

# Vegetable Gardening Made Easy

Here are the keys to a successful, fruitful garden.

*Proper soil prep, feeding and watering are 3 major keys. The 4<sup>th</sup> is Mother Nature...*

## SOIL PREP

Improving our soil is the #1 key to growing a successful garden. Our heavy clay valley soils need to be loosened to allow for proper drainage and better root growth. The addition of soil amendments or organic conditioners plays a key role in transforming our brick like earth into "good garden loam".

First, remove all large rocks, weeds and debris from the planting area. For a 100 square foot area rototill into the soil: 5 bags of **Bumper Crop** (2 cubic foot bags), 4 pounds of **E.B. Stone Organic Vegetable Food** and 5 pounds of **Iron Sulfate**. Next apply from 5 pounds to as much as 50 pounds of **Gypsum**. This combination will enrich and lighten your soil. March is a great month to prepare for your Spring/Summer garden. For your Fall/Winter garden, improve your soil in September.

## PLANTING

Vegetables may be started from seed or "starter" plants. Seedlings or a 4-inch potted plant give you a head start in the growing process and are usually easier to establish. If you begin from seed remember to thin the seedlings as they grow to get stronger, healthier individual plants.

Spring planting is generally done after the danger of frost, which maybe as early as mid-March or as late as mid-April. **Spring/Summer crops** include Tomatoes, Peppers, Squash, Eggplant, Cucumbers, Corn, Beans, Pumpkins, Melons and Strawberries. Some of your leafy green vegetables can also be grown now if given some special care.

Fall planting is generally started as the summer heat subsides, which for our valley is about September 1<sup>st</sup>, although many can be started from seed in August. **Fall/Winter crops** include Artichokes, Asparagus (November), Broccoli, Brussel Sprouts, Cabbage, Cauliflower, Kale, Lettuce, Mustard, Onions, Peas, Rhubarb (November), Swiss Chard and Spinach. Radishes and Carrots may be grown from seed.

When planting small starter plants, take extra care not to damage the stem where it enters the ground. Make sure not to bury the stem of the plant under extra soil; the crown needs to "breathe". When you plant, mix into the soil a "starter" fertilizer, choose either **EB Stone Sure Start or Master Nursery Master Start**. This helps the young plants develop a stronger root system.

## FERTILIZING

Feeding is the 2<sup>nd</sup> key component to a fruitful garden. A "starter" fertilizer will get your young transplants off to a healthy beginning. After about 3-4 weeks you'll need to begin your regular fertilizing schedule.

We recommend using **EB Stone Organic Tomato Vegetable Food** or **Master Nursery Tomato & Vegetable Food** once a month. They not only feed the plants but the soil as well. Fertilizers should never be applied to dry, thirsty plants. Water your plants well the day before, then apply your fertilizer and then water the plants again. Avoid feeding on extra hot days (over 85 degrees).

## WATERING

Watering is the 3<sup>rd</sup> Key to a successful garden. It's important to water new transplants right away. For the most part a vegetable garden is perfectly suited to be water-wise since most veggies will fruit better if kept on the dry side.



**Alden Lane Nursery**

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# Vegetable Gardening Made Easy (cont'd)

Consider using **drip systems and soaker hoses**. Both will deliver water slowly and can conserve up to 70% of your water use. On larger growing plants like tomatoes, use 3 drip emitters, triangulated around the plant, and run the system for 1 hour to start, then increase it to 2 hours when the plant has grown. How frequently depends mostly on your soil's water holding capacity and also on weather conditions. In general, you want to thoroughly soak your vegetable plants and then let them approach dry, in between watering\*. When you see the plants wilting (droopy) and you know it's been a while since you've watered, then it's time to water again. Temperature extremes will cause plants to droop even if they have enough water.

*\*Cucumbers and bell peppers are exceptions to the rule. Keep them evenly moist to prevent bitterness.)*

## MULCHING

Mulching in late spring with 3-4 inches of **Shredded Forest Bark** helps to conserve water, moderate soil temperatures during the heat of summer and discourage weeds. Studies have shown that plants that have been mulched grow faster and develop higher yields in the long term. Apply mulch in late spring to allow the sun to warm the soil early in the season. Remember to keep the mulch about one inch away from the plants stem.

## PEST MANAGEMENT

The first line of defense for your new plants is to protect them from snails, slugs and earwigs. Bait close to the base of your plants, around the bed and under nearby low growing shrubs with **Sluggo Plus**. The label directions will guide you for the frequency of reapplication. For other pest problems, it is best to identify what you're dealing with before treating. Bring in a sample if you are not sure.

**Ladybugs** make a good biological control for aphids and some other soft-bodied insects. **Captain Jack's Spinosad** and **Bonide All-Season Spray Oil** are good broad spectrum plant care products that are organic (OMRI approved) and treat most vegetable pests.

## OTHER TIPS & HINTS

- In late spring or summer, new plants should be transplanted into the ground late in the day, just before sunset, so they will not suffer from heat stress.
- Tomato & pepper flowers will not set fruit if nighttime temperatures drop below 55 degrees and flowers will usually drop off.
- When your tomatoes & peppers are blooming, gently shake the plants to aid in pollination. This will increase fruit set.
- Even out watering on tomato plants once fruit has set and begins to color.
- Cooler temperatures will slow set & ripening of all spring/summer vegetables.

