



Garden Manual

Growing Vegetables In Your Own Backyard

WELCOME:

Congratulations on growing your own food in your own garden! We know that gardeners are always eager to learn and so we have included lots of information in this manual about planning, planting, watering, pest control and fertilizing. A thorough reading of this guide should be very useful.

MY PLEDGE TO THE COMMUNITY:

By receiving a raised bed garden from Project SHARE, I am accepting the responsibility to take care of it. I will be rewarded with fresh food of my choosing and the benefits of gardening for years to come. I will share the produce that I cannot use and will share the idea of gardening with my family and community.

ABOUT US:

This garden has been brought to you by the Niagara Region and by Project SHARE, a multi-service organization committed to helping people who live on a low income in the City of Niagara Falls through programs that involve and assist with providing basic needs.

The Backyard Garden Program supports urban gardeners by building safe, easy to use gardens for residents and community organizations of Niagara Falls.

The goals of these raised bed gardens are to:

- increase local food production in Niagara Falls
- help residents grow their own food
- improve access to healthy, fresh vegetables for residents who need it most
- build capacity and community among urban residents
- help organizations utilize vegetable gardening as an educational tool

CONTACT US:

If you have advice, recipes, questions or gardening experiences that you would like to share, we would love to hear them. Send us your input:



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

Project SHARE appreciates the generosity and wisdom of The Food Project in Boston MA, Growing Places Garden Project in Harvard, MA and the Kitchen Garden Project, part of Garden-Raised Bounty (GRuB) in Olympia, WA. They taught us the ins and outs of constructing raised beds that wouldn't fall apart, and they graciously shared their growing manuals with us. Many of the words and illustrations in this guide are theirs.

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Raised Bed Gardens

Welcome to your new raised bed garden. Raised bed gardens can be constructed out of many materials. Untreated wood will last for several years and will not leach chemicals into your food plants like pressure treated wood. Layer newspapers at the bottom of the bed frame to provide a barrier from the grass, or if building your garden on rock, soil or asphalt, use landscape fabric below the raised bed. Finally, the frame is filled with clean, nutrient-rich compost. Whether you are a seasoned gardener or a first-timer, we hope you will enjoy growing healthy, fresh food for yourself, your family and friends for many years in your new raised bed garden.

Why raised beds? There are many advantages to growing food in raised beds. Here are a few:

The soil warms up faster in the spring, allowing for earlier planting.

Water is able to drain easily.

The garden can be tended from the edges, so the soil does not become compacted by people walking in the garden and remains loose.

Loose soil makes seeding, transplanting and weeding easier;

Plants like the loose soil because it gives them plenty of space for their roots to grow.

Raised beds can be planted more intensively than a traditional backyard garden. This means you can grow more vegetables in smaller spaces.

Raised beds make it possible to grow safely even on land that is contaminated with lead and other heavy metals.

Depending upon the severity of the winter and your own inventiveness, the garden can be used year-round, although most people grow their vegetables from mid-April through late October.

Fewer tools are needed to help you plant and care for your garden.

USEFUL TOOLS: The good news is that you will need very few tools to be successful in a raised bed! A pitchfork or shovel might help loosen the soil at the start of each season. During the season, scissors and a hand trowel are quite handy. Other useful things you might find around the house are spray bottles for pest control; plastic knives or popsicle sticks for labeling; and a bucket to fill with weeds.

This guide contains specific information on how to plant and grow a variety of vegetables that are well adapted to our climate in the Niagara Region. We have included information on where to place the raised beds, planning which crops to plant and when to plant them, watering, caring for the soil and getting rid of pests. There are many ways to plant a garden, so feel free to experiment and try other methods. Talk to other gardeners in your neighborhood and see what is working for them. Talk with Project SHARE staff about signing up for one of our workshops or gardener gatherings. Read gardening books, magazines, and seed catalogues. We have included a list of them as well as other helpful resources in the back of this guide. Of course, the best teacher is —trial and error!—so roll up your sleeves and have fun!

Where to Put a Raised Bed Garden

Most crops require at least six hours of direct sun in the summer so it is important to site your garden in a sunny area. Observe your yard during different times of the day to determine which spot gets the best sun. If you are doing this in the spring, remember to account for trees that may block light once the foliage appears. It is helpful to have a source of water nearby or you may find yourself having to carry water which can get tiring in a dry summer. Some afternoon shade may benefit the garden by helping to conserve soil moisture. However, it is advised to place gardens away from the drip line of buildings or structures that have lead paint on them, as the lead can contaminate the soil in the garden.

Square Foot Gardening

Project SHARE recommends using the square foot method to plan your garden. Mel Bartholomew, who developed this type of gardening in the late 1970s, discovered that this method could produce a greater harvest in less space with less work. In square foot gardening, the plants are arranged in blocks instead of rows. Each block contains a different vegetable, herb or flower. The number of seeds or plants that are placed in each square depends on how large the plant grows and how much space it needs to develop properly. The quality of the compost and soil in the raised bed also impacts how intensely you can grow. (See —Feeding the Soil section, page 16) By using this technique, you can easily maintain and replant squares throughout the season without disturbing other areas of the garden. **This growing method is also easy to learn, which is especially encouraging for first-timers!**

Garden Planning

TIPS TO CONSIDER:

The best time to *plan* a garden is during the winter.

You may want to choose to grow only the crops that are particularly well suited to growing in small spaces (small plants, quick growing plants, things that can be grown on trellises or vertically save space; plants with a high yield: kale and collards continue producing leaves for harvesting while cabbage only produces one head per plant).

For vegetables that take up a lot of space in your bed, such as cabbage, corn, winter squash, and melons, consider buying this produce at your local farmers' market.

If you have a favorite vegetable, consider planting two or three squares of it.

If you plan to grow more than one square of something that matures quickly (carrots, radishes, lettuce, beans), consider planting each square 2-3 weeks apart (succession planting) to spread out the harvest.

Plan to continue to use squares after something is finished producing and has been harvested. For example, after four weeks, you will harvest your radishes and have an empty square. Plant another square of radishes, or perhaps a fall crop of greens.

STEP-BY-STEP:

1. Using the Planning Chart (page 26), make a list of all the fruits, vegetables, herbs, and flowers that you want to grow and eat.

