

Basic Circular Vegetable Gardening



You can start a vegetable garden any time anywhere. You don't need a lot of space for a vegetable garden.. Even if you only have a tiny window space or a small balcony, plant some herbs and vegetables in containers. Growing your own vegetables saves you money and gives every member of your family, young and old, an opportunity to make a contribution. It is also a great way to spend fun time with children outside in the sun.

First plan your garden by making a list of the vegetables that you use most as a family. Some plants keep providing food for the whole season, so you only need a few plants. Others give only one crop, like carrots, so you need more plants. Choose one vegetable from each of the groups listed below and divide your garden into four sections to plant each of these vegetables in its own space:

- Group 1: Plants grown for their leaves or flowers, eg lettuce, cabbage, spinach, broccoli
- Group 2: Plants grown for their fruits, eg tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, cucumber, potatoes
- Group 3: Plants grown for their roots, eg carrots, beetroot, onions, turnips, radish
- Group 4: Plants grown for their seeds (legumes), eg beans, peas, peanuts.

This idea is based on plants that are friendly towards each other. It also allows for crop rotation each year. This makes it easier to manage pests, avoid the spread of plant diseases, feed the soil, and bear the best crop.

Good companion plants don't compete for root space, light and nutrients. Herbs make good companions because their scent, shape and taste prevent pests from eating their neighbouring plants. The following plants make good companions:

- Beetroots, cabbage, lettuce, tomatoes and spring onions
- Beans, eggplant and potatoes

Beans, chives, fennel, garlic, onion and spring onion do not grow well together.

Choose the best spot keeping in mind the following three basic needs for success. Most vegetables like:

- Full sun: At least 6-8 hours of direct sun
- Good soil: Moist, well-drained soil that's rich in organic matter, eg compost
- Plenty of water: Water when the weather is dry, as most vegetables don't cope well with drought.

Prepare the soil by loosening the soil by digging. Mix 2 parts of compost to 3 parts of kraal manure and 2 parts of bone meal. Spread this and work it into the soil. Finally, smooth the surface with a rake and water well. Allow the soil to rest for several days before you plant.



A communal vegetable garden in a city

Plant your seeds into empty egg cartons, toilet roll holders, or any other bio-degradable container so that you can plant the actual container instead of transplanting the seedlings. Seeds can also be germinated in paper towel and transplanted when they start to shoot, by simply burying the paper towel in the seed tray or soil. If you use paper towelling, just place the seeds between the sheets and lightly spray them with water. Do not over water as the seeds will rot. Place in the warmth of the sun on a windowsill. Transplant when the seeds begin to sprout. Most seeds take between 6-12 weeks to germinate. Soaking large seeds for up to 24 hours in water speeds up the germination process.

Planting times differ for different plants. Check the seed packet for details. If planting directly into seed trays or containers, cover with a thin layer of soil and water by means of a spray bottle to keep the moisture soft and even. Place your seedlings in a window with plenty of sun and wait for them to grow. Transplant when they seem strong enough to cope with exposure to the weather.

Care and feeding is important. Weeds compete with your vegetables for water and nutrients, so it is important to keep them to a minimum. Lightly stirring (cultivating) the top 2 cms of soil regularly discourages weeds. Also a clean layer of straw or compost on the surface can keep weeds at bay around larger plants like tomatoes.

