

Earth and Leaf (Pty) Ltd

THE ULTIMATE **GUIDE TO** **START A** **VEGETABLE** **GARDEN**

CONTENTS

WELCOME!

GET THRIFTY

FUNCTIONALITY FIRST

FIND THE PERFECT SPOT

WHAT TO GROW!?

FLOWER POWER

GROW SEASONALLY

DIG OR NO DIG

GROW HEALTHY SOIL

LEARN AND OBSERVE

PLANT CLOVER

NOW FOR SHOPPING!

HAVE FUN

ALL THE BEST



WELCOME!

I'm so excited that you're planning to grow more of your own food!

Apart from the amazing health benefits, it will save you money and contribute to a more sustainable and self sufficient lifestyle.

Gardening can seem intimidating at first, but with the right tools and knowledge, anyone can grow their own fresh produce.



By growing some of your own food, you're eliminating large scale supply chains which include industrial fertilizers, pesticides, fuel and transport, plastics and other packaging, cold storage etc. So really, your actions have big impacts.

I've created this guide to help you start and enjoy a successful edible garden in easy to digest steps. If you follow these guidelines and spend a little time each day learning and practicing, gardening will become a life changing journey.

Let's get growing!



GET THRIFTY

Many people believe that gardening is an expensive hobby, requiring a lot of resources, time, and money. The good news is that this is simply not true.

In fact, it can be completely free! All you need is a bit of creativity and resourcefulness.

Here are some pointers:

- Start by saving and reusing items like old containers, pallets, and buckets to use as planters.
- Look for free compost from your local community or start your own compost pile using kitchen scraps and yard waste. Tip: Buy compost in winter to get better prices and quality!
- Collect seeds from your own produce or ask friends and neighbours if they have any to spare.
- Pro tip to save money - if you are taking up gardening seriously, you'll be getting frequent workouts. So consider cancelling your gym membership and use that money in your garden rather



Source cheap materials, reuse and build your own

FUNCTIONALITY FIRST

Sure, some social media accounts boast huge gardens with plenty of raised beds, arches, or landscaped spaces. There's no need for all this, especially right away. It's important to remember that the main goal of a vegetable garden is functionality. In fact, a functional garden can be just as productive as an expensive one, if not more so.

By focusing on the basics of soil health, watering, and proper plant selection, you can create a thriving vegetable garden that provides an abundance of fresh produce.

Instead of spending money on expensive raised beds and irrigation systems, consider using simple techniques like planting in rows or using low-cost watering methods like drip irrigation.

Remember, the goal of a vegetable garden is to provide fresh, healthy produce for you and your family, not to impress the neighbours with fancy equipment and landscaping.

THE PERFECT SPOT

Finding the right spot to garden, whether it be outdoors or indoors, can make all the difference in the success of your plants.

Plants have specific needs when it comes to light, water, and temperature, and choosing the wrong spot can lead to poor growth, disease, and even death.

It's important to do your research and observe your space before planting to ensure that your plants will thrive. Have a look at the time and date site ([here's the link](#)) to learn more about the movement of the sun for your specific area throughout the seasons.

Whether you have a large outdoor garden or a small indoor herb garden, finding the right spot can make gardening a rewarding and enjoyable experience.

- Try have your garden in a spot that gets a lot of sun; and spend a little bit of time understanding how the sun moves in your garden.
- In summer the sun rises and sets high from East to West, in winter the sun curves low and is less intense.
- Try position your garden in an open space if you can. Avoid house walls, trees and any structures that create a lot of shade as the sun moves through the different seasons.
- Shadows cast different in summer vs winter.
- If you're growing inside or on a balcony, opt for the sunniest spot.

WHAT TO GROW!?