2. Use the Square Foot Planting Guide (pages 9-14) to determine how many squares each type of plant requires and its height. Then write this into your chart accordingly.
3. Using the Raised Bed Grid on page 27, mark off the North side of your raised bed. (This can be along either the short or long side of the bed, depending on the setup of your space. Use a compass or look at your street on a map to determine which direction is North.)
4. To determine what goes in each square on the Raised Bed Grid, you will use the plants' height. Write all plants that are marked as —short in the height column on your Planning Chart into the squares on the south side of your garden so that they will not be shaded by the taller plants.
5. Write the plants that are of medium height into the center squares.
6. The tallest plants should go in the squares on the north side. Make sure to block out several squares for large plants, such as tomatoes or summer squash.
7. If you are going to add a trellis, it should be built onto the north (most preferable) or west side. Mark off where it will be built on your Raised Bed Grid. Make sure to place the climbing plants, such as pole beans, cucumbers, or peas at the base of the trellis.
8. Now determine how many individual plants can be planted in each square. This information is contained in the Square Foot Planting Guide. Write the number (Example: 4 plants for lettuce, 16 for carrots) on the map next to the name of the plant.
9. Next, fill in the —planting schedule column on your Planning Chart. Do this by writing out the dates for when you can and will plant each crop (using the date ranges from the Square Foot Planting Guide). This will ensure that you start everything on time and prevent you from forgetting to plant something! You may want to write the dates out sequentially after you're finished.
10. Finally, fill in the —estimated harvest time column on your Planning Chart. This will help you figure out when it's time to harvest something, and get you thinking about what to replant in a square once it's empty. Using the date when you plan to plant each crop, write in the estimated date for when the crop will be ready to harvest. You can find this information on individual seed packages. The length of time a crop needs to mature varies depending on each specific variety. Some plants take so long time to mature that they use their squares throughout the entire growing season. In other words, nothing else can be planted in these squares. This includes most fruiting plants, such as peppers, eggplant, and tomatoes.

Planting Your Garden

MARKING OFF SQUARES:

Before planting, we recommend that you use a measuring tape to mark off each foot along the four sides of the raised bed. For some, it is helpful to hammer nails into the frame at each mark, and then string the bed in order to form a grid.

Alternatively, take a stick or handle of a garden tool and lay it across the bed from a mark to the one directly opposite on the other side of the bed. Push it lightly into the soil until it leaves an indentation in the soil. Continue marking the soil around the bed until you have formed a grid pattern on the soil. Now you are ready to plant.

PLANTING METHODS:

There are two ways to get plants in your garden – by putting in seeds (direct seed method) or by putting in small plants that you have grown indoors or purchased (transplant method). See the Square Foot Planting Guide (pages 9-14) for more information about specific plants' needs. When you plant your garden, try to stay outside the raised bed so that you do not compact the soil by walking or stepping on it. If you need to get to the center of the beds and can't reach from the side, lay a plank across the frame and kneel on it.

Direct Seeding: First, look at the seed package to determine how old the seeds are. If they are new, then the germination rate should be accurate. For new seeds that are below 90%, it is best to plant two seeds per hole to ensure that they germinate. Older seeds will generally continue to sprout if they are kept dry and well preserved. However, older seeds have lower germination rates so it is recommended to seed heavier (2-3 seeds per hole, for instance) to ensure that enough will come up. If you don't see a seedling after the suggested germination time, replant more seeds. Seeds that are more than four years old are probably worth tossing. (See —Seed Information Chart for crop-specific seed storage, page 23)

To determine how deep to plant the seeds, refer to the seed packet, Seed Information Chart (page 23), or the Square Foot Planting Guide (pages 9-14). Planting depths usually range from 1/8 inch to 1 inch. If you find yourself in the garden without access to this information, you can follow these general rules: in cool weather, plant a seed deep enough so that 3 more of the same seed could lie on top of it. In hot weather, 4 seeds should be able to lie on top of it – this will help protect the seed from drying out as it starts to grow. In other words, smaller seeds are planted less deep than larger seeds. Before starting, dampening the soil will make it easier to poke holes. Cover all seeds lightly with soil, and pat the soil gently to bring seeds into contact with soil.

Since you are rarely equipped with a ruler when you go out to the garden, it's helpful to know that the length of your index finger from the first knuckle to the tip is approximately one inch. So just use your own finger as a guide.

Be sure to water the seeds gently right after you plant them. This is best done with a spray bottle or mist nozzle on a hose. Some of the seeds are so small and so close to the top of the soil that a stream of water can wash them away. **Keep soil moist – not soaking – as seeds germinate.** The compost mix that is in the raised bed dries out fairly quickly. For this reason, it is important to water the seeds gently each morning until they germinate. Try to avoid watering in the middle of the day when soil moisture evaporates the quickest.

Transplanting: To transplant, dig a hole in the soil slightly larger than the container in which the seedling is growing. Carefully pry the entire plant and the surrounding soil out of the pot. Generally, it helps to turn the plant upside down and apply gentle pressure to the bottom—the root ball should slide out.

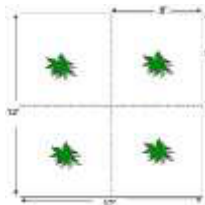
If you see a clump of tangled roots at the bottom of the root ball, gently tickle those roots loose. Set the root ball, roots down, into the hole, and fill it with soil. With vegetable transplants you can bury the plant up to the first set of leaves; this will keep the seedling from drying out too quickly. Pat down the soil firmly around the plant so that the roots are in contact with the soil. Smooth the soil out around the stem so that the surface of the soil drains slightly toward the plant. This will help the plant collect moisture.

Example of a root-bound transplant. Gently pry the roots loose before planting.

Water the base (not the leaves) of each seedling immediately after transplanting and for the next few days until they are established, especially if transplanting in mid-summer. Newly transplanted seedlings often suffer from shock and look sad for a few days but perk up after that. To lessen the shock, **transplant on cloudy days or early in the morning.**

LABELING: Label what you have planted in each square so you will remember the location of plants. Including the planting date on the label will let you know how long ago you planted and when you should expect to see the first sprouts as well as an estimation of when you can expect a plant to be ready for harvesting. Plastic knives work well as cheap labels!

