

Getting your spring garden ready

Although there is the chance of another frost over the next month or so, this is the best time to start getting your spring garden ready. Early spring's cool temperatures make it perfect for preparatory garden work. Some tasks are almost impossible to do after April when it is simply too hot.

Most of these tasks are not tough, for instance, checking the irrigation system. Are there enough drip emitters under your trees? This is critical, especially after turf removal. Many trees grew up **dependent** on lawn irrigation, resulting in shallow root systems. If the lawn and sprinklers are taken out without making up for that water loss, those trees suffer. Irrigation should reach the whole area under the tree canopy as it grows and expands. More drippers are probably necessary. Remember to put them away from the trunk. Look around the drippers – are they emitting? With hard water sometimes they get plugged. Clogged emitters are easy to replace, which can save a plant's life.

Trees and perennials are important, but for many, “gardening” means vegetable gardening – challenging in this part of the world. There are jokes about growing the world's most expensive tomato, or tiniest pumpkin. Our soil and lack of water can cause problems even for experienced gardeners, but success **is** possible. A few guiding principles can make a world of difference between growing something edible and having a colossal disappointment.

If you had a garden last year, were you happy with the results?

If you **were not** thrilled, or have not had a garden lately, now you can get started! We recommend putting in a raised bed, especially where the soil is solidly packed. Anyone new to the excitement of Mojave gardening might **not** want to start off plowing the entire back 40.

If you were pleased, great! If possible, do not put the same varieties in the same spot this year. Planting something completely different helps cut down on pests like insects and diseases, and keeps the soil from being depleted in particular nutrients.

If you do not have the space to create a new raised bed, and you really **want** to grow those fabulous tomatoes again, add compost. This can prevent a host of problems as it fertilizes the soil.



“Raised bed” has no hard and fast definition but it usually describes a confined area, outdoors, where enough amendments are added that the surface of that area is higher than the rest of the ground. It generally has a wall made out of bricks, wood or blocks.

In the middle of February you can plant leafy greens, early April transplant tomatoes and peppers, and in June, grow melons or cucumbers up a trellis. A separate herb is unnecessary since they tend to be low growing, and do fine when planted around taller vegetables. Bed size depends on the gardener, but start small. It is surprising how much you can grow in an area four by eight feet and two feet deep, especially when you grow things sequentially.

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