

# Pickin' Patch

Feeding big appetites from small spaces

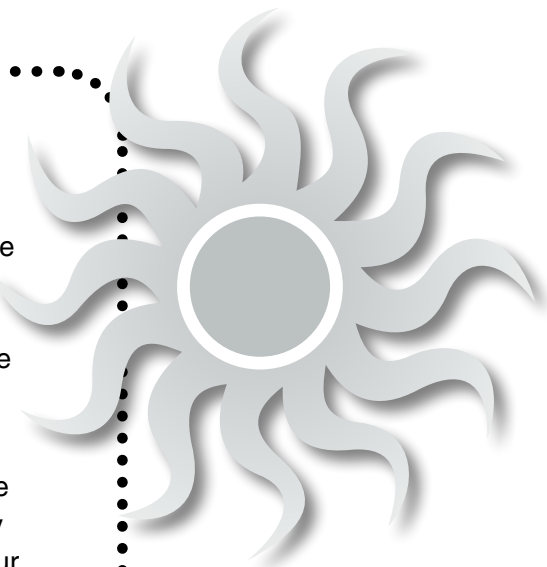
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## Site Selection

Think small. You will have a more productive garden by keeping it small and weed-free than if it's too large to keep maintained. Choose a location that will get at least six to eight hours of sunlight per day. Think of unused locations along buildings with good sun exposure. Stay away from trees; they create shade and their roots will compete with vegetable plants for soil nutrients.

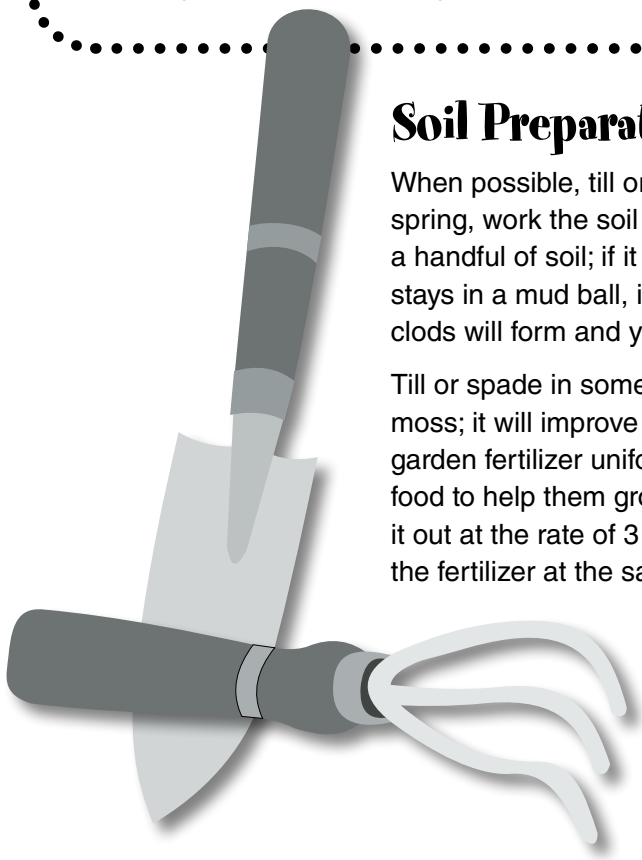
Shelter from wind is important; it allows your plants to grow faster than if they are not protected. Well-drained soil is a must; don't place your garden in low spots or where water stands for long periods. Try to locate your garden where you will have access to water. Keep your garden handy by locating it close to the kitchen. The old name for a small garden was "kitchen garden."



## Soil Preparation

When possible, till or spade your soil the fall before you plan to plant. In the spring, work the soil as early as possible, but be sure it's dry enough. Squeeze a handful of soil; if it falls apart when you open your hand, it's ready to work. If it stays in a mud ball, it's still too wet. If the soil is too wet when you work it, mud clods will form and you will have to deal with them all season.

Till or spade in some organic matter, such as compost, well-rotted manure or peat moss; it will improve the water-holding capacity and drainage of your soil. Adding garden fertilizer uniformly will ensure that your vegetable plants will have enough food to help them grow. Use a fertilizer with a blend of about 10-10-10 and spread it out at the rate of 3 to 4 pounds for each 100 square feet of planted area. Mix in the fertilizer at the same time you are tilling in the organic matter.