SPACING: When using the Square Foot Gardening technique, plants are spaced differently than they are in traditional row methods. Look at the diagram below to see how this works. If you are planting lettuce, turn to the Planting Guide to see how many heads of lettuce can fit in a square – 4. In your lettuce square (represented by the solid lines) draw a grid in the soil with your finger that divides your square into 4 equal blocks (represented by the dashed lines). Plant your seeds or transplants in the center of these smaller blocks as in the picture below.

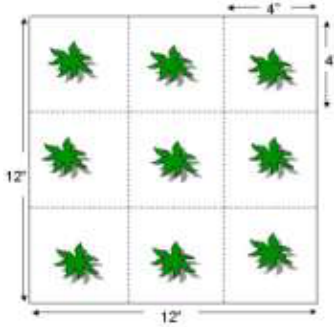


CLIMBING PLANTS: —Vertical crops such as peas, pole beans, and cucumbers, like to climb, so plant their seeds in a line underneath the trellis, near the edge of the bed. Train the plants to climb up the trellis by twisting the main stem through the trellis once a week. Alternatively, you can plant cucumbers along an edge or corner square (towards the front since they are short when not growing vertically) and train the vine to grow out of the box in order to save space.

Square Foot Planting Guide

Here is specific information on how to grow different types of vegetables.

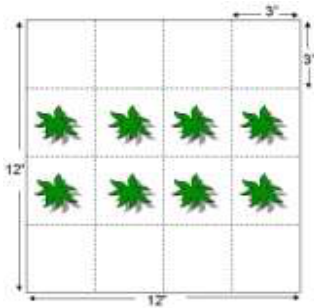
Beans – Bush:



Bush bean varieties mature earlier than pole beans. Direct seed in late May after soil has warmed and then every 3 weeks through July for a season-long supply. When watering beans, be careful not to wet the foliage; diseases and fungus love to grow on wet leaves. Harvest beans when the foliage is dry.

Square Foot Planting: 9 bush beans per square foot
Seed depth: 1" **Direct seed**
Germination: 7-10 days; **Height:** Medium

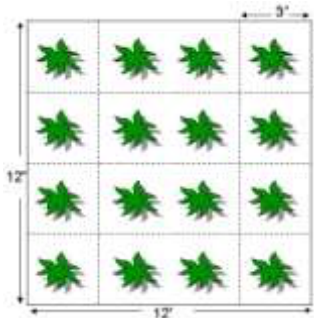
Beans – Pole:



The most effective use of space is to grow pole beans (climbing varieties) on a trellis. A single planting will supply you throughout the season. Sow the seeds along the bottom of a trellis. As they grow, help plants wrap up and around the trellis. The taller the trellis the better!

Square Foot Planting: 4 pole beans per square foot of trellis
Seed depth: 1" **Direct seed**
Germination: 7-10 days **Height:** Tall

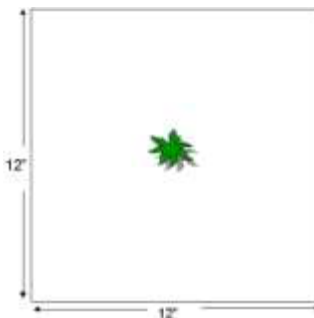
Beets:



Grown for both the greens as well as the beet root. Earliest plantings can fail if it is too cold and wet. Sow every 3 weeks from mid-April through mid-August for a continual supply.

Square Foot Planting: 16 beets per square foot
Seed depth: 1/2 inc **Direct seed**
Germination: 5 days **Height:** Short

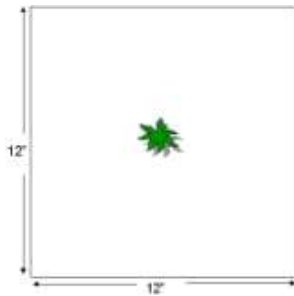
Broccoli:



Transplant in late April for early crop. Direct seed May-June for fall crop. Harvest the central head before yellow flower buds open. Then enjoy the tasty side shoots, which the plant produces all summer long. Water regularly throughout the season.

Square Foot Planting: 1 broccoli per square foot
Seed depth: 1/2 inch **Direct seed or Transplant**
Germination: 4-7 days **Height:** Medium

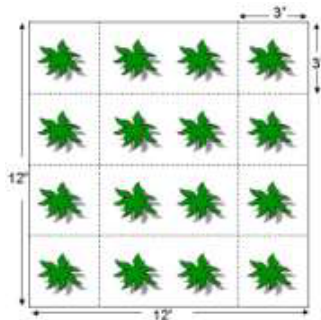
Cabbage:



Transplant in late April for early crop. Direct seed May-June for fall crop. Water regularly throughout the season.

Square Foot Planting: **1 cabbage per square foot**
Seed depth: 1/2 inch **Direct seed or Transplant**
Germination: 5 days **Height: Medium**

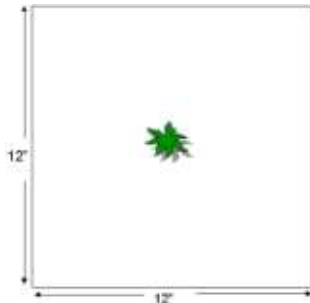
Carrots:



Carrots can be sown at 3 week intervals from late April to early August. Draw 4 evenly spaced, shallow lines (1/4" deep) using fingers. Broadcast (sprinkle) seed evenly over each line (about 8-12 seeds per line). Lightly pack down soil so seeds are in contact with it. Thin to 2-3 inches apart after germination. Keep soil moist and weed-free after planting.

Square Foot Planting: **16 carrots per square foot**
Seed depth: 1/4-1/2 inch **Direct seed**
Germination: 6-17 days **Height: Short**
(depending on temperature)

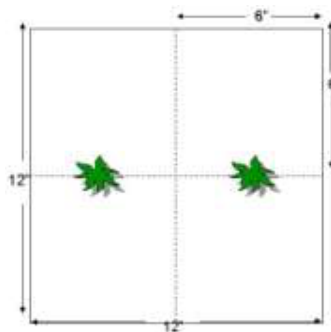
Cauliflower:



Transplant 4-5 week old seedlings in late April/early May after danger of hard frost has passed. Water regularly throughout the season. To keep the head white, leaves must be tied up around the head as soon as the heads become visible through the leaves.

