

# Gardening 101

## A Beginners Guide to Gardening



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# Raise Your Odds



If you are new to gardening, you're probably craving a little success - some small, green, or blooming sign that you can, in fact, do this. These small successes, more often than not, grow into larger ones. One way to raise your odds of success is to garden with raised beds, which means building a garden bed above the ground instead of in it.

## Why Use Raised Beds?

- Avoid underground utility lines
- The accessibility afforded by adding a bit of height to the bed; you don't have to bend over so much
- Better drainage, especially in areas with heavy clay soils

## Function, Fashion, & More

These days, we have not only functional but fashionable choices. You can have raised garden beds tiered, flat, square, white or robin's egg blue, among many other styles and forms. Gardener's Supply Company has raised beds in corrugated metal, cedar, and a recycled wood-plastic composite that is said to resist rotting and splitting.

Big-box retailers like Lowe's, Home Depot, and Menards have some good raised garden bed choices too. Many of the ones you see online are not sold in stores and must be ordered. Keep in mind that these same retailers may offer hands-on workshops for do-it-yourselfers on building garden beds; check with your local store. Lowe's and Home Depot have short videos on building garden beds, too.

The Purdue University publication, *Container and Raised Bed Gardening*, is a good source for more information, as is the Allen County (Indiana) Extension's *Raised Bed Gardens*, which will tell you more about the site preparation and how to calculate how much soil you'll need. The folks at your locally owned and operated nursery or landscaping supply center can be tremendously helpful as well.

Check out [Garden Starter: Raise Your Odds](#) for a topsoil recipe for raised beds.

# Hit the Deck

## Deck Planters

You want to plant, but maybe you have only a deck or balcony to work with or you're just not ready to "dig in" and commit to an in-ground flower or vegetable bed. Fortunately, there are plenty of options for container gardening and deck planters. Here are just a few to inspire you.

### The Grow Tub

Gardens Alive offers the Grow Tub for growing vegetables or annual flowers. Grow Tubs are made from non-woven geotextiles that allow for air and water exchange, and they come in sizes ranging from 7 gallons to 20 gallons. According to Gardens Alive, these containers can grow everything from herbs and salad greens to peppers, carrots, squash, potatoes and more.

### The EarthBox®

The EarthBox® is a patented durable plastic container gardening system developed by commercial farmers. An EarthBox® can sit in the yard or on a deck, porch, or rooftop; you can even add casters if you need to be able to move it. A staking system for taller vegetables and flowers is available.

It's self-watering, which means there's a reservoir at the bottom that you can fill through a tube. This helps prevent fungal disease. There's an overflow hole to prevent overwatering as well.



### Decorative Planters

Browse any nursery or "big box" garden center and you'll find an abundance of containers, from boxes you attach to a railing to cedar bins to imitation Grecian urns. Online, Gardener's Supply Company offers a variety of stylish and functional patio planter choices. These range from solar illuminated planters in cheerful colors to the VegTrug Patio Garden, a waist-high, 70-inch-long wooden elevated bed.

### What's In Your Garage?

Look around your garage, attic or shed. Old furniture, water troughs, recycling bins, storage totes, little red wagons, grills – these and countless others are all items with the potential for subsequent lives as garden containers. The Cottage Market has some good ideas, as does the DIY Network.

# Hit the Deck

## Deck Planters Continued

### Pick a Suitable Size

Just about any plant can be grown in a container of the right size and depth. The bigger the plant, the bigger the container it will require, especially if it's a root vegetable. When in doubt, go bigger.

Smaller varieties of the same crop lend themselves more readily to container gardening. For example, to grow the kind of tomatoes you can slice and put on sandwiches, you'll need a container of about 5 gallons

for one plant. Cherry or grape tomato plants give you that tomato taste in a smaller package, and you can probably get away with 2 to 3 gallons per plant. The same is true for peppers; the bell varieties will require a bigger home than their smaller (and hotter) jalapeño or Anaheim counterparts.

