A Greener View: Beginners have choices when attempting to grow vegetables

by Jeff_Rugg

The garden catalogs are still coming, and with them comes the desire to plant just about everything in the catalog. Not every plant, which is touted as easy to grow in some catalog, will work in everyone's garden. Some people find it simple to grow zucchini and others can't get any production at all.

Cool season crops grow in the spring and fall, while warm season crops develop in the summer. A beginning gardener will probably receive the best results from warm season crops; they can be planted directly from seed in the garden soil, or raised for a few weeks indoors to be planted outdoors as a transplant. Transplants can often be bought at the store for common warm season crops like tomatoes.

Cool season crops need to be planted early in order to harvest before the onset of warm weather. Proper timing is much more critical in the spring to receive a good harvest. Beginners have a harder time obtaining a good spring harvest because the soil is usually not prepared and the crop is planted too late. Crops are better off when planted in late summer - they can mature in the cool fall weather.

Let's just go through the alphabet.

Asparagus is loved by some and hated by others, but it is not an easy crop to grow for a beginner. First, it is a perennial, so wherever it is planted, it is supposed to stay there for years. Plant it on the sunny side of a fence and leave it alone for a year or two before harvesting any spears.

Beans, like many garden crops, come in dozens of varieties. If you are new to gardening, this is generally a good crop to try - the seeds are big and sprout easily. Even though beans and other crops may be inexpensive at grocery stores, all harvested vegetables taste better. Depending on the variety, beans can be eaten fresh or shelled for latter use.

Broccoli and brussels sprouts are moderately hard if you don't have cool weather. They are cool season crops that will not produce if the weather turns warm too soon. They are very tolerant of a few frosts; therefore, harvesting can go on much longer than in the spring.

Cabbage, greens, lettuce and any other plant being grown for just the leaves are known to dieters as green leafy vegetables. They are found worldwide, so you may see a listing for Oriental greens or European greens. Most of these plants are cool season crops, but they can be harvested longer into the warm weather than other cool season crops. Some are actually biennials that survive all winter to bloom the second year. Plant them in the fall and leave them in the ground so they can give you an early spring crop as well.

Carrots are easy to grow in sandy or loose soils, but virtually impossible in clay soils. They have tiny seeds that make it hard to plant, and they do not transplant easily for beginners.

Corn is one of the tastiest fresh crops you can ever eat. Even recent from the farm is not as fresh as eating them minutes after harvest. Try varieties that are listed as sweet or super sweet for the best type of corn. Plant them in groups of 10, every week for as many weeks as you have space for. Then you can harvest them for several weeks. Don't plant them in rows because they don't pollinate as well that way.

Cucumber vines are easy to grow if there is plenty of sun and water. If they are going to be in part shade, get a mildew resistant variety. Watch the vines for beetles that look like striped ladybugs and remove them all. Use a cloth row cover to keep the pests off the plants.

Eggplants are easy if they do not get too hot.

Gourds come in a wide array of colors and shapes. They can be used for decorations, birdhouses, and the luffa variety can be used as a washcloth. They need sun and water to develop into full size.

Melons take up a lot of space, but some can be grown on a vertical trellis. They also need sun and water for fruit development and to avoid mildew growth. Keep beetles off these vines.

Onions are a bulb in the lily family. Buy a set of small bulbs and plant them early. They can be harvested for small green onions or left to form large cutting onions.

Peppers are a warm season plant that will produce well if they do not become too hot and dry. Very few pests bother peppers.

Squash and pumpkins are vines that need plenty of room, and plenty of sun and water. Keep any beetles off of them. Some squash, like zucchini, can supply a plentiful harvest.

Tomatoes were once thought to be poisonous because they are classified as part of the nightshade family. Both tomatoes and peppers are native to the Americas. Tomatoes are an easy crop for a beginner. Even though they are warm season crops, they stop flowering when they become too warm. If they go through wet and dry cycles, the fruit will crack and could rot.

Any new gardener who sticks to these crops will have a great garden. Before you plant seeds or buy transplants, look at the estimated yield on the package. Don't plant too many of one variety. On the other hand, if you do have additional produce, take the extras to the nearest food bank; they are always in short supply of fresh vegetables.

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