

I was disappointed with my vegetable garden this year. Not sure what I did wrong. What are some of the main things I could do to help me have a more productive garden next year? KT First of all, let's talk about soil. As we teach in our gardening classes, it all starts with the soil. Soil chemistry can seem intimidating, but it doesn't have to be. The first thing you need to do, if you haven't, is get a soil test. Yes, you can fertilize blind (so to speak), but if you do, you never know if you are adding too much or too little fertilizer. The beauty of a soil test is that it will not only give you the current condition of your soil chemistry, but you will also get recommendations on how to get your soil from where it is nutrient wise to where it needs to be. Basic soil tests only cost \$10 from OSU, and they are money well spent in my view. We have directions on how to get a soil test on the Soil page in the Lawn and Garden Help section of our website, tulsamastergardeners.org. Once you have your soil where it needs to be, you can start thinking about what you want to grow. With the list of potential crops numbering in the thousands, choosing can be a little intimidating. If you are a beginner, we suggest you start with something that we know grows well in Oklahoma. On the Vegetables page in the Lawn and Garden Help section of our website, we have suggested varieties for the main garden crops. These are varieties that have proven themselves well suited to our Oklahoma weather. So start there and then venture out into the more exotic crops. Those nonstandard plants are a lot of fun, but before going there, build up your confidence with a season or two of success in your garden. Next, be serious about crop rotation. Many of us tend to want to plant the same thing in the same spot in our garden year after year. But this can contribute to a build up of disease that will greatly reduce your

success in the future. Rotating crops every three years or so helps to minimize this problem. To rotate successfully, you will need to learn the vegetable families. For example, many of us grow vegetables in the Solanaceous (Nightshade) family. Members of this family include tomatoes, eggplant, bell peppers and potatoes. So if you are going to rotate your crops, you are not rotating properly if you put peppers where the tomatoes were or potatoes where the peppers were, etc. Because these plants are in the same family, they will be susceptible to many of the same diseases. Instead, you will need to rotate crops with different families, such as Legumes (beans) or Cucurbits (cucumbers, melons, squash, etc.). Sometimes pollination is problematic. It seems like this year we had a lot of people complaining that their vegetable flowers were not getting pollinated. There are some seasonal reasons for this, but sometimes it is due to a lack of pollinators. To help avoid this situation, make your garden a destination for pollinators. You can do this by planting flowers or other edibles that attract pollinators. Personally, I plant flowers around and in my vegetable gardens. Flowers can help attract pollinators to your garden, and while the pollinators are there, they can visit your vegetables. Two great edibles you can plant in or around your garden are oregano and basil. It seems like all summer long, these plants were buzzing with pollinators in my garden. So a little pollinator bait never hurts. Next, ignore some of the folklore found on the internet. One of the main ones I am reminded of is Epsom salts. There are always plenty of recommendations out there about adding a little Epsom salt when you plant a new veggie plant. The only reason to add Epsom salts would be if you have a magnesium deficiency, and you won't know that without a soil test. Just adding Epsom salts to your soil can raise magnesium to unhealthy levels. It can also contribute to blossom end rot in tomatoes, which is ironically why many people use Epsom salts to begin with. Next, water consistently. I know it's hard at times, but your plants will

do better with consistent watering rather than rocking back and forth between over-abundance and drought conditions. And water in the mornings. Watering in the evenings leaves your plants wet through the night, which makes them more susceptible to disease. Lastly, pay attention to your plants. Keep an eye on them. Many issues are much easier resolved in the early stages before a condition or disease gets established. Yes, all of this adds up to a bit more work, but if you are like me, I would rather do the work on the prevention side than on the disaster control side. Hereâ€™s to a great garden season next year! Featured video: Ramona Reed, once a member of Bob Wills' band, sings a song with her daughter You can get answers to all your gardening questions by calling the Tulsa Master Gardeners Help Line at 918-746-3701, dropping by our Diagnostic Center at 4116 E. 15th St., or by emailing us at mg@tulsamastergardeners.org.