



Guide to *Growing Your Own Food*

Growing your own food does not have to be overbearing. It takes preparation, research, practice, experimentation, and most of all, PATIENCE! It feels good knowing that what you grow is free of pesticides and herbicides, while also being self-sufficient. As we prep our minds and yards (or containers) for the season, this Guide is here to serve as a reference to help you grow your own food with confidence!

What do you like to eat?

There is no sense planting eggplant if no one in your family will eat it. Think of some vegetables (or fruit) you enjoy and have the capacity to store in case some plants produce faster than your family can eat. Some of the easiest vegetables to grow are: peas, beans, carrots, potatoes, beets, peppers, tomatoes, lettuce, kale, broccoli and cauliflower.

What Can You Grow?



Toledo is located in climate zone 6, which means that our growing season starts in May after the last frost and usually wraps up by mid October before the first frost. It is possible to grow certain produce in colder weather, but it takes experience. This means that you must size up where you can grow things, so it is best to think about HOW you will grow.

Some questions to consider are:



How much room do you have? Will the garden be in the ground, raised beds, containers, or in vertical hydroponic towers? How ambitious are you? Think of these BEFORE heading out to the store and buying up things you won't need.

In general, it's always best to start small-- maybe a 10 x 10 plot with raised beds or container gardening with hanging baskets? Let's face it, nobody wants to be a stressed gardener. It's meant to be enjoyable.

Another point to think about is accessibility to your crops. Does bending over or kneeling for a few hours a day tax your physical abilities? In that case, your choices narrow to raised beds, containers, or vertical tower gardens. Research what works best for you and your growing goals. Regardless, a few tools like an iron rake, shovel, hoe, gloves, trowel, fork, and watering can or hose will be needed.



Plants require rich soil, deep enough to support root systems, moisture and nutrients that support photosynthesis. All vegetables require at least 6-8 hours of direct sunlight, planted in moist and well-drained soil, and a stable environment (no strong winds, heavy foot traffic, etc.). They also require frequent watering and fertilizing to provide enough nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium. After all of this, you are ready to plant!

Planning Tips:

- If doing raised beds, one that is 4 feet in width is a great start off point because it is accessible from all sides -- the length is up to you. In terms of height, it should be at least 12 inches.
- Think about whether you want to compost. Do not add animal waste, meat, or dairy products!
- Do not plant the same crops every year. Crop rotation is necessary to ensure soil nutrients and deters pests and diseases.

Seeds or Plants?

Many gardeners like to start with plants from the nursery to get a jump on the growing season, but some like to sow seeds directly into the soil. The seed packet has all the information you will need to be successful. Will you rowcrop by planting all the seeds/plants in a row or will you plant intensively, planting 4 plants/seeds in a square foot area at a time? Either way dictates how much weeding, fertilizing and soil depth will be needed. Once the plants/seeds are planted, the work is not over. Depending on what you planted, you may have to support the plants with stakes, cages or trellis.

Planting Tips:

- Do not use 100% soil because it dries out quickly. Consider a soilless mix or a good soil mix with time-released and water-soluble fertilizers.
- To reduce moisture loss, add mulch, pine, needles, grass clippings or the like on top of your growing area, even if you have a container garden!
- Keep good records that list all outcomes and effects, what you planted this season, and observations.
- If feeling ambitious, incorporate succession planting where something new is planted every week.

Controlling Creepy Crawlers and Critters

There will undoubtedly be pests and varmints that will try to get at your prize vegetables once they start to show. Some simple controls include row cover cloth draped over hoops and held down with wire stakes or rocks. The bigger varmints will dictate some kind of fence that they can't crawl over, dig under or chew through – 8 feet is a perfect height.



End of Season Clean- Up

The end of the season is just as important as the beginning because this is the time to protect and replenish your growing space. Discard all plants still in the ground or in containers and rake up dead leaves. Planting a cover crop like winter wheat, rye, clover, radishes, or buckwheat that will hold the soil in place. The type of cover crop will depend on when you plan on planting. Also, add fertilizer to sustain healthy soil. For containers, disinfect and clean thoroughly to prevent cross-contamination from last season's harvest, especially if disease was present.

The Rewards of Healthy, Tasty, Homegrown Vegetables

It is a challenge, but so is anything worth having. If you run into problems or questions about vegetable gardening there are lots of websites to check out, gardeners and books out there to help you along. There are local resources as well that are available to assist, which are listed below.

More Information

- Gardening 2020 <https://lucas.osu.edu/localfoods/vegetable-gardening-2020-during-covid-19>
- Vegetable gardening “how to:” <https://lucas.osu.edu/vegetable-gardening>
- Make Your Garden Grow: <https://lucas.osu.edu/makeyourgardengrow>

References

- Boeckmann, C. (2020). Vegetable Gardening for Beginners: The Basics of Planting and Growing a Vegetable Garden. <https://www.almanac.com/vegetable-gardening-for-beginners>
- Demoski, K., Martin, J., & Swanberg, A. (2001). Container Vegetable Garden. OSU Extension. <https://lucas.osu.edu/sites/lucas/files/imce/LocalFood/1647.pdf>
- Gardener’s Supply Company. Vegetable Garden for beginners: Organic vegetable gardens bring special rewards. <https://www.gardeners.com/how-to/vegetable-gardening/5069.html>
- GrowVeg.com
- JoeGardener.com
- Tessa, P. & Chadwick, N. (1993). *The Gardener's Handbook: The Essential Guide For Success With Plants*.
- Urban Farmer Seeds. Vegetable Planting Calendar. <https://www.ufseeds.com/>

Local Resources

Organization Name	Contact Information	Contact Person
Bench Farms	(419) 836-9443	Cindy Bench
Black Diamond Nurseries (Toledo Garden Center)	(419) 473-1409	Mike O'Rourke
B.U.G.G. Garden at Sofia Quintero Art and Culture Center	(419) 241-1655	Joe Balderas
Lucas Soil & Water Conservation District	(419) 893-1966 ext. 2	Jamie Kochensparger
Mighty Organics	(419) 215-6292	Thomas Jackson
Moe Urban Farm	(714) 689-3344	Liz Moe
The Harvest Doctor, LLC	theharvestdoctor@gmail.com	Dr. Carla Pattin
The Ohio State University (OSU) Extension Lucas County	Main: (419) 213-4254 Horticulture Office: (419) 574- 6783	Amy Stone & Patrice Powers-Baker
Toledo Grows	(419) 720-8714	Yvonne Dubielak
Urban Agriculture Alliance of Lucas County	uaalucascounty@gmail.com	Brittany Jones
Urban Wholistics	(419) 742-2585	Sonia McNair