

VICTORY GARDENING IN SAN FRANCISCO

San Francisco's climate makes vegetable gardening a sometimes challenging, but mostly rewarding experience. We can't grow many of the warm weather crops because our summers are foggy and cool. However, we do have the advantage of mild, generally frost-free winters and the possibility of growing cool season crops year round. Additionally, the warmer months of September and October often extend our summer harvests into November.

PREPARE

Microclimate: Pay attention to your microclimate! The side of town you are on, or even which side of the yard you plant in can make a big difference in what you are able to grow. Wind, fog and heat make a big difference to your plants' vigor.

Weeds: Weeding is easier when the soil is moist, and much more effective before the weeds have gone to seed. The first winter rains usually bring weeds in December and January. Mulching with bark or wood chips after weeding will help prevent more weed seeds from germinating.

Soil and Fertilization: Test your soil for nutrients (N-P-K,) texture, pH, and lead- especially if you are growing food. Prepare your soil well for spring and summer growth, add lots of compost and appropriate soil amendments, or an organic all purpose fertilizer. Consider planting a cover crop to let your soil rest in the winter or even in the summer. Winter cover crops include: crimson clover, fava beans, bell beans, vetch, ogle oats, winter wheat, alfalfa. Buckwheat is a good summer cover crop.

PLANT

Starting from Seed vs. Buying Starts from the Nursery

How much preparation time do you have? Do you have a place to start seeds where they will be watered daily, protected from cold/wind/rain and also will get enough heat to germinate, and light to grow? Many summer vegetables can be started in the greenhouse in March, such as tomatoes and basil, others do better to plant directly into the soil in April or May, such as beans and corn.

Pick Healthy Nursery Plants

When you buy plants at the nursery, look for multiple shoots and leaves, not necessarily for flowers or fruits. Very young plants should have healthy root growth, and not be fruiting or flowering. Also, you may have to separate the many seedlings growing in one cell.

Read Seed Packets: Look for essentials such as planting depth, spacing, germination requirements, etc., but bear in mind that planting times and days to maturity may not be accurate for our S.F. climate.

Basics of Seedsowing: Seeds should be planted according to package, but a general rule of thumb is to plant seeds at a depth of 2 - 3 times the diameter. When choosing whether to direct sow or plant in the greenhouse, remember that certain plants react poorly to transplanting (root vegetables.)

When to Plant:

February/March: bare root vegetables and fruits (edible perennials such as artichoke, rhubarb, strawberries, raspberries, asparagus) perennial herbs, hardy greens, onions, potatoes and leeks.

April/May: basil, cilantro, beans, squash, tomatoes, sunflowers and other summer flowers.
*Continue sowing summer crops through July for late harvests into October and November.
September/October: winter vegetables such as kale, chard, broccoli and root crops.
November: onions, garlic, and edible perennials once again, to take advantage of the rainy season.

Varieties: Choosing early maturing varieties can bring success with hard to grow vegetables, especially those that require summer heat. Other varieties provide resistance to certain diseases.

PROSPER

Water: Consider installing an irrigation system with drip emitters, which will deliver water regularly and to the roots of plants, thus preventing many plant diseases. Most gardens do not need additional irrigation during the months of December through February. However, container gardens and annual vegetables need more attention than perennial plantings.

Pests and Diseases: During the rainy season, slugs and snails will do the most damage in the garden. During the warmer months, look out for: aphids, tomato blights and wilts, powdery mildew, cabbage moths, beet leaf miner and whitefly. Non-toxic methods such as early detection, appropriate pruning, proper watering, and garlic sprays can control these pests.

Pay Attention: Visit your garden regularly. The best way to grow healthy plants is to prevent pest and disease problems before they grow out of control. The more often you are in your garden, the more you will learn about your plants' life cycle and how to best care for them.

RESOURCES

The University of Massachusetts at Amherst, inexpensive, thorough soil tests.

<http://www.umass.edu/soiltest>

The Urban Farmer Store 2833 Vicente St. San Francisco, CA <http://www.urbanfarmerstore.com/>

Broadmoor Landscape Supply, South San Francisco, CA <http://www.broadmoorlandscape.com/>

Bay View Greenwaste, 1300 Carroll Ave, San Francisco, CA (415) 822-7686

American Soil, Richmond, CA www.americansoil.com

Independent Nature, 1504 Church St. San Francisco, CA (415) 642-1708

Flowercraft Garden Center, 550 Bayshore Blvd. San Francisco, CA <http://www.flowercraftgc.com/>

Sloat Garden Center, many locations San Francisco, CA <http://www.sloatgardens.com/>

Bay Area Seed Interchange Library (BASIL) Berkeley Ecology Center

<http://ecologycenter.org/basil/>

Seeds of Change www.seedsofchange.com

Renee's Garden www.reneesgarden.com

Botanical Interests www.botanicalinterests.com

Compiled by Carey Craddock -Organic Garden Design and Maintenance slugcarey@hotmail.com

This handout uses information from the book Golden Gate Gardening by Pam Peirce, Sasquatch Books, 1998, 2010.