Deciding what to grow in a vegetable garden can be a fun and exciting process, but it can also be overwhelming. Here are five tips to help you narrow down your choices and make the most of your garden space:

- **Assess your space:** Take a look at your garden space and consider factors like the amount of sunlight it receives, the quality of your soil, and any existing structures or features that may impact your planting options.
- **Consider your preferences:** Think about what vegetables you and your family enjoy eating and what you like to cook. This can help guide your choices and ensure that you're growing vegetables that you will actually use.
- **Think about the seasons:** Focus on vegetables that are well-suited to the current season. For example, in the spring you might plant cool-weather crops like lettuce, spinach, and peas, while in the summer you might focus on tomatoes, peppers, and cucumbers.
- **Optimize your space:** Consider using vertical gardening techniques, interplanting, or succession planting to make the most of your garden space and maximize your yield.
- **Start small and experiment:** If you're new to gardening or have limited space, it's a good idea to start with a few easy-to-grow vegetables and experiment as you go. This can help you build confidence and learn what works best in your garden.

WHAT TO GROW!?



Another thought is growing vegetables or fruit that go into your favourite sauces and grow more of those.

For example: If you love basil pesto, grow your own basil and make it at home to save tons of money and have abundant supplies.



FLOWER POWER

GROWING FLOWERS IN
YOUR VEGETABLE GARDEN
IS INCREDIBLY BENEFICIAL
FOR YOUR PLANTS AND
YOUR GARDEN ECOSYSTEM.

FLOWER POWER

Here are my top 5 favourite and EASY beneficial flowers to grow:

- **Marigolds:** These beautiful flowers are known for their ability to repel pests such as nematodes and whiteflies. They also attract beneficial insects like ladybugs and lacewings, which can help control aphids and other pests.
- **Nasturtiums:** Nasturtiums have bright, cheerful flowers that attract pollinators like bees and butterflies. They also repel aphids, cucumber beetles, and whiteflies, making them a great companion plant for your vegetables.
- **Calendula:** This pretty flower has been used for medicinal purposes for centuries, and is also a great addition to your garden. Calendula attracts pollinators and repels pests like aphids and tomato hornworms.
- **Sweet Alyssum:** These tiny, fragrant flowers are great for attracting beneficial insects like hoverflies and parasitic wasps, which can help control pests like aphids and caterpillars.
- **Sunflowers:** These towering flowers not only add beauty to your garden, but also attract bees and other pollinators. Their tall stature can also provide shade and support for climbing plants like beans and cucumbers.

In addition to their benefits for your garden, growing flowers can also provide a sense of joy and beauty to your space.

Other wonderful flowers include Zinnia, corn flower, California Poppy, Lavender, the list goes on.

Also plant some comfrey in and around your garden to help you with your composting once you get to that point. It's known for medicinal purposes as well.

GROW SEASONALLY



Growing vegetables in the correct season is important for a number of reasons.

Firstly, plants have evolved to grow in specific seasons when the climate and other environmental conditions are favourable for their growth. When vegetables are grown outside of their natural season, they may struggle to grow properly and may be more susceptible to pests and diseases.

Planting vegetables in the correct season can help maximize their growth potential and yield.

By following the natural cycles of the seasons, gardeners can work with nature rather than against it, which can help reduce the need for artificial inputs like fertilizers or pesticides, and create a more balanced and harmonious garden ecosystem.

For example, planting warm-season crops like tomatoes or peppers too early in the spring can lead to stunted growth or frost damage, while planting them too late in the summer can result in a shortened growing season and reduced harvest.

Leafy greens, root vegetables like carrots and beet, and brassicas (cauliflower, broccoli, kale, cabbage) do well in colder seasons.

Here's a tip: seed packets usually have sowing and growing directions; and you can ask your garden centre for advice as well. If you follow a few of your local gardening accounts, they'll sure have practical information for you.

DIG OR NO DIG

No dig gardening and tilling are two approaches to preparing soil for planting.

No dig gardening involves building up layers of organic matter on top of the soil, rather than tilling the soil. The layers of organic matter break down over time and create a nutrient-rich soil that is teeming with life. No dig gardening is less disruptive to the soil than tilling, which can help preserve soil structure and reduce erosion.

Additionally, no dig gardening can help reduce weed growth and increase moisture retention in the soil. However, it can take some time to build up the layers of organic matter needed for successful no dig gardening.



