

## Gardening for Food: Seasonal Veggies

By Marlys Bell

More of us are growing at least some of our food according to the National Gardening Association. In the Mother Lode, even in small spaces, it is possible to eat from the garden nearly year round with edibles like lettuce, spinach, and broccoli in the cool weather and tomatoes, corn, peppers, zucchini and beans in the warm weather. To get the maximum yield, nutrition and enjoyment from the edible garden, these are some tips to consider.



### Where:

Edible gardens can be squeezed in most anywhere, even the front yard or on the deck in containers. Annuals (those that last just one season) such as basil, eggplant and peppers can be tucked into the landscaping in late spring and then replaced in late fall with other annuals like broccoli, cabbage, spinach or Swiss chard. Containers planted with dwarf varieties of favorite fruits and vegetables can provide additional gardening space. For example, I have a cook's garden in containers just outside the kitchen where I can grab some herbs, salad greens or cherry tomatoes. Wine barrels with holes drained in the bottom work well for tomatoes, potatoes and other larger plants. Fences, trellises and teepees can support climbers like peas, squash and pole beans.

For those with a little more room, the most effective way to grow most vegetables is in raised beds that are about four feet wide, twelve feet long and at least twelve inches deep. These can be made from concrete block, untreated lumber, stacked stones or retaining wall blocks. Straw bales can be used to form the walls or some plants such as tomatoes, squash, and peppers can be grown in the bales.

Although most vegetables need plenty of sun, most salad greens need shade protection so light conditions should be considered when determining what to plant where. The other issue to be considered is water availability since many vegetables require regular water to yield the best product.

### How:

One technique is to eliminate the concept of rows and to plant the whole area with, for example, salad greens, beets, onions, radishes and parsnips. As the radishes mature and get pulled out, there is room for other plants to grow or a hole where beans or something else can be inserted. Another variation alternates rows with early and later crops so as the older crop matures and is harvested, it makes more room for the new crop. Other techniques include combining plants that do well together such as corn, squash, beans and clover.

### When:

Plant when the soil is ready and at the right time of year. For those living at elevations lower than 2500 feet, it is usually possible to get two cool weather crops—one planted after Labor Day and the other planted in early spring. Those at higher elevations usually get only one cool weather crop of broccoli, Swiss chard, spinach or peas that can be planted when the snow leaves and the soil is dry enough so that it crumbles rather than clumps, usually in March or early April. The warm weather crops such as tomatoes and peppers are planted after the danger of frost has passed which is usually about Mothers' Day or when the soil and night temperatures are at least 50 degrees.

For those interested in learning more about vegetable gardening and its new trends and techniques, visit the Master Gardener Demonstration Garden on Saturday, May 5, from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at 251 S. Barretta Street in Sonora, the Cassina High Campus.

*Marlys Bell is a University of California Cooperative Extension of Tuolumne County who is using her property to demonstrate how to live "more green" by growing more fruits and vegetables.*

*UCCE Master Gardeners of Tuolumne County can answer home gardening questions. Call 209-533-5912 or go to: <http://ucanr.edu/survey/survey.cfm?surveynumber=7269> to fill out our easy-to-use problem questionnaire. Check out our website at: [http://cetralsierra.ucanr.edu/Master\\_Gardeners/](http://cetralsierra.ucanr.edu/Master_Gardeners/) You can also find us on Facebook*