Square Foot Planting: **1 cauliflower per square foot**
Seed depth: 1/2 inch **Transplant**
Germination: 6 days **Height: Medium**

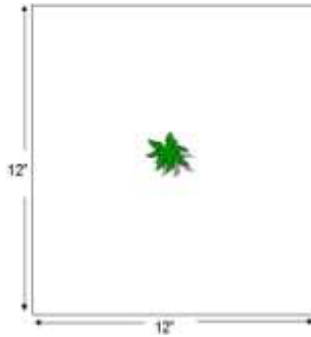
Cucumbers:



Grow on a trellis, or plant close to edge in a side or corner square and train vine to grow outside of box, to conserve space. Plant seeds or starts in mid-late May when the soil has warmed up and danger of frost is past. Be careful not to disturb the roots of these seedlings.

Square Foot Planting: **2 cucumbers per foot**
Seed depth: 1/2 inch **Direct seed or Transplant**
Germination: 3-4 days **Height: Short (Tall if trellised)**

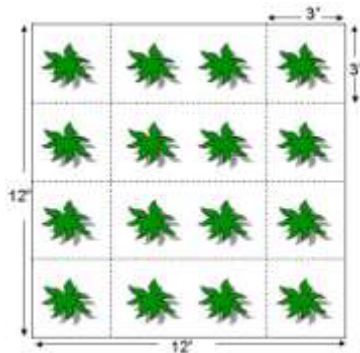
Eggplant:



Must be transplanted to develop mature fruit in southern Ontario. They need plenty of sun and heat. Plant transplants when the weather has warmed up, in late May or early June.

Square Foot Planting: **1 eggplant per square foot**
Seed depth: 1/4 inch **Transplant**
Germination: 7-14 days **Height: Medium**

Garlic:



Break up bulb into individual cloves. Plant the cloves (root side down) in October after other crops are harvested. Cover with mulch for the winter. The garlic will be ready to harvest next July. For an early garlic treat, be sure to snip off the curlicue flower buds that appear in May and June. The buds (called scapes) are delicious when grilled, stir-fried or sautéed. Cutting them will also enable the plant to put energy into the bulb.

Square Foot Planting: **9-16 garlic cloves per square foot**
Clove depth: 2 inches **Height: Medium**
(pointed end up)

Herbs, perennial:

Common perennial herbs include **sage, oregano, mint, and thyme**. **Rosemary** is a tender perennial, so it needs to be brought inside over the winter. These herbs spread, so cut back regularly, or dig up in spring or fall, divide, and give half to a friend; then replant. Plant 1 per square; or planting in containers works well and saves space.

Herbs, annual:

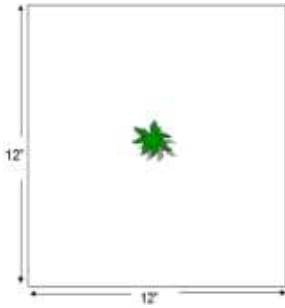
Basil- can be planted alongside of tomatoes (make sure to leave enough space so they don't get shaded by tomatoes). Otherwise, plant 2 per square. Cutting back regularly will provide a good harvest, and encourage more (bushier) growth. Transplant or direct seed.

Cilantro- draw 4 lines in a square, sprinkle about 10 seeds along each line. Or, plant a smaller amount within another square, such as with spinach. Seed every 3 weeks for continuous crop. Direct seed only.

Dill- Direct seed 4 per square.

Parsley- Difficult to direct seed so best off buying transplants. 2 per square.

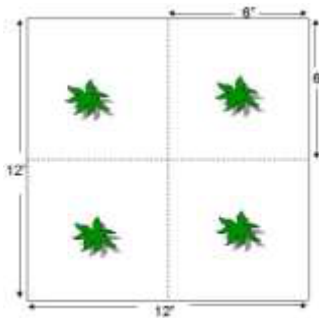
Kale:



Enjoy fresh kale from early summer through fall by planting seeds from late April through July. Harvest outer leaves as they mature, leaving the rest of the plant to keep producing. If the winter is not too severe, kale sometimes produces into the following spring.

Square Foot Planting: 1 kale per square foot
Seed depth: 1/4 inch **Direct seed or Transplant**
Germination: 5-7 days **Height:** Medium

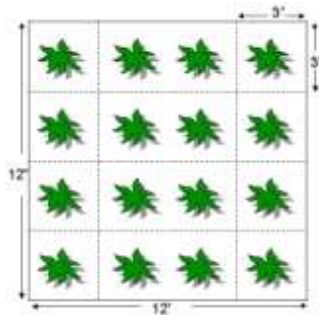
Lettuce:



Seed or transplant at ten-day intervals starting in early April. When it gets hot, lettuce tends to —boltll or send up its seed stalks before the plant is fully mature. Try to use —slow boltll varieties since they will not become bitter as quickly. During the hottest part of the summer, plant lettuce where it will get some shade.

Square Foot Planting: 4 lettuce per square foot
Seed depth: 1/8 inch **Direct seed or Transplant**
Germination: 7-14 days **Height:** Short-Medium

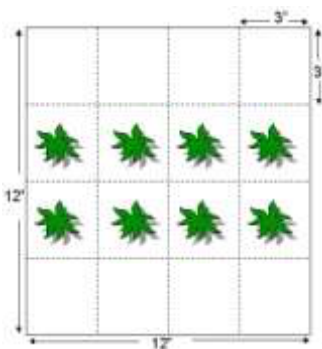
Onions:



Onions can be started from sets (small bulbs) or seedlings transplanted starting in mid-April. Separate seedlings into individual plants. Keep onions well weeded, and give them an inch of water each week. The bigger the plants get before the Summer Solstice (June 21), the bigger the onions you'll grow.