Here's an example of building a no dig bed. Round up some free cardboard, layer them well to block out any sunlight from the grass or plants below and add 15 - 20 cm of compost on top of the cardboard. This will kill the grass and the cardboard will decompose over time.

DIG OR NO DIG

Tilling involves breaking up the soil with a tiller or other tool to create a loose and aerated planting bed.

Tilling can be effective for incorporating organic matter and amendments into the soil, and can help create a uniform planting bed. However, tilling can also disrupt the soil structure, which can lead to soil compaction and erosion.

Additionally, tilling can bring weed seeds to the surface, which can lead to increased weed growth.



When deciding whether to use no dig or tilling methods, consider factors such as the condition of your soil, the types of crops you plan to grow, and your available resources.

No dig gardening may be a good choice for gardeners with healthy soil that doesn't need much amending, while tilling may be necessary for gardeners with compacted or poorly-draining soil. Ultimately, the best approach will depend on your specific needs and gardening goals.

GROW HEALTHY SOIL

Maintaining healthy soil is key to a successful vegetable garden. There are a number of simple soil health practices you can use to keep your soil in good condition.

First, make sure to add organic matter like compost or aged manure to your soil each season. This will help to improve soil structure, retain moisture, and provide nutrients for your plants. If you're starting a no dig bed from scratch or improving heavy clay soil, you'll need more compost initially, but after you only need to add a 5 - 10 cm layer of compost each season.

Additionally, consider using cover crops or green manure to help build soil fertility and reduce erosion. Cover crops can also help to attract beneficial insects and improve soil tilth.

Be mindful of soil compaction, which can limit root growth and reduce water infiltration. Avoid walking on garden beds or compacting soil with heavy machinery, and if you have the funds available consider using raised beds to improve drainage and reduce soil compaction.

Finally, always try to have something growing in soil, cover soil (mulch), and keep soil from drying out.

By following these simple soil health practices, you can ensure that your vegetable garden thrives and provides bountiful harvests season after season.

GROW HEALTHY SOIL



Use different kinds of mulch to cover your soil. Examples include straw, dried grass clippings, newspaper, cardboard, hay etc. Just avoid synthetic mulches in your food garden.

Try contacting a local animal feed producer and ask if they sell their bale offcuts. It might have a few seeds in but you could find a great deal on hay or other grasses. I use grade C hay and have no problems! I allow the odd wheat seed to grow as treats for my hens :)



LEARN AND OBSERVE

Spend 15 - 30 minutes a day in your garden or learning about your garden. There's a lot of information and really useful accounts that break up gardening topics into digestible chunks

Learn about a technique every day or week and apply what makes sense to your garden.

Here are some topics you'll want to learn about and there are many in-depth posts on Youtube and Instagram:

- o Requirements for the vegetables you choose to grow
- o Different types of mulch to cover soil and what will work for your setup
- o How and why to remove spent plants while keeping the root structures in the soil
- o Basic preservation techniques and recipes for the produce you grow
- o Common plant pests and disease
- o Interplanting and companion planting
- o Watering your plants. When, how, how much
- o Vertical gardening and how to create DIY vertical structures
- o Composting, vermicomposting
- o Organic fertilizers and how to use specific fertilizers (the composition and types e.g. granules, powders and liquid).
Tip!, While your at it, try learn how to make your own fertilizers with free things you probably have - weeds and banana peels



LEARN AND OBSERVE

You will encounter pests and disease; and you will kill a few plants. This is normal! Gardening is a journey and it takes time to learn new skills.

It's perfectly fine to buy seedlings instead of starting from seeds. In fact, many experienced gardeners choose to buy seedlings because it saves time and effort. Starting from seeds can be tricky and requires a lot of attention and care. Once you get more comfortable with gardening, you can start experimenting with starting from seeds.

Additionally, reusing seedling trays can save you money and reduce waste. After you've transplanted your seedlings into your garden, you can clean and sanitize the trays and use them again for your next round of seedlings. It's all about finding what works best for you and your garden, and there's no shame in taking it one step at a time.

