



Founded in 1875
Putting science to work for society

Dr. Abigail A. Maynard
Department of Forestry and Horticulture
The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station
123 Huntington Street, P. O. Box 1106
New Haven, CT 06504

Phone: (203) 974-8516

Fax: (203) 974-8502

Email: Abigail.Maynard@po.state.ct.us

Website: www.ct.gov/caes

PLANNING YOUR GARDEN

Garden size. To determine the size of your garden, your family's size and the kinds of vegetables you want to grow should be considered. Important in determining garden size are your physical ability, available time, and genuine interest in gardening. There is nothing more discouraging than planting more than you can handle. It is better to start small and build on success than to become discouraged and abandon the garden because it was too large and too much work. Even though the rewards of gardening are great, the work is hard.

Garden site. The ideal site for a garden is close to the house, but also out in the open where it receives full sun and is not shaded by trees or buildings. Ideally, the garden should receive full sun all day but it should receive at least 5-8 hours of full sun daily. Choose a place near a water supply that is as level as possible. On sloping land, contour planting or terracing is effective to prevent soil erosion.

Garden tools. Very few tools are necessary for a small garden. The usual tools needed are a spade or spading fork, steel rake, hoe, trowel, and a sprinkler with a garden hose long enough to water all parts of the garden. If the garden is too large for hand spading, a rototiller, which can be rented at many garden centers, can be used. A fifty-foot measuring tape is also helpful in establishing straight rows and placing the plants in an orderly fashion.

What to grow. Buy seeds early in the year so you will be sure to find the varieties or cultivars you want. Think about what you and your family really like to eat before planning your garden. Select vegetables and the amount to plant by determining how you will use the vegetables and whether you will preserve the excess fresh vegetables. Available garden space should also be a factor in selecting what vegetables to grow. Some vegetables require a lot of garden space for a long time, while others take up little space or are harvested in a short time period. Melons, pumpkins, winter squash, onions, and sweet potatoes are in the garden for a long time, but they are harvested in a short time frame in the fall. Tomatoes, eggplant, peppers, beans, and summer squash are also in the garden for a long time, but produce a continuous supply of food throughout the growing season. Vegetables to consider for small gardens are bush beans, lettuce, cabbage, spinach, onions, tomatoes, peppers, and eggplant. With a little more available space, broccoli, cauliflower, and summer squash can be grown. Vine crops like peas and cucumbers can be trellised to save ground space. Some vine crops, like squash, have short vine cultivars.

Mapping your garden. Make a map of your garden to help you visualize what it will look like and to make the best use of space. Rows should conform to the contours of the land. If space in full sun is limited, vegetables grown for their fruits and seeds, such as corn, tomatoes, squash, cucumbers, eggplant, peppers, and beans

should occupy the sunniest spots. Vegetables grown for their leaves or roots, such as beets, cabbage, lettuce, and spinach can grow in partial shade, but do better in direct sunlight. Perennial crops, such as asparagus and rhubarb, should be planted where they will not interfere with the cultivation of annual crops. Tall-growing crops should be planted where they will not shade or interfere with the growth of smaller crops. Make good use of your garden space by having successive plantings or growing more than one vegetable in the same space during the growing season. All early-maturing crops should be grouped so that as soon as one crop is removed, another takes its place. Empty rows simply provide places for weeds to grow. It is not always necessary to wait until the early crop is entirely removed; a later one may be interplanted between the rows of the earlier crop. It is best to follow a crop not with another of its kind, but with an unrelated crop. Early spring crops like peas, radishes, and lettuce can be followed by fall crops of rutabaga, Brussels sprouts, and cabbage. Another type of successive planting is making several small plantings of the same crop like beans, lettuce, and radishes at 2-week intervals to provide a continuous supply of fresh vegetables. Crops subject to attack by the same diseases and insects should not follow each other.

What's next? Now that your garden is outlined on paper, the fun begins. It is time to go outside and get your hands dirty. See Station fact sheets on soil preparation and planting.