

## Gardening Basics

You visit the local farmer's market on a whim, stroll past vegetable stands, herb bunches, and flower bouquets. Finally, your eyes fixate on a huge tomato that's bigger than both of your hands put together. It pulls you toward it; you lift it in your palms up to your nose and inhale all the sweetness of a thousand harvests. You are ruined in an instant and vow never again to be seen buying little mushy pre-ripened red water balloons that the local grocers label as the same fruit.

The "real" thing is always better than a fake, lacquered, forced vegetable. If you've ever wished you could grow your own crops, you're not alone. Hundreds of thousands of people have realized the taste and nutritional benefits of producing their own food. Not every body has a large patch of ground in which to sow their seeds. But anyone anywhere can grow their own food.

Embrace whatever situation you have, and creatively compose your garden. For people who live in the city or apartment complexes, a container garden might be ideal. Grow boxes and wide beds can be installed in virtually any sunny location. Indoor lights can simulate sunlight if your location doesn't get enough direct rays.

Your ability to garden is limited only by your location and imagination. Focus on what you have available to you, not what you don't. A lady in South Dakota grows enough fresh vegetables on their picnic table for her two young sons. They won't eat the store bought stuff, but they devour her organically-grown delectables. A culinary arts college student in California grows his own chives and oregano in his window.

Once you've located a spot for your plants that has enough direct light throughout the day, there are a handful of tools you'll want to pick up before getting started. Everyone needs a hand trowel and a hand-held weeding tool. A soil test kit, shovel, leaf rake, steel ground rake, pruners, hoe and pitchfork are also helpful, depending on whether you are gardening in the ground or in containers.

### Getting Started in the Ground

If you are reclaiming an area outside for regular in-the-ground gardening, you'll probably need to clear the area of dead vegetation, garbage, rocks and other debris. Test the soil ph with a simple kit that costs a few bucks at a gardening store. If you're soil is too alkaline, it may recommend you amend the dirt with aluminum sulfate, iron sulfate, or sulphure. If it's too acidic, add the amount of lime it recommends on the kit.

Make sure your soil is a good loam, meaning it's spongy enough to soak in water, but sandy enough to drain properly. It should have just enough clay in it that when you squeeze some in your fist, it retains some of its shape but crumbles easily. Adjust your soil by adding half in of clay or three inches of sand at a time. You might also want to add Humus, molded leafs, or peat moss.

Consider building wide beds by scraping dirt into rectangle that's about three feet wide and five or six feet long, with a depth of at least 18 inches. If you lay weed mat or newspapers covered with straw on the walkways in between, you'll have very little weeding to do throughout the season. The other reason wide beds are recommended is that they are water-economical. Because you plant staggered instead of in rows, more food can be raised in a smaller area. Also, no plants have roots that naturally conform to single-row gardening. Wide beds allow roots to spread naturally, hence they support larger harvests.

Once you get your watering system in, you're ready to plant. People have a lot of success by laying drip hoses about a foot apart across wide beds, then covering the whole bed with weed mat. The weed mat warms the soil and helps retain water. After starting seeds indoors before the last frost, thin plants directly into the soil. Water frequently enough to keep soil moist but not soggy. As plants become established, let no more than the top two inches of dirt dry out before watering. Now all you need to worry about is organic pest management.

### Getting Started in Containers

Micro gardening is becoming the new trend because people now realize the potential to grow large amounts of food in small areas. Containers, by their nature, will contain or retard root development some. Choose medium or large containers, as small, single plants will dry out too quickly. Think wide but not necessarily tall. Containers should be at least two feet in height. Their diameters depend on how plant type and quantity desired.

One barrel up against a wall that gets direct sunlight can hold a few different types of plants. Place taller plants (like tomatoes, beans or peas) in the back, medium-sized plants (like peppers, onions, carrots or beets) in the middle, and low-growing spreaders (like pumpkins and creeping thyme) in the front and on the sides. Plan out your container garden before you seed.

You can plan, arrange and fill your containers before the last frost. Just make sure they never sit in standing water. Wrap them in bubble wrap if you're worried about them freezing, and place plastic over the tops to help warm up the soil. Indoors, a few weeks before your anticipated last frost, start 50% more seeds than you plan on using to make sure you get enough healthy sprouts to fill your containers. Thin and transplant directly into the containers – through the plastic if you want weed control -- before seedlings get spindly.

Water containers once or twice a day, depending entirely upon your zone. Just like with wide beds, it's good for the plants if the first inch or two of soil dries out. Don't ever let them dry out completely or sit in water. A higher quality planting mix should take care of these issues. Feed container plants once or twice through the season, and use organic pest-control methods.

Farming in containers or in the ground is equally rewarding. The essence of self-sufficiency is growing and harvesting your own food. Embrace lighting and space availabilities as opportunities to eat more healthfully and enjoy the process of gardening.

### About the Author

David Beart is owner of the [Professors House](#), a site dedicated to family, relationships, [gardening](#), and household issues.

Source: [www.isnare.com](http://www.isnare.com)

Source: <http://articles.exospy.com>