



# How to Start an Organic Vegetable Garden

An organic vegetable garden is a natural and healthy way to grow vegetables for your personal consumption. Deciding to go organic will result in vegetables that have not been treated with chemicals or herbicides. Organic gardening may have a few more challenges than regular gardening, but these can be overcome with research and hard work. The following steps will help you make an organic vegetable garden.

## Steps

### 1 Find the appropriate area for your organic vegetable garden.

- Your garden will need plenty of sunlight, but should be near a water source.
- You will want to be able to protect your garden if necessary from birds and animals.
- Consider drainage issues so your garden does not hold too much water.

### 2 Determine if you prefer an in-ground garden bed or a raised garden bed.

- Raised beds can be made from materials such as cedar, which is a natural insect repellent.
- In-ground beds may require additional tilling work and, depending on where you live, you may need to locate utility wires before digging.

### 3 Prepare the organic garden bed.

- Decide on the size and shape of the garden bed and dig out the area using a shovel or spade. Use a hand tiller to loosen the dirt and break apart clumps.
- Research the recommended planting depth for the types of vegetables you are planting to determine how deep to dig.
- Add compost, which can be purchased in bulk and delivered to your home. Compost can be found in bags at your local gardening center or you can make it.
- You may prefer to use organic garden soil. Mix the organic soil in with the existing dirt or add it to the raised bed.

### 4 Shop for organic seedlings or organic seeds.

- Organic plants can be difficult to find locally. Many nurseries use fertilizers and pesticides, so be sure to ask.
- You can purchase organic seeds at online gardening stores.
- Choose plants that can grow well in your region and soil type.
- Inspect plants carefully for signs of disease or insect damage. Make sure the plants are healthy and not root-bound. Loosen it from the pot to see if the roots are wrapped around inside the pot. If it is root-bound, you can still use it, but you will have to cut it before planting.

### 5 Plant your organic garden.

- Water your plants before planting to moisten the root ball and lessen the shock of transplanting.
- Dig holes with a hand spade at the appropriate distance apart as indicated by the type of plant. Make the holes as deep as the root ball and 2 times as wide. Fill in dirt around the plants and pack slightly.
- Add a protective layer of mulch, grass clippings or hay to keep in moisture and keep weeds down. Gently spread the mulch evenly with a garden rake and hand rake.
- Water your plants immediately after planting.

## 6 Label your organic plants.

- You will want to label the vegetables in your garden so you will remember what they are as they begin to grow. This is important if you have several varieties of the same vegetable or if it is perennial (will live for another growing season). It will also help you to determine which plants do well for future gardening plans.
- Use small wooden stakes to label your organic garden plants. Copper, brass, stoneware and other types of plant labels are also available from online gardening stores.

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### Tips

- You can have your soil analyzed by your local cooperative extension office to determine what you might need to add to have the most successful garden possible.
- You can fight pests without the use of chemicals by introducing predator insects such as ladybugs, or by interspersing vegetables with herbs and flowers.
- Plan your gardening time frame based on the amount of time each plant will take to produce. This will vary from plant to plant and will also depend on whether you start from seeds or plants.

### Warnings

- If you are buying prepackaged mulch, be sure to check the sources to make sure it is organic.

### Things You'll Need

- Shovel or spade
- Hand tiller
- Garden rake
- Hand spade and hand rake
- Organic soil

- Compost
- Mulch
- Organic plants or seeds
- Hose for watering
- Stakes for labeling

### Sources and Citations

- <http://www.helpfulgardener.com/organic/2006/vegetable-garden.html>
- <http://organicgardening.about.com/od/startinganorganicgarden/a/newgarden.htm>

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