### Space Needed for Garden Planting

**4"**

Radishes  
Spinach  
Leafy Greens  
Lettuce  
Onions

**5"**

Parsley  
Peas  
Carrots  
Beets

**6"**

Flowers Annual  
Green Beans

**8"**

Tomato  
Broccoli  
Brussel Sprouts  
Cabbage  
Turnips

**10"**

Cucumbers  
Eggplants  
Okra  
Peppers

**14"**

Squash

\*Inches represent the diameter of the area

### Things to Remember About Container Gardening

- Plants in containers of any kind are going to need more frequent watering.
- Water has to be able to run through the soil and drain out; if too much moisture accumulates in the soil, you risk root rot.
- Make sure that whatever is underneath the container will not be damaged by water running out, and if it will, add a saucer, tray, tarp, or other protection.
- Plants do better with at least six hours of sunlight each day.



# Just Add Flowers

## Before You Head to the Nursery

First consider these two things

1. **When is the average last frost date in your area?**  
Visit the Old Farmer's Almanac website. Planting annuals after the last frost date will increase your chances of success.
2. **How's your soil?**  
Grab a handful and squeeze it between your fingers. If it crumbles easily, you're probably OK to plant. If it forms a ball or sticks together, it's still too wet from winter. Consider adding some quality bagged garden soil to freshen things up a bit.

## Great Picks for Beginners

When you're ready to plant, try any of these easy-to-find and relatively inexpensive flowers:

- **Petunias** for sunny areas. They add cheerful splashes of just about any color and are heat-tolerant. Better Homes & Gardens even goes so far as to call them "failproof favorites."
- **Impatiens** are colorful standbys for shadier areas.
- **Snapdragons** also add color and a spikier flower structure, and they are tolerant of a variety of temperatures. They prefer full sun but can tolerate a bit of shade.

Bring the flowers home and remove each plant from its container by gently squeezing the sides of the container to loosen. Then untangle the roots, use a trowel to pull the soil aside and place the plant in the hole. Don't pack the soil around it too firmly; just smooth it over.

Want to start gardening but aren't sure where to begin? It's easy to get overwhelmed by all of the options and info available, but starting small can yield great benefits.



# Just Add Flowers

## Continued



### Care & Feeding

Give them good, thorough watering to help them settle in. Then water every few days, more often if it's especially hot or dry. Remember to water the roots, not the leaves or flowers, to prevent fungal disease.

Fungal Disease (powdery mildew is a common one) basically means organisms are growing on the plant that take away the plant's nutrients. Too much moisture is a leading cause.

Give them some fertilizer every three weeks or so, or you can use the slow-release, granulated kind that you sprinkle on the soil, and make only one or two applications during the growing season.

Even planting just a few flowers in one small area can perk up and add a personal touch to your landscape. It can also boost your confidence and inspire you to grow even more!

# Weeding Out Common Mistakes



**Misinformation and bad habits can be as persistent as weeds for both new and seasoned gardeners. We're all learning, right? Hear some of the best landscapers and gardeners in the business weigh in on the most common myths and mistakes they see – and what could be done instead for better results.**

## Best Practices

**Enjoy a variety of gardens** while vacationing, on local summer garden tours, and in your own neighborhood. See what other people are doing to solve problems.

**Ask questions** at the garden center, on garden tours, and on social media.

**Swap plants** with other gardeners. Remember that gardening is a process, and you'll only truly get it wrong if you don't try.

## Common Gardening Myths

### 1 You have to dig a hole three times as wide and twice as deep as the root ball.

This works just fine in sandy soils. With heavy clay soil, not so much. Dig a slightly shallow hole about 6-8 inches wider than the container and allowing a little of the root system to stay above ground for better drainage.

### 2 New plants have to be watered every day.

Doing so is a sure road to waterlogged soil and plants with "wet feet." A better strategy is to apply 2-3 inches of mulch when planting. Then, when you think it's time to water, feel under the mulch. If it's cool and moist, let it go.

### 3 Dirt is Dirt

Ask questions about where the plants, trees, and shrubs they are buying were grown, and in what type of soil.

