



## Getting Started with a Vegetable Garden

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### Easy to Grow Vegetable Varieties for Beginners

#### Bean

Blue Lake  
Kentucky Wonder

#### Cucumber

Spacemaster  
Straight 8

#### Lettuce

Buttercrunch  
Red Sails

#### Pea

Sugar Snap  
Wando

#### Pepper

California Wonder Bell  
Early Jalapeño  
Sweet Banana Pepper

#### Squash (Summer)

Early Yellow Crookneck  
Scallop Patty Pan

#### Squash (Winter)

Delicata Honey Boat  
Spaghetti

#### Tomato

Ace Bush  
Celebrity  
Early Girl

#### Tomato (Cherry)

Jelly Bean Grape (Cherry)  
Sugar Sweetie

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Planting a vegetable garden is an American pastime that is rapidly regaining popularity. Some people grow their own for economic savings and others for environmental reasons. Many people choose to grow their own for the pure satisfaction of watching their plants grow and develop, and reaping the flavorful benefits of their harvest.

If money is tight, growing some of your own produce may provide your family with tasty, nutritious food for a fraction of the cost. Most people will not have the space or the time to provide entirely for their family's vegetable needs, but growing some of their favorites that do well in our dry climate may help take the 'bite' out of the weekly food budget.

It takes a lot of energy (fuel) to manufacture, process and transport food in our present large-scale agricultural system. A trend towards more local production of fruits and vegetables is on the rise. You can contribute to that movement by growing your own and reducing the miles your food travels. Another benefit is that you will be harvesting and eating your produce at its peak of freshness and flavor.

In northern Nevada, we can grow an abundance of vegetables. We have three seasons during which we can grow food: early spring, summer and early fall. St. Patrick's Day (March 18) is the traditional start to our cool-season gardens. English peas, snow peas, sugar snap peas, sweet peas and spinach can be planted on this day. Wait another month and you can direct-seed most other cool-season crops such as lettuce, Swiss chard, beets and carrots until the end of May. After the last frost in May to early June, you can plant warm-season transplants (small plants started indoors from seed by you or a nursery) such as tomatoes, eggplant, peppers, watermelon and squash. 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.

## PLANNING YOUR GARDEN

**Cultivar Selection.** The first consideration in planning your garden is climate. Climate affects what you can grow and which vegetable varieties are best for your area. In particular, knowing your *frost-free period* – the average number of days from the date of last spring frost to the date of the earliest fall frost – tells you the window of time you have to grow vegetables that are not frost-tolerant (warm-season vegetables). This information, combined with the *days to maturity* information for each crop you wish to plant, will help you decide on the best vegetable cultivars for your garden. The ‘days to maturity’ is the number of days required for a particular vegetable variety to grow from seed or transplant to the time of harvest. Different varieties of a given crop differ in ‘days to maturity,’ and you should choose the varieties that will be successful in your area. In general, our average last spring frost occurs May 15 and our earliest fall frost, Sept. 15. If you’ve lived in northern Nevada long enough, you know how variable this can be, so plan on a frost-free period of about 90 days to be safe (see sidebar, page 4).

**Site Selection.** The second consideration is selecting the site for your garden. Generally, choose a site that gets full sun for at least six to eight hours per day. This means planting away from buildings and shade trees. Often, the best place for a vegetable garden is the south-facing side of your property, although an east- or west-facing side can work as well. If full sun is not an option, you might consider growing your vegetables in containers and moving them around to track the sun. Another option is to rent space from a local community garden, which will have the space and light you need for growing your vegetables.

It is important that the site you select for your vegetable garden has access to water. Vegetable plants need a consistent supply of water to support their growth. Plants should never be allowed to dry out or sit in waterlogged soil – these conditions will kill your

plants. The site needs to be accessible to a garden hose or, if you prefer, an automated irrigation system. Drip irrigation is commonly used in our area because it reduces water loss from evaporation and delivers waters directly to plant roots, conserving water and reducing weeds.

**Vegetable Planting Dates.** Planting dates depend upon the plant cold-hardiness. Some vegetables are *very hardy* and can be planted as soon as the soil can be worked in the spring. *Semi-hardy* vegetables can be planted two to four weeks before the average last killing frost date of May 15. Cole crops such as broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts and cabbage are heat-sensitive, and they grow better in cool weather than in hot weather; they should not be planted after mid-May. *Frost-tender* and *cold-sensitive* vegetables will not survive a frost without some protection; they need to be planted after the last frost date. *Frost-tender* and *cold-sensitive* vegetables can be purchased as transplants, or started from seed in the house mid-March through mid-April for transplanting after the danger of frost is past. Earlier transplanting can be done when hotcaps, row covers or other protection is used.