Square Foot Planting: 9-16 onions per square foot
Seed depth: 1/4 inch **Set depth:** 1 inch
Germination: 4-5 days **Height:** short

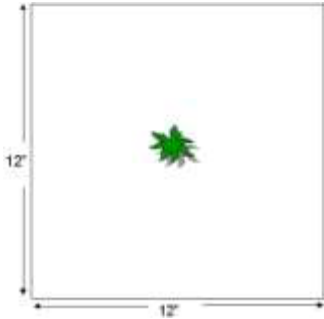
Peas:



Peas grow best in cool weather so plant from early April to mid-May, or plant in August for fall crop. Snow peas seem to do especially well in the fall. Climbing varieties save space and don't require successive plantings. Plant them along the base of a trellis and twist the main stem through the trellis once a week. Try snap pea varieties—fat peas with an edible pod. They are productive and delicious.

Square Foot Planting: 8-12 plants per ft of trellis
Seed depth: 1 inch **Direct seed**
Germination: 14 days **Height:** Tall

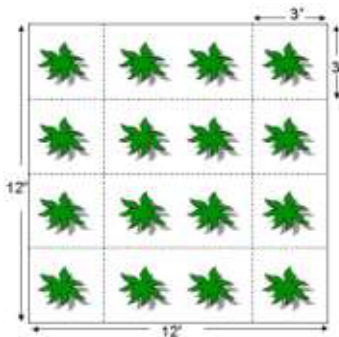
Peppers:



Peppers need lots of sun and heat to grow well. They must be transplanted here in southern Ontario. Set transplants out in late May or early June. Early maturing varieties will do the best.

Square Foot Planting: 1 pepper per square foot
Seed depth: 1/4 inch **Transplant**
Germination: 10-15 days **Height: Medium**

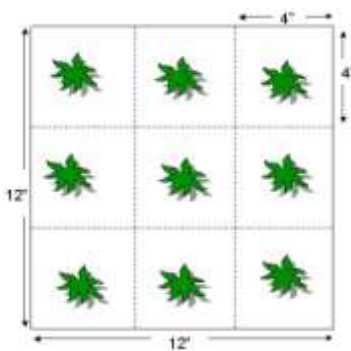
Radishes:



A very gratifying crop because it grows quickly. Radishes can be sown every three weeks from early April to early August. For mild and tender radishes, give them plenty of moisture. Begin to harvest in 3-4 weeks when the root is the size of a marble. They will split and get very spicy if you let them grow too big.

Square Foot Planting: 16 radishes per square foot
Seed depth: 1/2 inch **Direct seed**
Germination: 4-12 days **Height: Short**

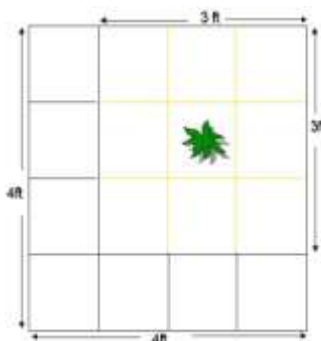
Spinach:



Spinach germinates best in cool, moist soil so plant every 1-2 weeks from late March through mid-May. Sow in August for a fall harvest. Spinach will tend to —boltll (make flowers and seeds) during the summer heat.

Square Foot Planting: 9 spinach per square foot
Seed depth: 1/2 inch **Direct seed**
Germination: 7-14 days **Height: Short**

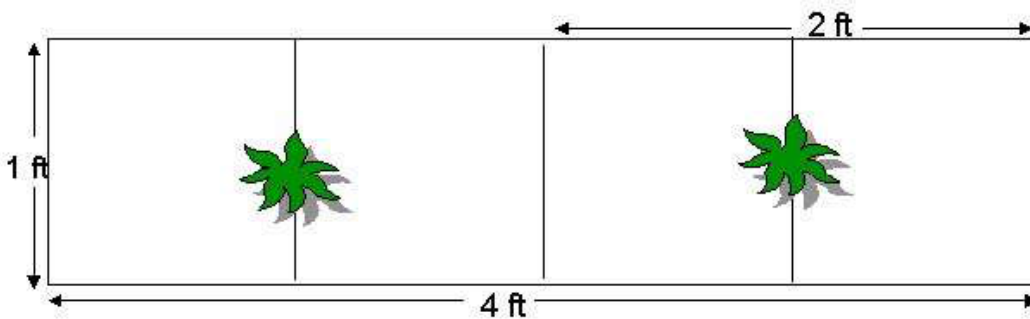
Summer Squash (zucchini, yellow squash):



Seed or transplant after the soil has warmed up, late May to early June. Mound soil in the center of 3 foot by 3 foot space about 4 inches high and plant 1-2 seeds in center of mound. One or two mounds usually provide more than enough squash for most families. Harvest several times a week so fruits don't grow too big and lose flavor.

Square Foot Planting: 1 squash plant in a 3 foot by 3 foot block
Seed depth: 1/2-1 inch **Direct seed or Transplant**
Germination: 6-10 days **Height: Medium**

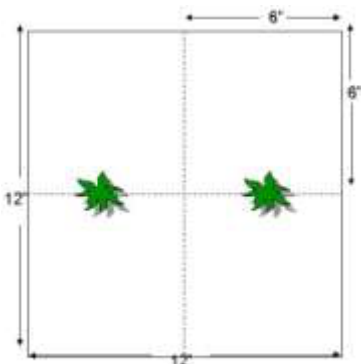
Squash, Winter (acorn, pumpkins, butternut):



If you just love winter squash and have to have some from your garden, you need to plan ahead. Winter squash really sprawls out and needs lots of room. Plant near the edges of your raised bed and train the vines to sprawl across your yard. Winter squashes with smaller fruits (such as sugar pumpkins) and gourds can be grown on a trellis. Set out transplants or direct seed after the soil has warmed up (late May to mid-June).

Square Foot Planting: *2 winter squash vines in a 1 ft by 4 ft row or under trellis*
Seed depth: 1 inch
Germination: 6-10 days
Direct seed or Transplant
Height: Medium – Tall

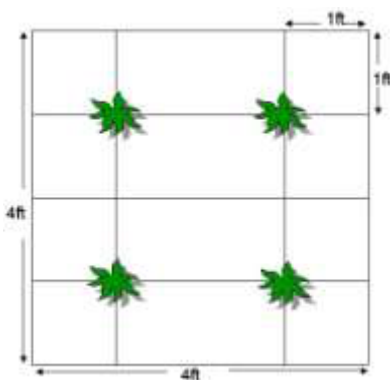
Swiss Chard:



A good green for the whole growing season. Plant from early April until mid-July. Harvest outer leaves as they mature, and leave the rest of the plant to keep producing. A few plantings, spaced every two months will supply you for most of the season. Red chard is more resistant to pests than green.