### 4 Planting Zone Charts are the Holy Grail

Gardeners should not be so smitten with hardiness and planting schedules, you can grow things earlier and later than they 'should.'

### 5 There's a Right Way and a Wrong Way

The biggest gardening mistake? Thinking there is only one way to do things. You learn a lot about hardiness and reseeding by not doing things the 'right way.'

**To read more about debunking gardening myths, check out [Weeding Out Common Gardening Mistakes](#).**



# Creating Harmony

## Companion Planting

If you don't have a plentiful, pest-free garden, it could be that your plants are working against each other. Or perhaps they aren't teamed up as well as they might be for optimum productivity. Sound like your last staff retreat? Plants, like people, are beautifully diverse and complex, and some combinations work better than others. Gardeners can make these differences work for them.



Companion planting is based on the belief that certain plants benefit others when they're planted together or near each other. Plants can naturally protect one another from pests or suppress disease, reducing or eliminating the need to use chemicals. Conversely, some plants can suppress or even kill others with chemicals they secrete into the soil, as with the black walnut tree.



# Friend or Foe?

## Companion Planting Continued

### Plant Near These

garlic, geranium, mint

basil, garlic, cucumbers

carrots, celery, lettuce

onions, parsley, peas

flowering herbs

marigolds, parsnips, strawberries

peppers, tomatoes, and most other plants

— **Roses** —

— **Broccoli** —

— **Tomatoes** —

— **Carrots** —

— **Zucchini** —

— **Chives** —

— **Marigold** —

### Do Not Plant Near These

Ground covers that aggressively spread

grapes, mustard, oregano

corn, kale, pole beans

dill and parsnips

No known foes

beans and peas

No known foes

General information on how close to plant companions or how far to separate garden foes can be difficult to find. It really depends on the specific plants involved and how they benefit or detract from each other. Try a search such as “planting broccoli and tomatoes” for guidance. Do your due diligence, but don’t be afraid to experiment to discover what works for your garden. Nature is not static, and everyone’s research is ongoing.

For more about companion gardening, see [Companion Planting Creates Harmony in the Garden.](#)

# Easy Outdoor Gardening

## The Salsa Garden

**You'll get the most bang for your buck (and harvest for your time) if you plant a salsa garden. Think tomatoes, bell peppers, onions, garlic, & jalapeños. Here's a rundown of the harvest from an experienced, though imperfect, salsa gardener:**

**Tomatoes:** The trick for tomatoes is to estimate when your final frost of spring will happen. Count back a few weeks from this date and plant your seedlings indoors. Once the threat of frost has subsided, your baby plants can be transplanted outdoors. If you aren't sure about the frost date, transplant your starts into a large pot that can be moved back indoors if needed. Also, have some stakes or caging ready to support your tomato vines once they begin to mature. Tomatoes are dense and heavy and will lay on the ground if you don't support them. When they lay on the ground they get bugs.

**Garlic:** This is easy to grow and tastes so much better from a fresh garden! Plant your garlic in the fall for harvest in late spring. If you're too late for garlic planting this year, buy several varieties of garlic throughout the summer months so you can cook and experiment to find out which is your favorite. When you're ready to plant, crack your bulb of choice into individual cloves before you bury them. Give it some good soil, and enjoy winter while your bulbs hibernate. They should sprout in mid-spring. However, if some green shoots show up early don't worry. Most gardeners just leave them alone and they're just fine.

**Onions:** Smaller onions grow quickly and you don't have to do much chopping before throwing them into the blender. Onions are ready to harvest when the long, green shoots get heavy and start to fold over.

**Jalapeños:** These are another easy veggie to grow. There are many varieties and the seed manufacturers will assign a spice level. Soil conditions can also affect the spice. Every palette is different, so you should plant at least two varieties in case one is too hot or too mild for your taste.

