

Garden Column for Salisbury Post

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An increasing emphasis on diet and exercise has many opting to produce what they eat. Gardening our own food not only allows us to reap the rewards of fresh delicious fruits and vegetables; but the physical activity of gardening helps keeps us in shape with the constant gardening tasks of planting and maintenance. Gardening is not terribly difficult; however understanding a few basic principals and cultural practices will provide novice gardeners a greater degree of success and a less frustrating experience. Below are a few gardening hints that will increase your ability to produce healthy food crops.

a. Vegetable gardening areas need full sun. Try to locate your garden spot in an area that receives as much sun as possible. Shady areas produce spindly plants that are not prolific with poor quality fruit.

b. Have an ample water supply. Vegetables need a constant source of water to produce a premium crop. Carefully consider the water source before implementation. Weak private wells or areas with extremely high water utility bills may not be cost effective. Consider drip irrigation and mulch to conserve valuable water supplies.

c. Soil testing and preparation. Have soil tested by NCDA soils labs {<http://www.ncagr.com/agronomi/sthome.htm>} to determine the soil's fertility levels. Urban soils are often compacted and unfertile. Consider improving with proper nutrients and amendments. Gardening areas with water drainage problems or extremely poor soils should consider raised beds with amended soils.

d. Crop selection. Start with vegetable or fruit crops that are easy for beginners. Tomatoes, peppers, summer squash, turnip

greens, radishes and green beans produce prolific crops and are fairly easy to grow. Crops such as sweet corn and melons take much space and can be difficult to produce, especially in a small garden.

e. Have a realistic plan. Involve the entire family including the kids in choosing what vegetables should be planted. Make it an educational as well as a fun event.

f. Do you have time for the garden? Vegetable gardening is a constant chore, sometimes only a few minutes a day or maybe much longer, but it is a labor intensive responsibility. Gardening requires constant observation for insect, disease and weed control. Those with hectic schedules should reconsider or try to set aside ample time periodically for gardening chores.

g. Have good reference materials and information. The North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service has a tremendous source of information through horticultural agents, web sites, printed materials and Master Gardener Volunteers. More information on vegetable gardening can be found in the Cooperative Extension Publication Ag. 006 Home Vegetable Gardening. The publication can be downloaded from this site:

<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/pdf/ag-06.pdf>

Other horticultural information can be found at
<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/consumer/>

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