

CREATING AN IN-GROUND GARDEN

1) Location and Layout:

- Like all plants, vegetables and herbs need a certain amount of sunlight everyday to grow. For optimum plant health and growth, garden beds should be placed in a location that receives at least six or more hours of sun a day.
- Make sure your garden is in an area that is level and drains well. You don't want to plant your garden in an area that has issues with standing water.
- Make sure you place your garden near a hose spigot. While this isn't 100% necessary, it will make life easier on you when you don't have to drag a long hose across the yard or make multiple trips with a watering can.

2) Create the Design:

- Think about what size you want your garden to be. If this is your first garden, you may want to start with a smaller one as a trial run.
- Create a visual layout by using wooden stakes and string to create the shape and size. Once you've established your shape and size, use flour or a marking paint to mark the borders of the bed and then you will be ready to start the preparation for your garden.
- **TIP:** If you want to do a larger bed, try not to make it any wider than four feet across. That width allows you to plant, weed, and harvest without having to walk through the garden bed.

3) Creating A Garden Bed:

- First, clear the space by removing any existing vegetation. If it's grass, you can use a sod cutter or a spade shovel to remove it. You can also smother any grass or weeds by covering the area in black plastic for one to two months or until the vegetation dies.
- Second, you need to prepare the soil. Making sure that you have good soil in your garden is important when growing herbs and vegetables.
 - i. Start by using a tiller to till up the existing soil to a depth of at least 10 to 12 inches.
 - ii. Then amend your soil by covering the area you just tilled up with a 2 to 4 inch layer of good organic soil. Once you have covered the area with the organic soil, you will need to work the amendments into the soil by going over it again with a tiller.

When purchasing soil to amend your garden, there are several different options to consider:

- If you are doing a small to medium bed, consider buying soil by the bag. We recommend Miracle Gro Herb and Vegetable soil.
- If you want to create your own soil mix, consider a triple mix of top soil, compost, and peat moss. A blend of 60% top soil, 30% compost, and 10% peat moss or potting mix is generally a good ratio to work with.
- If you are doing a large bed or multiple larger beds, you can buy soil in bulk and have it delivered. Like making your own mix, you will want to work with the supplier to get a triple mix of top soil, compost, and peat moss.
- Amending the soil in your beds during the season is important as well. If you harvest plants during the season, not only will you be removing some of the soil, but those plants will have depleted the nutrients in the soil. Topping your bed with compost will help add nutrients back into your soil so it is ready for your next planting. In addition, at the end of the season, consider adding the mulched leaves from your yard to garden bed to breakdown over the winter. Remember, maintaining the health of your soil is essential so make sure you add organic material to your bed every year.

4) What to Plant:

- Deciding what to plant in your garden is the fun part. Whether you're doing all vegetables, all herbs, or a combination of both, think about these things when deciding what to plant:
 - i. What do like to eat? If you like to eat a lot of salads, consider planting things like head lettuce, a lettuce cutting mix, cucumbers, radishes, carrots, and cherry tomatoes. If you are the culinary expert of your home, plant things like basil, cilantro, thyme, onions, peppers, potatoes, tomatoes, and leeks. The combinations you can do are endless.
 - ii. Once you decide what you are going to plant, take a moment to create a planting plan for your bed. Research the spacing and growing habit of each plant and then consider whether that plant will require stakes, ladders, or cages.

TIP: If you have planted in this space before, be sure to think about crop rotation. Crop rotation means not planting the same plants in the same spot two years in a row. By utilizing crop rotation, you help replenish soil nutrients and it helps to interrupt any unseen disease or pest cycles that may be present. This is especially true when planting tomatoes.

Once you have determined these things, create your layout. The trick is growing as much food as possible without over crowding the plants. If you overcrowd your bed, your plants will never reach their full potential because they will be stressed due to poor air circulation and they will be competing for water, root space, and nutrients.

5) When to Plant:

- There are multiple factors to consider when determining when to plant your garden:
 - i. The first thing to consider is what type of herbs and vegetables are you putting in? Certain vegetables such as lettuce and broccoli, can tolerate cooler weather. Others, such as tomatoes and basil, have a higher chance of being damaged when temperatures get lower than 40 degrees. Refer to the planting guide document on our herb and vegetable page to help you determine the best time to plant each crop.
 - ii. Other important things to consider are the frost dates and soil temperatures. In our growing zones, the prime gardening season falls between the first and last frost dates. You should not plant cold sensitive plants until all danger of frost has passed. In our area, this is typically between May 11-May 20.
 - iii. Lastly, soil temperature is another important consideration. Most plants thrive when the soil temperature is between 60 to 70 degrees. Again, while some plants may grow in cooler conditions and soil, most won't grow properly until the soil temperature is at our above 60 degrees.

6) Maintaining Your Garden:

- The rewarding part of a garden is getting to enjoy the spoils of your hard work, yet it's the hard work of maintaining your garden that allows you to enjoy those spoils. Here are some maintenance tips to help you get the most out of your garden:
 - i. **Weeding:** Make sure to weed your garden. Weeds compete for moisture, nutrients, and root space with your plants so you will want to remove them as soon as they appear. You may have to do this weekly in the earlier months, but by mid-summer you shouldn't have to do it very often.
 - ii. **Watering:** In an ideal world, Mother Nature will provide you with at least an inch of rain every week to keep your plants happy. Since that isn't always realistic, you will probably have to do some watering to help your plants thrive. Consider putting in a rain gauge to keep track of how much rain has fallen. While this helps give you an indication of how much moisture has fallen each week, your hands are still one of the best tools for determining water needs.

Stick your fingers down into the soil to around the root zone of the plant. This should be around 3 inches. The soil should feel slightly damp. Think of a sponge that has been wrung out. You should do this once a week.

If you do need to water, consider using a watering wand because they deliver a lot of water quickly, but make sure to spray around the base of the plant and not the foliage because watering the foliage can promote disease. You can also use a soaker hose or a soaker hose with a timer to water while you are at work or away on vacation. Again, check the soil with your fingers once you are done to make sure your bed got thoroughly watered.

- iii. **Fertilizing:** To improve plant health and productivity, you should consider fertilizing your plants. It is recommended that you feed your plants at planting time and then again midseason. Consider using a granular, organic all purpose fertilizer.
- iv. **Pest Control:** Pests and animals are part of gardening. Below are some tips on dealing with pests and animals in your garden:
- If you have a rascally rabbit eating your carrots, consider putting up garden fencing or chicken wire around your garden bed. Make sure to set it up high enough so they can't jump over the fence.
 - When dealing with bugs, remember most bugs are good bugs so know what you are dealing with before you start spraying your plants. If you do need to spray your plants, make sure to read the product label because different products have different lead times between treatment and harvest.

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