You will have weeds to manage - even when installing the most expensive walkways, weeds spread through seeds that blow and settle everywhere. So keep on top of weeds by spending a few minutes each week tidying up your garden or pulling weeds when you water by hand.

As you embark on your gardening journey, observe and document your progress. Create a simple excel sheet or use a journal to track basics like:

- Date
- Weather pattern
- Bed number/ name
- What you sowed/ planted
- Quantity
- Harvest
- Issues
- Actions



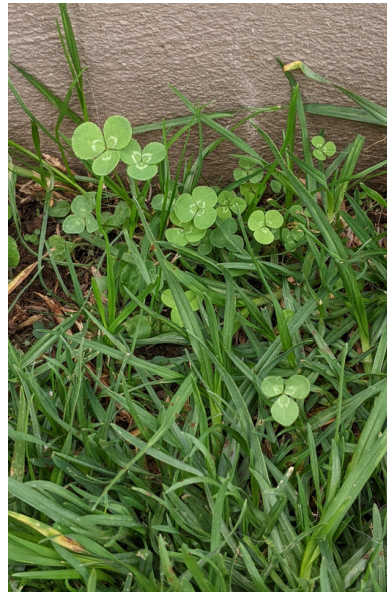
PLANT CLOVER

Clover is a versatile and useful plant in a vegetable garden. One of its most popular uses is as a living pathway between garden beds.

White Clover grows low to the ground, which makes it an excellent ground cover, and it's also drought-tolerant, making it a great choice for areas that receive little water.

Additionally, clover is a nitrogen-fixer, meaning it can convert nitrogen from the air into a form that's available to plants. This makes it a valuable addition to a vegetable garden, as it can improve soil fertility and reduce the need for chemical fertilizers.

Finally, clover can also be used as a green manure. When it's tilled into the soil, it provides a source of organic matter and nitrogen, which can improve soil health and structure. In short, clover is an excellent plant to have in your garden, whether you use it as a living pathway, a nitrogen-fixer, or a green manure.



NOW FOR SHOPPING!

Creating a new garden can be a thrilling experience, and it's easy to get swept up in the excitement of choosing new plants and tools. However, before heading to the garden center, it's important to take a step back and plan out your garden to ensure that you're not overspending on unnecessary items.

Planning before shopping can save you time and money in the long run, and can help you make informed decisions about what to purchase. Here are tips and strategies for planning your garden before heading to the store, so that you can create a beautiful and thriving garden while staying within your budget.

To start you really only need a few basic things. Stick to this list to save your hard earned money:

- Gardening goods are generally cheaper in off seasons (winter)
- Source good quality compost. If you have a small space you can get away with a few bags; for bigger spaces check if any local farms or garden centres can deliver larger scale batches to you
- Spend on good quality potting soil for container gardens
- Purchase organic neem oil to help fight general pests (buy a small container to start off, you will dilute it when needed)
- Once you have learnt a little about fertilizers, purchase a good organic fertilizer to prepare growing spaces as well as feed your plants through their growing stages
- Only purchase basic tools like a water can, a set of sturdy gloves, a spade and garden shears. A garden hose might also be a good idea
- Only buy enough seedlings for your space. Ask the garden centre for special deals as well and check trays to see if you can find ones with more than one seedling per tray holder
- Only buy one or two packets of seeds to start and learn

HAVE FUN

As a beginner gardener, it's completely normal to feel unsure about certain aspects of gardening.

However, it's important to remember that gardening is a process of learning and experimentation.

You don't need to have all the answers or follow strict rules to be successful.

Trust your gut and experiment with different techniques and methods to find what works best for you and your garden.

Sometimes even seasoned gardeners can give confusing information, so compare and test for yourself. This is my motto... Go with your gut and what your garden tells you.

Don't be afraid to try new things and make mistakes. Gardening is a fun and rewarding journey, and every gardener's journey is unique. So have fun, be patient, and enjoy the process of growing and learning!

Here's to your amazing gardening journey!



ALL THE BEST!

