

Iâ€™ve never grown vegetables before, but I want to start next year. Any advice?

SH Congratulations on wanting to become a vegetable gardener. I know that for many of us, getting out and working in our vegetable gardens in 2020 not only helped to keep us sane, but also reduced our trips out to the grocery store. In a way, itâ€™s the ultimate social distancing activity. As you are thinking through what you want to do, there are some things you need to consider.

First of all: What type of vegetable garden do you want to have? Because you are just beginning, I would suggest you start small for at least the first year. Donâ€™t go out and till up your entire backyard, as you will likely get overwhelmed. Container gardens are a good place to start and are especially great if you donâ€™t live somewhere you can have an in-ground garden. You can grow vegetables in almost any type of container. Five-gallon buckets are good for tomatoes or peppers, among others. Just be sure to drill some holes in the bottom of the bucket so that excess water can drain out the bottom. Once your bucket is ready, you will just need to fill it with some garden soil.

Containers can also be decorative, just like those you might use for flowers, if you are so inclined. If you have the space and budget, raised beds are a great solution. For your first bed, maybe something about 4 feet across and 6 to 8 feet in length would be a good place to start. These beds only need to be about 8 inches deep and can be made of wood or concrete blocks. There are also raised bed kits available locally and online.

Once you get your bed built, you will need to find some good garden soil. To fill your bed with soil, you can buy a bunch of those bags of soil at the garden center or (and I think this is really easier) get a friend with a pickup truck, go to a place that sells garden soil and have them load it up. You may have to do a

little math to figure out how much you need, but the people who sell soil can help you with that. Location is the next big thing you need to think about. Vegetables need to be in a location with full sun. Full sun is considered at least 8 to 10 hours a day. You can get by with less, but your plants and production may not be as robust as they could have been. There are other types of gardens, such as hydroponic, aquaponic and aeroponic. These will require a greater financial investment and may not be the best place for a new gardener to start. We have information on these types of gardens, if you are so inclined. Once you decide what type of garden you want to have, you'll need to think about what you want to grow. Our best advice: Grow what you will eat. And by this I mean, pick something you like to eat and then plant an appropriate amount. For example: You won't need 12 tomato plants, but maybe two or three would be good. Again, we have a lot of information on varieties of vegetables that do well in Oklahoma on our website, tulsamastergardeners.org. The next decision you will have to make is, do you want to start your plants from seed or would you rather purchase plants ready to plant? Seeds are definitely more economical, as you can get a package including dozens of seeds for several dollars compared to a single plant for the same money. But to start, you may want to buy plants ready to go. If you want to try starting your plants from seed, you can get your seeds locally in the spring or you can get busy ordering seed catalogs now. I usually recommend catalogs from Baker Creek, Burpee, Johnny's and Stokes, among others. Next, I would suggest you sketch out your garden using the size of a fully grown plant as your guide. That info will be in the seed catalogs. This is important because you don't want to overcrowd your garden. Good airflow is a first line of defense against plant disease. Also, if you plan on growing

cucumbers or squash, take into account that they take up a lot of garden space. I have been growing cucumbers on trellises for years, and it is a great way to get a good harvest without having your garden taken over with cucumber vines. You may also want to consider signing up for our Urban Gardener series of classes that are currently available in an online format. We usually teach these classes in person, but 2020 moved them online for now. In these classes, we talk about soil health, vegetable gardens, pollinator gardens, trees and shrubs, and turf management. It is a good overview of a lot of topics. Again, you can find out more information and sign up on our website. Welcome to gardening! Featured scene video: Go behind the scenes with an aquarist at the Oklahoma Aquarium Treat yourself at Tulsa's top bakeries 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.