

Growing vegetables in Central Oregon

By Jack Remington
Correspondent

If you like the taste of really fresh vegetables, want to reduce your grocery bills, are fit enough to dig, shovel and rake, have a spare hour or two each day, have a plot of ground 10-by-10 feet or more in full sun, know a little about how plants grow and are willing to learn more — then, you are ready to try a veggie garden!

We moved to Deschutes County in 1988 and started building our home seven miles northeast of Bend. Even before we completed the house, the idea for a garden came up, so in a small plot of native soil we planted potatoes to see what would happen. We watered with a sprinkling can. Small green shoots came up, appeared to be healthy, grew to maturity, turned brown and died back as expected. What was in the ground as a crop? We dug under the brown stems and found a few small marbles the color and shape of potatoes, but far from what we could buy at Safeway.

First lesson: native soil in Deschutes County will not

grow much of anything except native high desert plants and invasive weeds.

Fortunately, Deschutes County is home to a horticulture program through the Oregon State University Extension Service. A Master Gardener course was offered (for free in those days) and I signed on. The instructor told us the truth with his first statement: “Vegetable gardening in Central Oregon is tougher than in most of Alaska.” Wild statement? No. And 29 years later I’m growing good veggies (most years) but still learning and trying to overcome the difficulties presented by the soil, the high desert climate and garden predators.

How to get started:

- Check out gardening books and magazines at the library or buy them at a book store or Goodwill. Not many have direct references to Central Oregon, but some covering cold-climate gardening will help.
- Cruise your neighborhood and talk to the owners of gardens that look successful. Some will be quite willing to help.
- Search the Internet

for Central Oregon Master Gardener Program. It’s still available and still an excellent source for learning about vegetable gardens. The course covers much more than veggies, including soils and fertilizers, orchards, lawns, house-plants and landscape design. There are many other references on the net pertaining to gardening in cold climates that you can pursue. Call Deschutes County Extension at 541-548-6088.

Average annual precipitation in our area is only about 12 inches a year, and precipitation seems to be lessening each year as climate change gradually warms the earth. So, unless you want to do a lot of hand-watering, build an irrigation system. There are plenty of equipment dealers available. A recent improvement in watering is the “drip” system using PVC pipe at ground level drilled with tiny holes which deliver water exactly where the plants need it. If your plot is native soil, buy good topsoil and mix it with existing soil and, at the same time, add a lot of organic matter in the form of compost or manure. For this you will need a good shovel and probably a

garden fork.

Some folks will want to dig out the existing soil and go entirely with topsoil, compost and manure.

To confine it, improve growing temperatures and make the work easier, build wooden raised beds. A rototiller is a very handy tool for thoroughly preparing your soil for planting, but a shovel can do the job and provide good exercise. After your soil is prepared, buy some red worms and add them. They are great “tillers” and providers of free organic fertilizer.

Before you plant anything get a soil test, which will tell you if the soil is acid, alkaline or neutral. Most vegetables do well in soil that is close to neutral. Choose seeds for plants with short growing seasons (average growing season here is less than 90 days). Or, buy nursery plants that are ready to transplant.

The OSU Extension Service offers a Central



PHOTO BY JESS DRAPER

You CAN grow vegetables in Sisters!

Oregon Vegetable Garden Calendar, an excellent guide for when to plant or transplant. Follow the directions on the seed packets for depth and spacing. A hand trowel is very useful for planting and for controlling weeds, which somehow find their way into every garden.

Garden enemies:

You are not the only animal that likes vegetables!

Expect others to find your plot — from tiny insects to deer. I solved the deer problem by building a gated, woven-willow fence, seven to eight feet high, but it would not stop a determined raccoon or mouse. Gophers can invade from underground, their natural habitat. Bugs will come, and probably plant diseases,

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Willamette Valley Bank, Matt Ingram

Matt Ingram has always felt that he was born to help people. Feeling a calling to serve his country, Matt entered the Navy after graduating high school. He then served in law enforcement for over 17 years.

Matt later decided to go a different direction with his career, but the need to serve his community never left him. Twelve years ago, he and a close friend started their own mortgage company. He has since become a veteran in the mortgage industry with a proven track record. In April of 2014 Matt joined Willamette Valley Bank, a community bank with a local focus at their Bend Home Loan Center.

Matt and his wife live in Sisters with their two youngest children. Their oldest is a recent college graduate and pharmacist. Matt looks forward to being the local home-loan lender for you and your family.



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