

Kitchen Gardens: Getting Started

Why a kitchen garden? Growing fruits and vegetables for consumption can improve household food security, nutrition, and income.

What do you need to start a kitchen garden?

Sun. Sun-loving vegetables need at least **6 hours** of direct sun per day to grow well (**8-10 hours is ideal**). Locate such vegetables away from the shade of buildings, trees, fences, compound walls (Figure 1), and to the south of taller vegetables such as corn. Avoid shading on the north side of buildings, trees, etc. by placing gardens as far from the structure as the height of the structure. Gardens to the south of trees and structures do not have shading problems and can be located close to structures. South-facing slopes are warmer and less subject to damaging frosts.



Figure 1. This compacted courtyard soil has been loosened to start a bed. Locate gardens close to water sources and far enough from courtyard walls to avoid afternoon shade. Photo: C. Hughes, 2013.



Figure 2. Composted kitchen waste from this compost pile can be added to a garden bed to build soil structure and nutrients. Photo: C. Hughes, 2013.

Water. Vegetables grow best when watered every few days, so locate gardens close to a water source (Figure 1). Some irrigation options include hand watering or drip irrigation.

Soil. Where possible, put planting beds on **flat, well-drained** land (no standing water after a hard rain). If land is steep and erosion is likely, use contour planting, terraces, or grasses between rows.

Soil preparation. A pick axe and shovel may be required to loosen compacted soil (Figure 1). Add **sand** to clay soils to help with drainage. **Compost** is easy to make and improves soil nutrients and soil structure (Figure 2).

Protection. If **wind** is a problem, build or grow a windbreak, such as a row of shrubs. Fence the garden to keep out **chickens** and other **livestock**, as well as children and unwanted visitors.

A good garden location has easy water access, 6 or more hours of sunlight, good soil drainage, and protection from wind and animals.

What should you plant?

Start by planting hardy, easy-to-grow vegetables that the family likes to eat. If families have little experience growing vegetables, start with a “container garden,” i.e., grow a few plants in pots. Moving containers around is a great way to experiment with the ideal location before digging beds. As gardeners gain experience, they can plant more area and more types of vegetables (see **examples** below). Getting good seed to plant is critical for success.

Vegetables requiring less space (good for containers)*		Vegetables requiring more space (good for beds)*	
Prefer cool temperatures (Plant late spring or fall)	Prefer hot weather (Plant late spring or summer)	Prefer cool temperatures (Plant late spring or fall)	Prefer hot weather (Plant late spring or summer)
Lettuce, broccoli, onion, carrots, cabbage, garlic, leafy greens, onions, peas	Eggplant, okra	Potatoes	Cucumber, melon, peppers, squashes, sweet corn, tomatoes

* See the “Cool Season/ Warm Season Crops IS” for more ideas of crops to plant in different seasons.

Reference: Cornell University, Vegetable Growing Basics, <http://www.gardening.cornell.edu/homegardening/scene196e.html> and Mccrate, C., & Halm, B. (2012). Food grown right, in your backyard. Mountaineers Books.