



SASSY GARDENER by LeAnn Locher

Get your veggies on!

Tips for first-time vegetable gardeners

So you want to grow a vegetable garden for the first time? I've been tickled pink to be hearing from so many first timers, invigorated by a crappy economy, too many food scares, and a resurgence of the Victory Garden. And I salute you and welcome you to our ranks. The world is a better place with more people growing their own food. In the spirit of helping you save money and be as successful as you can, I offer a few tips 'n' tricks....

1. **Plant them where they'll grow best.** Figure out where you're going to get the most sun. It may be in the front of your house: veggies in the front, party in the back? Oh wait, that's a mullet. But veggies need direct sun for a minimum of 8 hours a day, and if that's in the front, that's where they should go. Keep it close to the house, in an area in which you'll enjoy being, and where it's protected from winds.

2. **Build those beds.** Think about building raised beds: raised soil warms earlier and can be easier to tend. Make sure you

create your raised beds with untreated wood, and never railroad ties, because whatever chemicals are in that wood go into your soil, which will go into your edibles...you get the picture.

3. **Get your dirt on.** The single best thing you can do to be successful in growing your own food is to have good soil. I hate to break it to you, but just digging up the lawn and plunking some seeds in isn't going to yield you the best results. We filled our beds with gorgeous soil from Best Buy in Hillsboro: their selection is excellent, and you can either pick it up there, or have it delivered. Their Super Grow soil is my tip to you, and includes compost from Tillamook, and you know what's plentiful in Tillamook, right? Hint: mmmmmooooooooo.

4. **Time it right.** Right now, in mid-to-late March, the soil is still pretty cold, and will continue to be until June. Hot weather vegetables, like tomatoes and peppers, will just sit there and shiver if you put them out now. While you may be tempted to buy those tomato starts you see at your grocery

store entrance, don't. They're hoping you'll buy them, they'll die, and then you'll buy them again. Tomatoes don't go into the ground until May or June. If you're giving seed starting a go, things to be starting by seed outdoors at this time of year are peas and fava beans. If you're a first-timer, I'd suggest sticking with vegetable starts and a few seeds throughout the season.

5. **Figure out your watering plan now.** If you have the itch to get gardening, a word to the wise: figure out your strategy for summertime watering. Soaker hoses? Drip irrigation? Put some thought into it: it's not worth it to work so hard getting your vegetable bed going, and then find yourself tied to a hose all July and August. Or worse yet, taking that week-long vacation only to discover upon returning home a heat wave has turned your beautiful edibles to a crispy, dead crunch. Soaker hoses are hoses that "weep" water slowly along the ground over an extended period of time. They provide deep watering, ensuring roots grow deep and strong. Drip irrigation provides water in



Some work now can provide tasty treats later this year.

the same slow way, but only to the specific plants you set it to water. Drip is the most environmentally responsible watering technique, and can even be set on a timer system, perfect if you're busy or planning a vacation. I've been using soaker hoses in our beds, and keep telling myself to figure out that drip watering kit I've had stashed in the garage for four years. Maybe a long, cool spring will help motivate me to get that done. JO

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