

Growing Food Without a Farm

GARDEN LOCATION

What type of garden is best?

Private vs Public - Depending on what's available to you, choose the option that is best suitable - for example, are you gardening by yourself or do you want to garden with others? Do you want to garden in containers, or in a raised plot? However you want to garden, it is recommended that you start small and expand later.

If you have access to an appropriate garden location, a private garden is possible. It can be a container garden, an in-ground backyard garden or a raised plot garden.

If you do not have access to a private site, there are a variety of public options available, but require a bit more planning. For example, maybe your neighbour has an unused backyard - ask for their permission to establish a garden there. Maybe there is a community organization in your neighbourhood - speak with them about establishing a community garden in a nearby lot!

Where should I put my garden?

The best area is one that is sunny, has some shelter, and access to water.

Put your garden in a location where the possibility for expansion is possible. This is particularly important for in-ground or raised plots.

Don't forget that you may need space for compost piles, tool storage and space between rows.

Resources:

Garden Plot Location Considerations

<https://www.homemadefoodjunkie.com/garden-plot-location-considerations/>

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PLOTS VS CONTAINERS

Where is the best place to plant?

When planting your garden, you can plant directly into the ground, you can build a raised bed or even plant in containers. The option you choose may depend on the amount of space you have available, how you want to plan your garden, and whether you might want to relocate your garden in the future.

One caution about raised beds. Be sure to stay away from pressure-treated lumber and plastics when building your beds as the chemicals may contaminate your plants. Raised beds can be built from a variety of materials including brick or logs.

Resources to help you decide between in-ground or raised beds:

<https://www.dailyharvestdesigns.com/blog/2015/3/23/raised-beds-vs-in-ground-beds>

What can I grow in containers?

Container gardening is a great way to grow fresh vegetables, especially in a small space like a balcony or patio. Anything can be used as a container for gardening (even found objects like teapots and tin cans) as long as it is large enough for the plant you want to grow. Be sure to choose a food safe container. Some great plants to start with are tomatoes, peppers, lettuce and herbs.

Container gardens have an additional advantage in that they are easily portable. Even if you don't plan to move your garden, you can extend the life of some plants by moving them inside during the cold weather.

There are pros and cons to every different kind of container. This website will help you to decide what is right for your conditions.

<https://themicrogardener.com/choosing-a-container-the-pros-and-cons-2/>



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SOIL

Why is soil so important?

Soil is probably the most important part of having a happy garden. When your soil is healthy, your garden will also be healthy and productive.

Knowing the type of soil in your garden will help you to determine what types of things to add. In southern Alberta, many of our soils have a lot of clay, which means that adding sand and organic matter (compost) is very important. Try the following test to see what type of soil you have:

1. Fill a jar about one-third full with soil and fill with water.
2. Shake the mixture vigorously, until all the clumps of soil have dissolved.
3. Now set the jar on a windowsill and watch as the larger particles begin to sink to the bottom.
4. In a minute or two the sand will have settled to the bottom. Mark the level of sand on the side of the jar.
5. Leave the jar for several hours. The silt particles will gradually settle onto the sand. Mark that layer.
6. Leave the jar overnight. The clay will settle onto the silt. Mark the thickness of that layer. On top of the clay will be a thin layer of organic matter. Some of the organic matter may still be floating in the water. If not, you probably need to add organic matter to improve the soil's fertility and structure.

To learn more about the best way to improve your soil, visit this page:
<https://www.gardeners.com/how-to/building-healthy-soil/5060.html>

Healthy soil also contains lots of bugs and insects. This article can tell you how to tell the good bugs from the bad:

<http://www.calgaryherald.com/life/Garden+bugs+Friend/6569570/story.html>

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STARTING SEEDS

Should I start my own seeds?

When choosing plants for your garden, you can plant seeds or purchase seedlings from local garden centres. Some seeds are easier to start than others, so you may want to try a mix of both in your garden.

For root vegetables, flowers and plants that grow quickly, such as lettuce and spinach, start the seeds outside in the ground as per seed package directions.

Frost sensitive plants such as tomatoes and cucumbers can be started indoors, either in a sunny window or with full-spectrum lighting. These seeds are not difficult to start, but can be tricky without proper light conditions. If you have a south facing window, it is totally possible without any fancy equipment.

Many seedlings can be purchased easily, but the cost adds up depending on the garden size. We recommend shopping at local greenhouses rather than corporate chains, as there will be better selection, healthier transplants, and knowledgeable staff members to help you!

How do I start my own seeds?

Any container can be used to grow seeds. Even newspaper can be shaped into a cup and made into a biodegradable container that can be planted directly in the ground.

Most seedlings are fragile when small, so they are very sensitive to drying out. Cover your small seedlings with plastic wrap or a clear food-packing container to help keep the heat and moisture in the soil.

For more tips about starting your own seeds, try this website:

<https://www.gardeners.com/how-to/how-to-start-seeds/5062.html>

<https://northernhomestead.com/starting-seeds-indoors/>



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