

## Vegetable Garden Evaluation and Planning Ahead

Annual vegetables grow quickly, but good gardens and gardening skills develop over many years. If you make mistakes in your garden this year, such as seeding spinach too late so it flowers immediately, or planting a beefsteak-variety tomato that doesn't mature in Seattle's cool summers, you have to wait a whole year to get a second chance. For most of us, the only way to be sure to remember and learn from our mistakes in the garden is to keep good garden records and use them in planning for next season.

### **The information you gather can help you:**

- > Plant varieties that will grow and taste good and avoid the ones that won't.
- > Plant things at the right time and in the right place and avoid previous mistakes.
- > Set up rotations that help you avoid disease and insect problems.
- > Plan fertilizer, compost, and lime applications to get the most benefit from them.

### **To be useful, a garden log should record:**

- > What you plant (crop, variety and seed company)
- > Dates crops were started and transplanted
- > What fertilizers and soil amendments were added
- > When and how much was harvested
- > Insect and disease problems
- > Personal opinion of crop quality
- > Ideas for what you'd like to try next year

Only you can say what vegetable variety tastes good to you. But, when it comes to how well a plant grows and whether it matures on time, some of our publications will help guarantee success. You can make sure that you are planting the correct variety at the best time. Water, fertilization, soil quality and light all contribute, but the "right plant at the right time" can be the determining factor in successful gardening. WSU Extension Bulletin *Home Gardens, EB0422* is available for downloading at [pubs.wsu.edu](http://pubs.wsu.edu). Also useful are **Fact Sheet #8 Vegetables – Starting Indoors and Outdoors** and **Fact Sheet #9 Vegetables – Seed Starting and Spacing**, as well as over a dozen additional Fact Sheets related to the growing of vegetables. These are available free from the WSU Extension Master Gardener program in King County.

### **Rotations**

There are several reasons for using crop rotations, and an infinite number of patterns of rotations. For most home gardeners, simple rotations are sufficient. The most important rotation rules to adhere to are:

- > Vegetables of the same group should not be grown in the same spot two years in a row.
- > Do not plant **potatoes** in the same place more often than every third year. Also, allow at least one year between the application of lime and growing potatoes in sandy soils, two years in clay soils. Lime increases the problem of potato scab.

> Grow a **legume** at least every three years in every spot. Clover and peas as a green manure will help you do this. **See Fact Sheet #27 Green Manures.**

It is wise to rotate different crops through specific areas of your garden to avoid the buildup of disease or insects, or the depletion of nutrients. Different crops use major nutrients in varying amounts and from different soil depths. By rotating plantings, you can make the best use of fertilizers, lime, and available soil nutrients. Rotating crops by groups is as effective as rotating specific crops.

**General groups with some comments on their specific needs are:**

- > Greens: Lettuce, spinach, chard, celery, etc. Taste best if grown with plenty of nitrogen and a recently limed (alkaline) soil.
- > Roots: Beets, carrots, potatoes. Need potassium, loose organic soil, not a lot of nitrogen. Prefer neutral soil (except potatoes, which prefer acidic soil).
- > Vegetables that are really fruits: Tomatoes, squash, peppers require high phosphorous levels.
- > Legumes: Peas and beans like a limed soil and a high level of phosphorous.
- > Cabbage family: Cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, choys, turnips, radishes, mustards, collards, kale like a recently limed soil and lots of nitrogen.
- > Corn: Corn is a heavy feeder. It likes limed soil, lots of nitrogen, potassium, and phosphorous.
- > Onion family: Chives, garlic, leeks, onions, shallots like loose, organic soil and regular applications of general-purpose fertilizer.

**Suggested three-year rotation plan**

	Year One	Year Two	Year Three
Soil Preparation	- Remove sod and dig bed deeply - Add manure or compost - Lime (do preceding fall if possible) - Add complete fertilizer, high in nitrogen	- Add fertilizer high in phosphorus - For fruit crops (see above) cover soil with agricultural “seasonal extender” plastic after turning under your cover crop. This will warm the soil in preparation for planting.	- Add compost - Use no manure or lime - Add fertilizer high in potassium
Crops	Cabbage family Greens Corn	Legumes Fruit crops	Root crops Potatoes Onions
Overwinter	Cabbage family Greens	Fava beans Cover crop	Onions Cover crop