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## Planting Seeds and Transplants

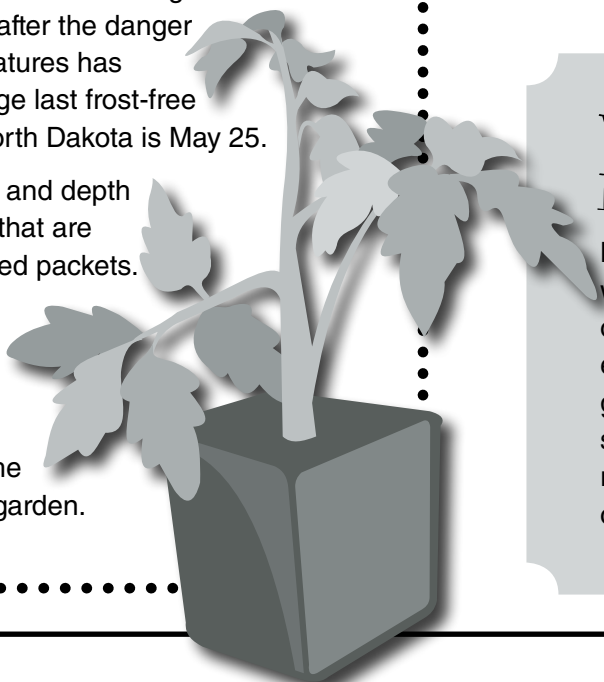
Decide what plants you want in your garden. If this is your first garden, start with plants that are easy to grow. Use plants that do not need lots of space, such as tomatoes, carrots, radishes, lettuce, beans, bush squash, bush pumpkins, Swiss chard, potatoes, onions and peas. Examples of space-robbing plants are sweet corn, melons, vine squash and vine pumpkins.

Most vegetable plants can be planted from seed. However, some plants take longer to grow than others; you will have better success if you start them indoors ahead of time. Some plants that should be started early for later transplanting are tomatoes, peppers, cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower. Harden seedlings off by gradually exposing them to increased sun and wind at least two weeks before you want to plant them outside.

Don't plant too early. Some vegetables will tolerate a little bit of freezing; these are broccoli, cabbage, onions, peas, radishes, rutabagas and spinach. Plants that will tolerate very light frosts are beets, carrots, cauliflower, lettuce, potatoes and Swiss chard. Tender vegetables, those that will die from any frost exposure, are beans, cucumbers, melons, peppers, pumpkins, squash and tomatoes. Tender vegetables should be planted after the danger of freezing temperatures has passed. The average last frost-free date for most of North Dakota is May 25.

Follow the spacing and depth recommendations that are provided on the seed packets.

Keep the tallest vegetable plants from shading the shorter plants by planting them on the north side of your garden.



## Space-saving Techniques

Try these space-saving tips to get more vegetables from a small space:

- Plant a fast-growing vegetable in a row close to a slower-growing one. For example, plant radishes or green onions close to a row of peas or beans. When the radishes or onions are all picked, more space is available for the peas or beans as they get bigger.
- Mix early harvested vegetables with later ones in the same row. Radishes work well when planted with carrots. When the radishes are done, the carrots will be spaced for best growth.
- Plant a small amount at a time. For example, plant a little bit of spinach. When it is just about ready to eat, plant another short row. It's a Pickin' Patch; plant only what you need.
- Plant rows of some vegetables close together. Put carrot or beet rows only 2 to 3 inches apart. Wide rows waste space.
- If you have a fence on the edge of your garden, plant climbers; peas and pole beans work well here.
- Plant mini varieties. Use the bush-type of squash or cucumbers; they are bred to be smaller plants. Tomatoes, too, are available in varieties that have smaller plant sizes.

## Weeds, Weeds Everywhere!

No matter what you do, you will get weeds. Be sure to keep all weeds out of your garden. Weeds pull much easier when small than when they get big. Big weeds require a hoe and some effort to make sure you remove roots while being careful not to injure or disturb the soil of nearby plants.

## How Much Water?

For good growth, your garden needs about 1 inch of moisture per week. When your garden has not gotten much rain, you will have to add extra water to make up the difference. If you are using a sprinkler to add water, put a can out in the garden to catch water from the sprinkler. That will help you determine how much water you've provided. Thus, when the can has 1 inch of water in it, you will know you have added 1 inch of precipitation.

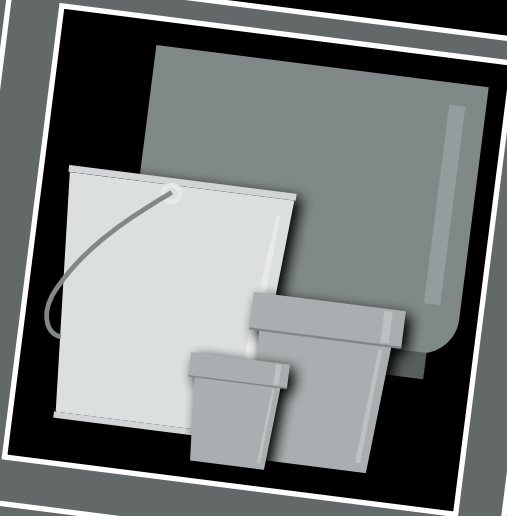
Watering in the morning will reduce the chance of disease development because the foliage will not remain wet overnight. If possible, use a soaker hose instead of a sprinkler, and water the soil, not the leaves. Wet leaves allow diseases to get started more easily.