**Bell Pepper:** These are more difficult to grow, but are not impossible. They're larger than jalapeños and attract pests (insects and rabbits). Keep an eye on your peppers and make sure to water them as frequently as you water your tomatoes. The extra labor is worth the reward, though. Homegrown bell peppers are flavorful, crunchy, and full of vitamin C. Bell peppers, like jalapeños, take about 70 days to mature.

**To learn how to grow herbs for your salsa garden, check out [Easiest Plants to Grow Indoors and Out](#)**





# Easy Landscape Gardening



Landscape plants are the toughest to tackle. You can plant babies and hope for the best, or you can pay a hefty price for mature plants and have them planted and pruned by a professional. It's advised to consult with a landscape artist before you take on any major landscaping projects. If you're looking to add some plants to your landscape, here are some plants to help boost your home's curb appeal.



**Jonquils (northern climate):** The Jonquil, a type of perennial that stems from the daffodil family, grows from a bulb. With this plant, proper planting is key. Your bulbs should be 10-12 inches deep and covered with fertile soil. If you plant them at the proper depth they'll flower year after year. Also, after the flowers have bloomed and faded, cut the stems down to one inch above the soil. This seems to help the plants stay healthy.

**Boxwood (northern climate):** Boxwood shrubs are a popular landscape shrub, and for good reasons. You can get a decent-sized boxwood for under \$30 and they'll usually root well even when planted by a novice. They only require a moderate amount of water and look appropriate almost anywhere. Boxwoods require a yearly pruning or the branches will start to curve and look awkward.

**Variegated ginger (southern climate):** Emily, a well-traveled homeowner, recommends variegated ginger as an easy landscaping choice for southern homeowners. This beautiful plant has delicate seashell flowers that will leave you thinking about Florida vacations! Emily states, "I never watered it, but it grew fuller and fuller every year."

Check out [Easiest Plants to Grow Indoors and Out](#) to learn how the amaryllis can help transform your garden.

# Easy Indoor Gardening

Growing plants indoors is not only just a great way to decorate your home, but indoor plants can also freshen up the air in your home. Indoor plants are great for those who have a green thumb but don't have the luxury of an outside space for a garden! These indoor picks are even great for aspiring gardeners who are afraid of killing anything green!

**Aloe Vera:** The aloe plant is the queen of the windowsill. She requires sunlight but not much water, so you can basically set up your aloe and forget about it. Aloe is a succulent, after all. The kitchen is the perfect room for an aloe plant because the gel comes in handy for treating minor burns and scrapes. Just break the tip of a shoot off and apply some of the gel to the affected skin.

**Spider Plant:** The spider plant is a quintessential hanging plant. Many homeowners will hang them in the kitchen in macramé baskets hanging from the ceiling. While there's still a place for macramé floral patterns in retro design, spider plants are a nice choice for modern designs as well. Try hanging them in silver or gold pots, for rooms decorated with a light industrial theme. If you have a cat, though, keep this plant far out reach. Spider plants are toxic yet irresistible to felines. Water once a week and make sure your spider plant is close enough to a window to get some sun.



**Bamboo Palm:** This plant has made its way to many offices, salons, and homes. A little research confirmed that bamboo palms are known for improving indoor air quality. If this seems like the perfect news for you, you can order your first bamboo palm from Amazon. These will grow larger if you increase the size of their planter and they may even flower. Also, the ASPCA reports that bamboo palms are non-toxic to cats, so no worries about your pets!

# Growing Calendar



Growing calendars are a useful tool to help you plan your gardening. Growing calendars are based on your location and growing zone. These are easy to use and can provide you with valuable information. Gardening calendars will show you when to plant and when to harvest, so the chances of a successful garden is more. Below is an example of a growing calendar for Zone 6.

## Zone 6 Calendar

Start Inside

Transfer Outside

Start Outside

	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov
Tomatoes	<div></div>		<div></div>						
Basil	<div></div>		<div></div>						
Watermelon			<div></div>						
Violas							<div></div>	<div></div>	

**Burpee** is a great resource to find more growing calendars in your growing zone. You can find growing calendars for vegetables, herbs, fruits, and flowers! Burpee will guide you on how to use the growing calendar.