



# 40th Annual Farm and Garden

## Plan Your Vegetable Garden Early

Submitted by Illinois College of Agriculture, Consumer, & Environmental Sciences

If you're itching for home-grown tomatoes this year, now is the perfect time to plan your vegetable garden. "Growing your own vegetables is a great way to save money at the grocery store, get some exercise, and teach kids where their produce comes from," says Gemini Bhalsod, a University of Illinois Extension horticulture educator. "For a successful vegetable garden, a little bit of planning can go a long way to tasty harvests."

Bhalsod suggests starting with a brainstorming session with family or neighbors - anyone you will be sharing produce with - to decide what plants to grow. "Growing your favorite vegetables will ensure that you are excited to continue working in the garden all season long and that you can enjoy the 'fruits' of your labor when the time comes to harvest," she says. Popular garden vegetables include peas, lettuce, tomatoes, cucumber, carrots, corn, and beets. Try and stick to disease-resistant varieties, or those with other interesting features.

Now that you have your list of vegetables, Bhalsod suggests making a chart that includes their planting requirements, such as dates and

spacing needed to grow the vegetables adequately. This will help you stay organized and will help you decide where to place your plants in the garden.

If you don't have an already established garden, you will have to consider your site conditions. Most vegetables require 6 to 8 hours of full sun per day, so make sure you scope your space to find the sunniest spot. Be sure to avoid areas under trees, or that are shaded by your house. Most popular vegetables, like tomatoes, beans, cucumbers, and corn, require full sun. "If you have a shady area, don't worry! You can still grow root vegetables like carrots and beets and many leafy greens like spinach, chard, kale, and lettuce in a partial shade," Bhalsod notes.

Choose a place where the ground is level and near a water source, if possible. Next, decide what size it will be. "It is always okay to start small, with maybe one or two raised beds or containers, if you are new to gardening," Bhalsod suggests. Consider how much space you have, what kinds of vegetables you want to grow, and how much time you anticipate having to maintain your garden.

Next, decide if you will be building raised beds or if you are planting directly in the soil. "Raised beds can be beneficial because you can

control the type of soil mix that is going to be used," Bhalsod says. The soil needs to drain well, so Bhalsod suggests using a mix of 1:1:1 topsoil, compost, and a mineral component like perlite or vermiculite. If planting directly in the soil, consider a soil test for nutrient levels, pH, and, if you are concerned, heavy metals.

When establishing a new garden bed, gardeners will need to kill off existing vegetation before planting. "One of the best ways to kill off existing weeds or turf is to smother them," Bhalsod says. You can do this by layering wet cardboard or newspaper on the area you want to clear, being sure to weigh the pieces down to prevent light from penetrating. A downside is that you do have to wait a few months for the grass to die off. You can do this process directly in a raised bed too, and then put your soil mix on top to plant in. For quicker removal, a sod remover can also be used.

Once your garden has been set up, use your vegetable blueprint to start mapping out where your vegetables will go. It is always easier to get it down on paper before planting outside. "Follow these steps and you will be on your way to a well-thought-out and organized vegetable garden this summer," Bhalsod says.



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## Milk: The Real Deal

St. Louis District Dairy Council is encouraging consumers to "keep it real" when choosing their milk in 2019. "The dairy aisle is literally exploding with options--- everything from new milk flavors to lactose-free milks, and even alternative beverages disguised as milk," states Senior Nutrition Educator/Registered Dietitian Monica Nyman.

These alternative beverages are often plant-based drinks or solutions made from rice, soy, nut and hemp products that are soaked in water and then strained. Though they share shelf-space with milk, and often times have the word "milk"

on the front label, these plant-based beverages do not share the same nutrient package. Some key differences include:

- Milk contains naturally occurring calcium that easily absorbed by our bodies. Most imitation dairy beverages are fortified to match milk's calcium content.
- Milk provides high-quality protein, with an average of 8 grams per cup. Many imitation dairy beverages have 1 gram of protein or less per cup.
- Simple and natural, milk is void of added sugars, flavorings or stabilizers, which are often found in the ingredient list of many imitation dairy beverages.

At less than 25 cents per cup, milk is a nutritious bargain. Most imitation dairy beverages are twice the cost of milk.

Loaded with calcium, potassium, protein and phosphorus, dairy foods contribute significant nutrition to Americans' diets. "It's important for consumers to know that, when it comes to nutrition, not all dairy aisle drinks are created equal," notes Nyman. There is no substitute for the high nutrition and economic value that milk offers. It's the real deal!"

To learn more about Milk: The Real Deal, visit stldairy-council.org.

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