at least every or every other day until established.

One of the final steps to a great garden is mulching or top dressing. Mulch builds your soil, keeps weeds down and conserves water. The best top dress mulch on the market is called Black Forest. It comes in three cubic foot bales and goes a long way. Apply approximately one inch of mulch, avoiding direct contact with the plant stems.

As your garden grows, there will be some on-going maintenance to be mindful of. For starters, watch out for pests. The moment you see them, try to control them first with a shot of water. If that does not work, horticultural or "neem" oil should do the trick. Vegetables will produce more if you keep harvesting while the production is young.

Producing your own food and beauty in the form of plants adds value to your life on earth. It connects you to it. As with so many things in life, remember its all "experience." If something doesn't work, move on and replace it with something else.

More important than anything, know that help is available from other gardeners and your local nursery.