Square Foot Planting: *2 per square foot*
Seed depth: 1/2 inch; **Direct seed or Transplant**
Germination: 5-7 days; **Height:** Short – Medium

Tomatoes:



Must be transplanted to develop mature fruit in southern Ontario. Transplant outside in late May to early June. —Indeterminate varieties will need to be trellised or staked and should be pruned back to the best 2-4 leaders (main stalks) on each plant. —Determinate varieties will not need to be pruned, and will sprawl a little more. Withholding water after mid-August will force the vines to ripen more fruit. Removing all young flower clusters after mid-September will help the remaining fruit ripen

Square Foot Planting: *1 tomato in a 2 foot by 2 foot block or 2 tomatoes under 4 feet of trellis*
Seed depth: 1/4 inch; **Transplant**
Germination: 6-14 days; **Height:** Tall

Caring for Your Garden

WATERING: When seeds or seedlings are first planted in the garden, they will need frequent watering to keep their root systems (but not leaves) moist. **Check the moisture level in the top 2” of soil by sticking your finger into the soil; if it is dry, it is time to water.** If you have a —soaker hose, lay it down in the middle of the beds and turn it on low for twenty minutes every other day. Water the soil deeply to encourage the plants to develop deep roots. Be careful not to give too much water, as the soil we use is highly organic and it can become waterlogged. If you do not own a hose, use a bucket and a cup as a scoop to water the individual squares, which works especially well for plants that have just been transplanted.

The frequency and amount of watering will depend on the weather and the size of the plants. If it has been rainy, it is not necessary to water as frequently as when it has been sunny and dry. After seedlings are established and growing well, you can water less frequently.

When watering by hand, be sure to pour close to the ground so you do not —rupture the soil or create large puddles. This also prevents the leaves from getting wet, which can lead to blight and other fungus problems. Water and harvest your garden during the cooler hours of the day — preferably in the morning. If the plants look yellow, they are getting too much water; if they look wilted, they are not getting enough. During the midsummer when the weather is usually drier, it might be necessary to water every day. **If leafy plants look wilted at midday, but perky again at night and early morning, they are doing fine.**

THINNING: To be sure to have the maximum number of strong plants growing per square, gardeners often plant extra seeds (perhaps instead of one seed per hole, you put two.) After the seeds germinate, you therefore might have more than one plant in a single spot. Decide which one seems the strongest and —thin out the others. Yes, you must find the courage to do this—plants need the right amount of space to continue growing! Thin your seedlings by gently pulling out the shoots you don’t want or carefully use small scissors to clip off the unwanted sprouts at the base of the shoot.

WEEDING: Between the time you plant your garden and the time you harvest the last tomato, most of your time will be spent pulling weeds. Weeding is an important part of caring for any garden because without control, weeds can easily over grow and crowd out slower growing vegetables and fruits. **The best way to keep up with the weeds is to spend a few minutes pulling weeds every day or every few days so that the task will always be manageable.** If you neglect your garden for several weeks, you may have trouble finding your crops when you return and it will take you longer than a few minutes to make the garden free of weeds again. The most important thing to remember is to remove the weeds before they go to seed and spread more weeds around your garden. (Think of a dandelion.) Another good way to beat the weeds is to use mulch in the garden. (See the mulching section below for more information)

Removing weeds from a raised bed garden is often easier than from traditional gardens since the soil in a raised bed does not get compacted so roots come loose easily. It is easiest to pull weeds when they are small as long as you can distinguish the tiny weed leaves from those of the crops you have planted. (Labeling what you plant will help you identify the wanted from the unwanted.) Weeding is also easier when the soil is moist, such as after watering or a rain storm.

You can remove weeds by hand or use a tool such as a claw, a co-linear hoe or a hula hoe. Just make sure you get all the roots out so they don't grow back. If you use a tool for weeding, be careful not to work too close to the base of the vegetables or flowers so that you do not damage the roots. When hand weeding around plants, hold the plants in place as you pull the weeds so that you do not inadvertently pull out the plants you want along with the weeds. When you are finished, you can collect all the discarded weeds and add them to your compost pile.

MULCHING: One advantage of raised beds is that the soil warms sooner, so the beds can be planted earlier in the season. However, this also means that the beds are more susceptible to drying out. To help conserve moisture, we recommend that you mulch your garden if you can. Straw (preferred), shredded leaves, compost, and dried grass cuttings can all be used as mulch. Spread the mulch several inches thick over the surface of the bed after the plants have established themselves or put down a layer of newspaper first and then cover it with mulch. At the end of the season, this mulch can be turned under to add organic matter to the soil. A layer of mulch will also help keep weeds in check.

FEEDING THE SOIL: The most important part of a healthy garden is healthy soil. The soil provides nutrients that are necessary for plant growth. The square foot garden method that we advocate for in this guide is particularly dependent on nutrient-rich soil. Healthy, fertile soil can support more plants- plants that are stronger, bear more fruit and will provide more nutrient-dense food for your family. Feed the soil and it will feed you!

Organic matter is an essential component of healthy soil. It helps dry soils to hold moisture and wet soils to drain, it add nutrients to the soil, it creates air spaces so the roots can penetrate the soil, and it binds up toxic materials in the soil so that the plants can't absorb them. Adding compost is a good way to incorporate organic matter into your soil.

A rich compost high in organic matter will be made of a variety of sources: food waste, manures, coffee grinds, and garden waste. Starting your own compost pile is an easy way to feed your garden!



Not All Compost is the Same: We recommend that you add more compost to your garden bed each year in order to replenish the nutrients and bind up any particulates of heavy metals that may have blown into the bed during the winter.

Ideally, a rich compost high in organic matter will be made of a variety of sources—food waste, manures, coffee grinds and garden waste are some examples. We encourage you to make your own compost.

