Reasons why you should plant your own vegetables

Growing your own vegetable garden will save you money and give you a sense of satisfaction

By Leslie Allen ■ Commercial Horticulture Specialist

PLANTING a vegetable garden is an important American pastime that is rapidly gaining popularity in our contemporary society. Many folks are growing their own for environmental reasons, others for economic savings.

I grow my own food because I enjoy the independence it brings. I don’t want to rely on an unknown person to provide my family its sustenance. Growing my own food puts my family’s health and well-being squarely into my own hands.

Over the next several months, my colleagues and I at University of Nevada Cooperative Extension will guide you through the many steps required to help you start a vegetable garden, expand your existing garden or improve your gardening skills.

We’ll write about starting seeds, planting cool-season crops, installing drip irrigation and battling pests. Each week, our “Growing Your Own” series will not only help you have a better garden, but will help you become more self-sufficient.

Some agricultural scholars say that our current food system is not sustainable because it requires too much energy. Did you know for a conventional agriculture system it takes an average of 10 fossil-fuel calories to produce one calorie of food energy? That’s because it takes a lot of energy to manufacture, transport and apply fertilizers and pesticides. In fact, about a quarter of America’s greenhouse gas emissions are attributed to how we grow, process and transport food. On average, our food travels 1,500 miles before it reaches our plate. These food miles equate to a lot of fossil-fuel energy. Growing your own food will reduce the miles your food travels. Indeed, if you...
grow your own your food, the
distance it travels might be just
a few steps.
Growing your food will also
insulate you from food cost
fluctuations. Food costs have
been steadily increasing over
the past several years. With
economic recovery nowhere in
sight, it is expected that costs
will continue to increase. If
money is tight, growing your
own food will provide your
family with tasty, nutritious
food for a fraction of the
cost. Lucky for us in Northern
Nevada, we can grow an
abundance of food. We have
three seasons during which we
can grow food.
St. Patrick’s Day is the
traditional start to our cool-
season gardens. English peas,
snow peas, sugar snap peas
and even sweet peas can all
be planted on this day. Wait
another month and you can
direct seed most cool season
crops such as spinach, lettuce,
Swiss chard, beets, carrots,
etc., through to the end of
May. After the last frost in
May (or when the snow melts
off Peavine) we can plant
our warm season transplants
(small plants started from
seed by you or a nursery)
such as tomatoes, eggplant,
peppers, watermelon, winter
squash, etc. You can plant
a second season of cool
season vegetables starting
in August. Many of these
plants can be harvested
well into autumn, and will
overwinter if protected. Garlic
is best planted in the fall for a
summer harvest. I like planting
it on Nevada Day.
If you need help deciding
what to grow, you can always
call us at University of Nevada
Cooperative Extension (784-
4848). We can help you decide
what varieties to grow and
when to plant them.
If you want to start your own
warm season crops from seed,
you’ll need to start thinking
about that now. Gather your
seeds, growing medium
(special seed starting soil),
pots, plant labels and watering
can, so that you’ll be ready to
start seeds come March.
Growing your own food is
an excellent step towards self-
reliance and independence.
Involve your family and you’ll
find that suppertime becomes
something truly special.

About the author
Leslie Allen is the former commercial
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Where to plant
The most important thing
about starting a vegetable
garden is to locate where,
on your property, the sun
shines for most of the day.

Now is the time to start
planning where you’ll put
your vegetable garden.
Look to areas of your
landscape – the front, back
or side yards – that get at
least 6-8 hours of sunlight.

For most folks, the best
place for a vegetable garden
will be a south-facing side
of their property, although
an east- or west-facing side
can work well to.

But beware of the hot
late-afternoon sun! The
setting summer sun can fry
even the most sun-loving
vegetables. Many local
gardeners have found that
in our region, tomatoes
produce better if they
have late afternoon shade.
Take some time to get to
know how heat and wind
vary on your landscape. I
discovered the perfect spot
for artichokes in my front
yard!