The dates in the table below are average planting dates for the Reno, Nev. area, and are for direct-seeding into the ground unless indicated otherwise. Since there are many microclimates in the Reno area, planting dates may differ by several days to two weeks. For example, the north valleys average five to 10 degrees F colder than Reno, and planting should be delayed by one to two weeks in these areas.

Succession planting can ensure a continuous supply of produce. For example, by planting a 10-foot row of beans on May 15 followed by another planting two to four weeks later, you can extend the harvest period over the entire season. Succession planting can be done with beans, carrots, broccoli, endive, lettuce, radishes, cabbage, turnips, corn and beets.

## EARLY SPRING PLANTING

### VERY HARDY VEGETABLES

#### Plant March 15 to May 1

Asparagus - crowns  
Broccoli  
Brussels sprouts  
Cabbage  
Garlic - cloves (fall planting best)  
Horseradish - root sections or plants, anytime  
Kale  
Lettuce  
Parsley - plants or seeds  
Peas  
Rhubarb - plants  
Spinach  
Turnip  
Onions - seeds, plants or sets†

### SEMI-HARDY VEGETABLES

#### Plant April 1 to May 1

Beets - thru June  
Carrots - thru June  
Cauliflower  
Chinese cabbage (late summer planting best)  
Parsnip  
Radish - thru May  
Swiss chard - thru May  
  
Broccoli - plants  
Brussels sprouts - plants  
Cabbage - plants  
Cauliflower - plants  
Potato - "seed" pieces‡

## LATE SPRING PLANTING

### FROST-TENDER VEGETABLES

#### Plant after May 15

Celery - plants  
Green beans - succession plantings thru June  
New Zealand spinach  
Sweet corn - plants or seeds, succession plantings thru mid-June



### COLD-SENSITIVE VEGETABLES

#### Plant 1 to 2 weeks after May 15 to June 15

Beans, lima  
Super sweet corn - plants or seeds  
Cucumber - plants or seeds  
Eggplant - plants  
  
Melons - plants  
Okra  
Pepper - plants  
Pumpkin  
Squash  
Sweet potato - plants  
Tomato - plants

## LATE SEASON PLANTING

### Plant Mid-July to Sept. 1

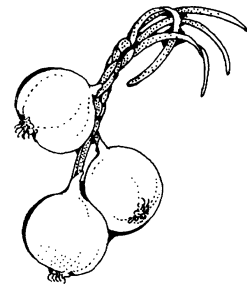
Beets  
Carrots (mid-July)  
Chinese cabbage (late July to mid-August)  
Collard  
Kale  
Lettuce (mid-August)  
Peas (July 1 to mid-July)  
Radish (mid-August)  
Spinach (mid-August)  
Turnip (early July)

†Onion sets are small bulbs, less than 1 inch in diameter.

‡Potato seed pieces are small pieces of potato cut to include at least one "eye."

### Plant in October for next summer harvest

Garlic - cloves  
Onions - bulbs (spring planting best)



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**Annual Frost-Free Days for  
Selected Northern Nevada  
Cities<sup>†</sup>**

<b>Battle Mountain</b>	<b>70 – 115</b>
<b>Carson City</b>	<b>90 – 120</b>
<b>Elko</b>	<b>60 – 90</b>
<b>Ely</b>	<b>55 – 85</b>
<b>Fallon</b>	<b>105 – 130</b>
<b>Fernley</b>	<b>115 – 145</b>
<b>Hawthorne</b>	<b>135 - 180</b>
<b>Lovelock</b>	<b>105 – 140</b>
<b>Minden</b>	<b>75 – 105</b>
<b>Nixon</b>	<b>85 – 115</b>
<b>Reno</b>	<b>90 - 120</b>
<b>Tonopah</b>	<b>110 – 155</b>
<b>Virginia City</b>	<b>105 -140</b>
<b>Wadsworth</b>	<b>105 – 135</b>
<b>Wells</b>	<b>40 – 70</b>
<b>Winnemucca</b>	<b>85 – 110</b>
<b>Yerington</b>	<b>80 – 120</b>
<b>Tahoe</b>	<b>65 – 90</b>

<sup>†</sup>Based on historical data indicating 90% (first number) to 50% (second number) probability of consecutive days with temperatures above 32°F.

Source:

<http://www.wrcc.dri.edu/summary/Climsmnv.html>

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**Start small.** Finally, if this is your first adventure into vegetable gardening, it's good to start small. An overly enthusiastic gardener may plant more than the family can use, or underestimate the time it will take for thinning young plants, weeding the bed and harvesting the produce. Start with a small area of your yard: a strip of land on the south side of a garage or a sunny space near the patio. You can even tuck a few vegetable plants in your flower beds; just remember not to use herbicides or pesticides in these areas. By starting small, with a few easy-to-grow vegetables, you will increase your chances for success and may become a devoted lifelong gardener.

### References

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