Making your own compost: Here are some guidelines for making your own compost in your backyard:

Locate your composter on bare soil, somewhere in your garden that is easily accessible all year round.

You should try to mix both Green and Brown materials when composting.

Greens (Nitrogen Rich)

- Grass & Garden Clippings
- Green Leaves
- Livestock Manure
- Fruit and Vegetable Scraps
- Coffee Grounds and Filters
- Tea Leaves and bags
- Egg Shells

Browns (Carbon Rich)

- Straw and Hay
- Dry Leaves and Dry Grass
- Nut Shells
- Corn Cobs
- Pine Needles
- Peat Moss

When starting a compost pile, you should put a lot of materials in all at once. Chop large items into smaller pieces to help with the process. Try to ensure that your compost is moist but not wet. – when squeezed in your hand, a few drops of water should be produced. Add water if it is too dry; cover and add dry material if too wet.

Keep adding materials, remembering to agitate the contents every couple of weeks throughout spring and summer to keep air flowing through.

Your compost is ready when it is dark in colour and smells like earth. This can take from 6 to 18 months depending on the materials used and the time of year.

Compost Cautions

- Wood branches, sawdust, newsprint take longer to break down and are better left out of home compost bins
- Livestock manures should be well composted before putting on gardens. Do Not add pet manure to your compost bin.
- Do Not compost meat, dairy, oils and fats, cooked foods
- Composters work best when they are at least a one metre/3 foot cube. This allows the necessary heat to build up to break down the matter in the compost and turn it into usable material more quickly

PEST CONTROL: The best way to keep pests away from your garden is to grow healthy plants since strong, healthy plants tend to fight off invading pests. In addition, certain vegetables, such as onions, will help to repel insects if planted around the edge or throughout the garden. Flowers and herbs, such as nasturtiums and marigolds, can also provide protection from pests.

Many common household items, such as newspaper, spray bottles, dish soap, and beer, work well to fight off pests in your garden!

If pests do find their way to your garden, try these remedies:

For *aphids*, mix one teaspoon of dish soap with one quart of water. Spray the aphids with it once a week, over a two to three week period.

For *flea beetles*, try sprinkling the leaves with ground cayenne pepper. You can purchase a large jar of this at most dollar stores.

To prevent *cutworms* from chewing through the stems of your newly transplanted peppers, eggplant and tomatoes, loosely wrap the stems of the transplants at the base with 2 inch wide strips of newspaper and bury the bottom edge 1/2 ' deep in the soil. The paper will discourage the cutworms when the transplants are young and dissolve as the plants get larger.

In the Northeast, *slugs* can be a problem for gardeners. They tend to hide under surfaces and around wood. There are several ways to dispose of them. You can pick them off, trap them under a board or melon rind at night, or you can put out traps made of jar lids filled with beer. The slugs will drink the beer and drown in it. Spreading a gritty material, such as sand, around the base of the plants will also deter them.

For *Japanese beetles*, *Mexican bean beetles*, *Colorado potato beetles*, and *cucumber beetles*, hand pick the adults and the larva and squish or drop into a jar of water. Be sure to scrape any egg masses off the leaves as well. It is easiest to capture these pests in the early morning when the temperatures are still cool.

Try putting a short piece of a board between your squash plants to trap the *squash beetles*. They will hide under the board at night and can be easily captured in the morning.

If you notice that the leaves on your tomato plants are looking like skeletons, you probably have *tomato hornworms* in your garden. You will need to look carefully to find the caterpillars hiding among the leaves as they are green and well camouflaged. When you find them, pick them off and dispose of them. They look scary, but they will not bite.

Removing weeds and diseased plants from your garden will also help to keep your plants healthier and pest free.

Not all insects you will see in your garden are there to eat your plants. A number of them are helpful to gardeners because they prey on other insects or they help to pollinate your crops. Without insects such as bumblebees, honey bees, and butterflies we would not have tomatoes, squash, or peppers. Ladybug beetles, trichogramma wasps, soldier beetles and lacewings are among the insect predators that feed on pests in your garden. You can attract these friendly insects by planting nectar-producing flowers and herbs, such as parsley and dill, around and throughout your garden.

Mid-Summer Planting for Fall Crops

Mid-summer (late July- mid August) is a good time to think about planting garden crops for fall harvest.

CROPS: In mid-summer you can plant **lettuce, radishes, carrots, beets, spinach, bush beans, peas, kale, swiss chard, broccoli, cabbage and cauliflower.**

Mid-summer is **too late** to plant winter squash, zucchini, cucumbers, tomatoes or other crops that require a long season for harvest.

Plants in the cabbage family such as broccoli, cauliflower, kale and cabbage make excellent late season choices because cool weather enhances their flavor and they are frost tolerant. Leaf or head lettuce develops a sweet, mild flavor in cool weather. Carrots and beets planted in mid-summer will not have time to grow excessively large before harvest but will store well for the late fall and into winter.

HOW TO PLANT MID-SUMMER: Mid-summer plantings need to grow quickly and vigorously because the growing season is shorter. Take care of the preliminaries to give them the best start possible.

Use the bare soil left by harvesting short-season spring crops, or leave space intentionally for this purpose. Empty spaces in gardens tend to accumulate weeds.

If space is not available exactly when mid-summer planting needs to take place, start seeds of plants like lettuce, cauliflower, cabbage and broccoli in a sheltered location of the garden. Plant the seeds in good soil in rows close together. Transplant them to their growing location as earlier crops mature and are removed. This will save garden space and require less seed.

Remove all dead plants and weeds (including roots) from the area to be planted. Till or turn the soil to loosen it and work in organic matter/compost.

Germination can be a problem in hot, dry summer weather. As the soil surface dries out quickly and crusts, the small seeds have a hard time emerging. Soak large seeds such as beans and peas in water overnight before planting. This will help them to germinate once they are planted.

Conserve moisture in the soil by covering rows with light mulch such as grass clippings. Water lightly and frequently until the seeds appear. Another option is to cover the row with thin boards or burlap strips. Check frequently to see when the seedlings germinate and remove the board. Burlap allows water to penetrate without causing the soil to crust over. Remove the burlap covering when the seeds germinate.

