



## A Simple Approach To Your First Vegetable Garden

**G**rowing up there was nothing better than a sandwich made with fresh, homegrown tomatoes. Every year, my dad would grow tomatoes and I kept him company while he tended to the garden. The vibrant red color, the taste and the juiciness is so vivid in my mind like it was yesterday as are the memories of spending time with him. I have never tried to grow any vegetables on my own but here we are 25 years later and I want to try. After talking with several of my clients and doing a little of my own research I have an easy plan for starting a vegetable garden. I know that if I can do it, you can, too. So let's get started.

### **STEP 1: A raised bed or container gardening is the easiest and least expensive way to create your first vegetable garden.**

You can build a raised bed from a raised bed kit or make your own with a few pieces of wood. Here is a simple step by step instructions for a [raised garden bed](#).

**STEP 2: Start Small.** A good size for a beginner's vegetable garden is 4 x 4 square garden bed frame. Generally, the bulk of a plant's roots will need 6-8 inches of soil depth for healthy growth. One of my clients told me her mom used a plastic kiddie pool for her raised bed and put holes in the bottom. It doesn't get any easier than that!

**STEP 3: Should you place the bed in sun or shade?** That will depend on the vegetables you choose to plant. Start small, 4-5 vegetables plus a couple herbs. Plant just a few of each; you'll get plenty of fresh produce for your summer meals, and it will be easy to take care of. Container growing is also a good way to start out. You can place containers on a sunny deck or balcony.

**STEP 4: Your water source should be in close proximity to your garden.** During the first few weeks, you'll need to be able to water frequently so the seeds germinate or if you are transplanting seedlings to help them produce strong roots and stems. Once your plants are established, water your garden well every few days rather than a little sprinkle every day. It will give the water the opportunity to move deeper into the soil, which encourages roots to grow deeper, and access the nutrients they need to stay healthy.

**STEP 5: Grow what you eat.** Like I mentioned in the beginning, there is nothing better than eating fresh, homegrown vegetables or adding your own herbs to season your food. So start there when deciding what you want to grow and also consider the location of your raised garden bed (full sun or partial shade). Below is a list of vegetables and herbs that are the easiest to grow for first timers.

**Full Sun** - Vegetables that require full sun can be planted in a raised bed or containers and placed on a sunny patio. These include radishes, green beans, turnips, tomatoes, cucumbers, arugula, kale, green onions, bok choy, okra, basil, dill, and rosemary. These vegetables are fast growing and some of the easiest vegetables to grow.

**Partial Shade** - Vegetables that grow best in partial shade include lettuce, kale, chard, spinach, chives, cilantro, parsley, and thyme. Root vegetables like carrots, radishes, and beets might also work if your site gets at least 4 hours of direct sunlight a day.



*I'm going to choose a raised bed in partial shade and plant butter lettuce, cucumbers, jalapeno peppers, and summer squash. I am also going to place tomatoes, rosemary, basil, and thyme in containers on my patio.*

**STEP 6:** Once you've determined where you are going to put your garden, get your raised bed in place, line the bottom of the frame with several layers of newspaper, fill with soil, water the soil and you are ready to plant. That being said, what type of soil do you fill it with? For our raised bed, the easiest soil to use is a 50:50 mixture of potting soil and manure. Vegetables require a rich, well-drained growing medium to thrive. These types of soil mixtures are easy to dig and drain well. Plant seeds according to seed packets with plenty of room to grow.

Alternatively, you can plant vegetables and herbs in containers. A five gallon bucket is perfect for this use. Drill or punch 10 to 15 holes in the bottom to let excess water drain out. Fill the bottom with roughly 2 inches of gravel and top it with the 50:50 mix of planting soil and manure. You can choose to either plant seeds or one large plant per bucket. Water them thoroughly and water again when the soil is dry about 1/2-inch below the surface. GARDENTIP: Give your container plants a little afternoon shade if you live where the summer sun is intense.

**STEP 7:** Water is key to a successful garden and why it warrants being mentioned a second time. So here are 2

#### GARDEN WATER TIPS:

- It's important that you water the soil, rather than the leaves of the plants to keep from developing fungal diseases.
- Watering early in the morning gives crops time to absorb the moisture before it evaporates in the heat of the day. Any water that gets on the foliage will also have enough time to dry off before nightfall, minimizing the risk from slugs and fungal diseases.

**STEP 8:** Caring for your garden isn't hard. First, you want to keep pests that can cause harm to your vegetables out. Natural predators like ladybugs and lacewings, can take care of harmful spider mites and aphids. Most garden centers carry insecticidal soap sprays for large insects. Keeping out big pests like rabbits and deer will require a fence, at least 8' tall for deer, 6 inches below ground to keep rabbits from digging underneath. Second, you want to keep out weeds. Just because you have a raised bed doesn't mean weeds won't find their way to your plants. A few minutes on a regular basis is an easy way to make sure you stay ahead of the weeds. A great way to care for your garden is to create a garden schedule that includes when to plant, when to water, when to weed and check for pests, and when to plan to harvest!

**STEP 9:** Harvest your vegetables when they are young and tender, picking them when you plan to use them and enjoy the deliciousness!

