

Ag Column
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Start a Vegetable Garden

Gardening is a great way of spending time outdoors during the Covid-19 Coronavirus Outbreak. You can grow a garden in a conventional garden or in raised beds. Each of these methods can produce a successful garden. You only need to till the existing soil to have a conventional garden. A raised bed garden is elevated above ground level either by piling the soil up or by building frames to hold the garden beds.

Some major advantages of raised beds are a more intensified growing area with walking paths. You can walk through the garden immediately after a rain to pull weeds. The beds warm quickly in the spring to allow an earlier start to the gardening year and you can easily adjust the soil for better yields. With a good soil or growing media, you won't need a rototiller because the soil will be very loose.

The first consideration would be to do a soil test of your garden to ensure you apply the right amount of nutrients and your soil pH is correct. Extension soil labs offer soil testing services. You can call your local Extension Office about soil testing.

Next, you will want to decide what you want to plant in your garden. Gardeners have the option of growing both cool and warm-season vegetables. Cool-season vegetables are typically grown in the early spring and again in the fall. Warm-season vegetables are typically grown during the summer as the chance of frost has passed. Some vegetables such as beans or corn may be planted in late April, which can handle cooler temperatures than other warm season vegetables. Most warm-season vegetables should be planted after the chance of frost has passed or plan to cover on cold nights. Refer to UT Extension SP291-P, Guide to Warm-Season Garden Vegetables for some general recommendations.

Planting a crop in stages can sometimes help with pest control. For example, you can plant squash every two weeks. This will give you a fresh youthful planting to harvest, as the squash vine borer overcomes older plantings.

If you are short on space, grow plants that climb to maximize your yields. You can plant your beans so they climb the corn stalks if you time it right. You can also use poles, sections of fence, and other trellises to support plants.

Gardening does not have to end with frost in the fall. You can prepare to cover vegetables in the fall to extend the growing season. Cool-season vegetables planted in August can produce into early winter with proper planning.

Take advantage of the extra time at home, as we continue to practice social distancing. Make 2020 your best garden year ever!