Light shelter or shade should be provided during the hottest portions of the very hot summer days until the seedlings are established. Seedbed covers, made from two long boards nailed together at a 90-degree angle, form an excellent cover to let the seeds germinate. These covers form a "tent" over the row to keep the seedbed moist.

FALL CLEANUP AND GREEN TOMATOES

Your garden has been spending a lot of time feeding you, now it's time to feed it! After the first hard frost (sometime in October) many of your plants will die. At that point your job is to:

- Remove all weeds and dead plants except those that are still producing (root vegetables, kale, broccoli, lettuce). Add them to your compost bin, breaking or chopping bigger plants into smaller pieces
- Remove decaying vegetables and fruits. Add these to your compost bin also.
- Sprinkle a thin layer of compost on the soil and around the plants that are still producing. You do not need to work it in to the bed. This will give your garden a good meal over the winter so that it's ready to plant in the early spring.

WHAT TO DO WITH ALL THOSE GREEN TOMATOES?

Ripen them: Wrap them in clean newspaper or lay them on a newspaper lined tray or cookie sheet and keep them at room temperature. Check them often.

Preserve them as Green Tomato Chutney, Green Tomato Dill Pickles, Green Tomato Salsa... you get the idea; there are lots of options. Check the internet or your local library for recipes.

Eat them as **Fried Green Tomatoes:**

These are tasty served on a bed of lettuce with crumbled goat or feta cheese.

- 1 pound green tomatoes
- ½ cup cornmeal
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh oregano or thyme leaves
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 large egg
- 1 tablespoon water
- 1/3 cup olive oil

Remove a ¼ -inch slice from the stem end of each tomato. Cut the tomatoes crosswise into 1/2 -inch-thick slices. Lay the tomatoes out on a couple of layers of paper towels.

Combine the cornmeal, oregano, salt and pepper to taste in a shallow, wide bowl. Beat the egg and water in another shallow, wide bowl.

Heat the oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Remove the tomato slices from the paper towels (the seeds should stay behind) and dip in the egg and then drag them through the cornmeal mixture, making sure both sides are well coated. Place the slices, a few at a time, in the hot oil. Fry, turning once until golden brown and crisp on both sides, about 5 minutes (reduce heat if oil starts to smoke).

Transfer the fried tomatoes to plates lined with paper towels. Continue until all are cooked.

Resources

SEED CATALOGS:

Seed catalogs are a great place to find good quality seeds, and they are full of helpful information. Below is a list of a few seed catalogs that have seeds that grow well in southern Ontario. You can call to request a catalog, or check out their websites.

Stokes Seeds (905)688-4300 www.stokeseeds.com
Ontario Seed Company (519) 886-0557 www.oscseeds.com
Veseys Seeds (800) 363-7333 www.veseys.com
William Dam Seeds (905) 628-6641 www.damseeds.ca

NIAGARA FALLS PLANT NURSERIES:

Mullen Bros. Garden Market, corner of Drummond Rd. and Morrison St., Niagara Falls
Rainbow Greenhouses Ltd, 6353 Carlton, Niagara Falls
Country Basket Garden Centre, 10008 Lundy's Lane, Niagara Falls

HELPFUL BOOKS:

How to Grow More Vegetables by John Jeavons
Square Foot Gardening by Mel Bartholomew

ONLINE RESOURCES:

Organic Gardening Magazine: <http://www.organicgardening.com/>
Click on „Growing A - Z“ and then „vegetables“

Cornell University: <http://www.gardening.cornell.edu/vegetables/index.html>
Their “growing guides” have fact sheets for more than 50 vegetables that include basic techniques, and common pests, diseases and problems.

Growing Places Garden Project: <http://www.growingplaces.org/newsletters.html>
A catalogue of Growing Places Garden Project’s monthly Newsletters from 2004 to the present. Many helpful tips & tricks for raised bed gardens specifically, plus they’re organized sequentially through the growing season!

COMPOST BINS:

Backyard compost bins are available at a price of \$20 from Niagara Recycling, 4935 Kent Ave. Niagara Falls. Monday – Friday 8 AM- 4:30 PM

Companion Planting Charts

Companion planting means that certain vegetables, herbs, and flowers **like** to grow together. They often help each other grow better, yield more or taste better. Some plants can also repel pests or attract pollinators. These plants can be planted in squares next to each other or even in the same square if there is enough space.

Vegetable	Compatible With	NOT Compatible With
Beans	Cabbage family, carrot, corn, cucumber, eggplant, peas, potato, Swiss chard, marigold, nasturtium, oregano	Chive, garlic, leek, onion
Beets	Bush beans, cabbage family, lettuce, onion, garlic	Pole beans
Cabbage family*	Beets, cucumber, lettuce, onion, potato, spinach, Swiss chard, chamomile, dill, garlic, nasturtium, sage, thyme	Pole beans, tomato
Carrot	Beans, lettuce, onion, peas, peppers, tomato, chives, rosemary, sage, thyme	Dill
Corn	Beans, cucumber, melon, peas, potato, squash, marigold, parsley	Tomato
Cucumber	Beans, cabbage family, corn, lettuce, tomato, marigold, parsley	Potato, sage
Eggplant	Beans, peppers, marigold, thyme	
Lettuce	Beet, cabbage family, carrot, onion, chive, dill, garlic, onion	
Melon	Corn, pumpkin, squash, marigold, nasturtium, oregano	
Peas	Beans, carrot, corn, cucumber, turnip, parsley	Onion family**, squash, tomato
Peppers	Carrot, eggplant, onion, tomato, basil	
Spinach	Cabbage family, lettuce, pea, radish, onion	
Squash	Corn, melon, pumpkin, radish, marigold, nasturtium, oregano, onion	
Tomato	Asparagus, beans, carrot, cucumber, onion, peppers, eggplant, basil, chive, parsley, sage, thyme	Corn, dill, cabbage family, potato

*Family members include broccoli, Brussel sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, collards, kale, kohlrabi, turnips

** Onion family includes asparagus, chive, garlic, leek, onion, and scallion

Examples of plants that can help deter pests include:

- Nasturtiums, marigolds, cosmos
- Members of the mint family
- Members of the onion family

Notes and Questions

(Scratch space for notes, questions, your own garden designs, other)

Stay in touch!

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