



FACEBOOK LIVE SEMINAR

Veggie Garden Prep Time

Great vegetable gardens begin long before planting time, and it's the pre-season work that lays the foundation for a productive growing season with loads of fresh, summer veggies. Gardening expert, Mike Westphal shares his insider tips for prepping the garden and growing great-tasting produce all season long.

LET'S START WITH A PLAN

Light – The #1 thing that vegetable gardens need is sun. Making sure you have enough sun throughout the day in the spot you want to plant your veggie garden is integral to your garden plan. If it is your first time planting, spend a day paying attention to how the sun moves across your yard. When growing veggies you want “full sun” or 6+ hours of direct sun every day for an abundant crop yield. South and west sides of the yard usually get the most sun depending on other structures or tall trees in your yard.

Sizing – Planning the size of the garden you want before starting from seed or planting starter plants is helpful so you know how many plants you will want. Generally, raised bed gardens come in multiples of 4 feet (4x4, 4x8, 4x12). This is so you are able to reach across your beds and efficiently harvest the veggies. Planting in rows and gardening straight from the native soil is also possible, but the soil will need to be amended in both cases before planting.

Spacing your plants the appropriate width apart is also an important thing to consider when planning. Reading the tags and asking one of our Green Team members can help make sure you aren't planting too close or too far away.

The Plants – Deciding what veggies to grow is probably the hardest part of planning your garden because there are so many fun foods to try! However, when thinking on what to plant, you will want to consider what you already like eating as well as what the other people in your household like eating. For example, if you have a 4-person household and only one person likes tomatoes, you might only want 1-4 tomato plants. Generally, you will want 1-4 plants per person to feed them throughout the season.

Drawing the Dream – Creating a drawn or written plan to assist in your veggie garden planning is very helpful. Not only does it give you a visual representation or example of what you want your garden to look like, but bringing a drawn plan into one of our locations can also help you find the plants that will work for your space. Saving your drawn garden plans helps when planning future veggie gardens so you can rotate or change the crops you grew the previous year.

MOVING PAST THE PLAN

Now that you have a plan for your garden, it's time to start preparing to plant by gathering the tools you need and the plants that you chose.

Quick Tips & Tricks on Seed Starting:

- Reading seed packets can be very valuable, not only because they contain the seeds for your favorite veggies, but they give very exact

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information and directions for planting your desired vegetables.

- Seeds can be started indoors with grow lights or directly sown in the ground if the weather and soil temperatures are compliant. Finding what times are good to sew is information you can find on the seed packet, as times vary between plants.
- Knowing the last projected frost date for your area can help in seed sowing and planting. The United States is divided into 13 hardiness zones, for example, McDonald Garden Center year-round locations and seasonal Garden Markets are located in zones 7b - 8a. Planting after the last frost of the season is recommended, and you can usually find the last frost date by looking at your zone. If you are bringing your seedlings from indoors, acclimate them first to outdoor shade and then ease them into full sun before planting.

SOIL PREPERATION

Prepping the soil for your veggies is another essential on the list. Whether you are planting in a raised bed, pots and containers, or even if you are growing in your native ground, you probably need to amend or mix your soil.

Container planting – Terracotta, glazed ceramic, plastic, hanging baskets, the list goes on. Planting in containers is very doable for vegetable gardening. For container planting you will need a **potting soil**. Potting soils have wetting agents that help the soil stay moist in containers. You only ever use potting soil for plants in conatiners.

The Garden Guru Recommends: McDonald Garden Center Natural and Organic Potting Soil & The Earth Box Garden Kit Container.

Raised Beds – Prep your raised beds for filling with soil by measuring how big your bed is, including the depth so you know how many cubic feet of soil you need. For raised bed planting, you will need a mix of **topsoil, compost, peat moss, and perlite**. You can also use a pre-made garden mix or raised bed mix.

The Garden Guru Recommends: The Gronomics Modular Raised Bed, McDonald Garden Center Natural and Organic Garden Compost, Sungro Black Gold Perlite, Sungro Black Gold Vermiculite, McDonald Garden Center Premium Topsoil.

Amending Native Soil – When planting straight in the ground, plants want moist, well-draining soil. Our native soils may not be able to achieve that as they are missing or lacking in essential nutrients. For planting in your clay native soil you will need a mix of **compost, perlite (or vermiculite), and your native soil**. For planting in your sandy native soil you will need a mix of **compost, peat moss, and your native soil**.

The Garden Guru Recommends: McDonald Garden Center Natural and Organic Garden Compost, Sungro Black Gold Perlite, Sungro Black Gold Vermiculite. Sungro Black Gold Peat Moss Plus.

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SOIL pH

- The general desired pH for vegetable gardens is **6.5 - 7**.
- Amend your soil with lime to "sweeten" your soil by raising your pH to be more alkaline.
- Amend your soil with a soil acidifier to lower your pH to be more acidic.

The Garden Guru Recommends: Espoma Organic Garden Lime for the Hampton Roads area, Rapitest soil test kit, Soil Master 3-in-1 pH, Moisture, and Light Meter,

IT'S TIME TO PLANT!

Planting – Planting level with the ground is recommended for all veggie planting. Some veggies you can plant deeper (like tomatoes) but it is not necessary. General rule of thumb is to plant level.

Mulching – mulching your garden after you are done planting is a good idea to avoid weeds, keep the moisture in, keep your roots cool in the hot summer days, and keep your plants warm on cooler days. Use **hardwood, pine straw, wheat straw, pine bark nuggets, pine bark, cedar bark, and cypress bark mulches** for your veggie garden beds.

THE GARDEN GURU'S RECOMMENDED ADDITIONS

After planting is all said and done, you still might need some additional tools and tricks to help you in your veggie garden journey. Here are Mike's favorite products to use to make veggie gardening an even better experience.

Watering -

- Rain Wand by Dramm
- Soaker Garden Hose by Terra Verde
- Zero-G hose by Teknor Apex

Feeding -

- Greenleaf by McDonald Garden Center (organic and traditional)
- Organic Garden-tone by Espoma
- Organic Tomato-tone by Espoma
- Happy Frog Tomato and Vegetable Fertilizer
- Organic Bio-tone Starter Plus by Espoma

Stakes & Ties -

- Heavy duty tomato cage
- The Ultomato Tomato Cage (regular and jumbo sizes)
- Bamboo stakes by Terra Verde (4ft and 6ft)
- Rapticlip vinyl stretch tie

Pest and Disease Control -

- Animal Repellent by "I Must Garden"
- Holographic Scare Tape by Dalen
- Bee-Safe 3-in-1 Garden Spray by Organocide
- Neem Oil by Fertilome
- Bug, Slug & Snail Bait by Fertilome
- Monterey Complete Disease Control RTU by Monterey
- Triple Action by Fertilome

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Tools -

- Garden Gloves by the Bamboo Gardener and Gardware
- Hand tools - trowels, cultivators
- Adjustable Rake by Terra Verde
- The Weed Slice by Burgeon and Ball
- Pruners

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