

Starting a Your Own Community Vegetable Garden

Here are some steps to a successful garden:

- The first item on your list to do is to rake your area with a hard steel rake so you will aerate the top of the soil for seeding. Discard any rock, twigs, or weeds.
- Determine what seeds you are going to plant. Time is the number one issue for many of us. If you are time poor, consider planting root crops such as potatoes, carrots, beets or easy care plants such as corn, cucumbers etc. These take less time to maintain. If you have more time, plant lots of tomatoes for example, and dazzle your family with home-made marinara sauce in the fall.
- Leave enough room between rows to allow for growth and weeding. Some plants get really large and will overtake smaller veggies. Also leave room for a path, between your plot and your neighbours.
- Mark your rows with plant stakes and label them so you know what you have planted. Make a furrow with the end of your rake, deep enough to accommodate the size of seed you are planting. You must read the seed packet to determine how deep to plant and how wide apart the rows of vegetables should be. Pat down lightly with your palm to ensure that the seed is in contact with the earth.
- Water the seed bed after planting, and keep it moist, not wet until the seedlings are established. You may have to visit the garden every day if the weather is hot and dry. Once they are growing well, water every 4 or 5 days if it is very hot. The best time to water is in the morning so plant leaves can dry off before the cooler nights. If you can only water in the evening, considering using a watering wand to water the soil and not the foliage. Conserve water once plants have grown large enough, by watering deeply every week to 10 days rather than frequent watering.
- If you plant vegetables like carrots, beets, radishes and lettuce you must thin out plants when they are 1 to 2 inches (3-5 cm) high. New gardeners find this hard to do, but you must pull out plants so they are not too close together. If you don't do this, especially to carrots, you will not get a full size carrot.
- Weeding is the most important task in the garden. In your own home garden you can procrastinate if you like, but it not a good practice in a community garden. Remember that every weed that goes to seed can produce a thousand more. We all must visit the garden on a regular basis to weed, weed, weed! If you do not weed regularly, all your gardening neighbours will have to pick them out of their plots.
- Need more information on gardening? Go online to the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) site. They have fact sheets on every vegetable that you could possibly grow. The Master Gardeners are also part of their organization. The internet itself has a multitude of sites and UTube videos to show how to plant and grow vegetables.
- Tools that you need include: steel rake, trowel, shovel, watering can and perhaps a kneeler, rubber boots, hoe and fork.