

Vegetable Gardening 101

By Kathleen Cue, Nebraska Extension Horticulture Educator

Nothing provides greater satisfaction than to grow your own food. It's also really easy to start, with a small investment in some seeds, a few transplants, and a container or plot of land.

A basic requirement in vegetable gardening is a clear understanding that there are cool season vegetables—those that grow and produce best when temperatures are chilly and frost is still a common thing—and warm season vegetables—those that grow abundantly when frosts are past and temperatures are warm. Cool season vegetables include kale, lettuce, peas, radishes, broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, potatoes, onion, and spinach, to name a few. Warm season crops are comprised of eggplant, pepper, tomato, tomatillo, beans, okra, New Zealand spinach, cucumbers, melons, corn, basil, summer squash, and winter squash.

Cool season vegetables will develop flower stalks and fail to produce if planted when temperatures are too warm. Likewise, warm season vegetables will need protection if planted when frosts are still common. Mother's Day serves as a good date to gauge if it's time to be planting warm season vegetables and marks the end of spring planting of many cool season crops. Gardeners have the added benefit of getting in a second crop of cool season vegetables by planting them in late August. Though temperatures may be still warm in late August, cool season seedlings will benefit from lattice or some other temporary shade structure until temperatures cool.

From here, it is helpful to know which vegetables can be started by directly sowing seeds into the garden and those that need a head start, such as those started early indoors or purchased transplants from the garden center. Lettuce, peas, spinach, radishes, kohlrabi, beans, cucumbers, melons, corn, basil, and squash are easily directly sown from seed into the garden. Those that benefit from the extra time provided by starting them early indoors are broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, eggplant, pepper, tomato and tomatillo.

Many new gardeners purchase every vegetable for their garden as cell-pack transplants. Not only is this a costly way to vegetable garden, it also limits the vegetable varieties to choose from. Starting seeds inside to transplant later into the garden or to be directly sown offers a cost savings and a tremendous variety of possibilities missing from cell-pack choices. An excellent resource for getting started is from Iowa State University Extension, "Planting a Home Vegetable Garden," available at: <https://store.extension.iastate.edu/product/4134> .

Want to know more about vegetable gardening and the possibilities that seeds offer? The Nebraska Extension Master Gardeners in Washington County are teaming up with the Blair Library to sponsor a seed library. People can check out seeds to grow in their garden, then return collected seeds to the library at the end of the gardening season. Kickoff for the new seed library is a seed exchange, Saturday, May 18, from 1:30 to 3:00 p.m. at the Blair Library, 2233 Civic Drive. An "Ask the Master Gardener" table will be featured, along with a program on "Beginning Vegetable Gardening" by me at 1:30 p.m.

Nebraska Extension Master Gardeners can answer your gardening and plant questions! The horticulture helpline is available for questions from the public at these dates and times:

Mondays, 9 a.m. to 12:00 noon, Washington County Extension, 402.426.9455

Tuesdays, 1:00 to 3:00 p.m., Cuming County Extension, 402.372.6006

Wednesdays and Fridays, 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon, Dodge County Extension, 402.727.2775