## Insects and Diseases

Keep a lookout for leaves and plants that are stunted, wilting, or turning yellow or brown; they could be diseased. Watch for leaves that have holes in them or have been chewed; insects may be eating your vegetables. If in doubt, take a sample to your local NDSU Extension office for an identification of the problem. In many situations, insects and diseases can be controlled without spraying. If you choose to use a pesticide. However, do not apply anything until you have positively identified what is affecting your vegetable plants, and be sure to read and follow the directions on the pesticide label.

## Garden in Containers

If you live in an apartment, you still can garden.



- Plant tomatoes or peppers in large pots and on your balcony or patio.
- Plant a few onions alongside the peppers in the pots and maybe a few cilantro seeds.
- Containers need to be watered more often than a Pickin' Patch garden, and you need to add fertilizer regularly.
- Use good potting soil in your containers; don't use garden soil.
- All containers need to have some drain holes. Place a tray under the container to collect water that drains out the bottom.
- Use the right size pot for what you want to grow. Pots don't need to be fancy or expensive. Put your creativity to work by using items you already own.
- A 6-inch pot will be OK for green onions, radishes and herbs.
- You will need a 5-gallon container for tomatoes or peppers.
- A 3-gallon container will work for a few green bean plants (get the climbing kind and train them onto a small trellis).

## Don't forget beneficial insects!

Add color, beauty and benefit pollinators and beneficial insects by including annual flowers in your garden. Examples are alyssum, cleome, cosmos, marigolds, verbena and zinnias.

# How to Use Vegetables from Your Pickin' Patch

Vegetable	Salad	Cooked	Remarks
Green Beans	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Pick when beans start to show in the pod for best flavor.
Beets	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Thin and use leaves and beet roots for early meals. Pick the remainder when they are more than 1 inch.
Carrots	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Start picking carrots when they are the size of your thumb. Late-fall carrots are the sweetest.
Cucumbers	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Pick thumb-sized cucumbers for canning as pickles, bigger ones for slicing in salads.
Green Onions	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	They are best when used about pencil-sized; they are great alone or in salads or stir-fry.
Lettuce	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	For better tasting and crisper lettuce, harvest in the morning.
Peas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Pick when the peas are well-rounded in the pod.
Snap Peas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	These peas give great flavor without all the shelling. Pick when the pods are well-formed.
Peppers (sweet or hot)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Pick these when well-formed and large. Sweet or hot peppers may be picked when green or left to ripen.
Spinach	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Pick it when the leaves are full-sized but before the main rib gets tough. You need a lot to make a meal of cooked spinach, but a little adds lots of flavor to salads.
Radishes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	They are one of our earliest vegetables. Harvest them when they are just about 1 inch; they can be added to stir-fry for crunch and flavor.
Summer Squash	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Harvest when small; 8 inches long is a good size.
Tomatoes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Harvest when ripe for best flavor. Make salsas and can for later use.

## NDSU Sources and Publications to Learn

### More about Gardening:

#### Garden to Table

<https://www.ndsu.edu/agriculture/extension/extension-topics/food-and-nutrition/food-preparation/garden-table>

#### Gardening and Horticulture

<https://www.ndsu.edu/agriculture/extension/extension-topics/gardening-and-horticulture>

#### From the Garden to the Table: Salsa!, FN584

<https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/publications/food-nutrition/from-the-garden-to-the-table-salsa>

#### Field to Fork Leafy Greens!, FN1793

<https://www.ndsu.edu/agriculture/extension/publications/field-fork-leafy-greens>

#### Field to Fork Snap Beans!, FN1798

<https://www.ndsu.edu/agriculture/extension/publications/field-fork-snap-beans>

## References

Lerner, B.R., and Dana, M.N. (2009) *Small plot and intensive gardening*. Department of Horticulture, Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service., West Lafayette, Ind. Retrieved Aug. 6, 2015, from [www.hort.purdue.edu/hort/ext/Pubs/HO/HO\\_124.pdf](http://www.hort.purdue.edu/hort/ext/Pubs/HO/HO_124.pdf)

Masabni, J.G. (2010) *Vegetable gardening in containers*. Department of Horticultural Sciences, Texas A & M University. Retrieved Aug. 6, 2015, from <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu>

Smith, R.C., and Weinmann, T. (2012) *Gardening Delights for All: Nontraditional, Money-saving, Sustainable Gardening*. North Dakota State University Extension Service, Fargo, N.D.

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