

Gardening season nears again

BY DEBBIE KOONTZ

LITITZ — As another gardening season nears its dawning, planning a garden, buying tools and selecting seeds becomes for some a favorite pastime and for others a dreaded chore

An added feature to the home section this week is a chapter on gardening: how to plant, what to grow to suit your needs, how one gardener grew his garden, and information on some favorite vegetables, as supplied by the United States Department of Agriculture.

For some enthusiasts, even the decision to grow a garden is exciting; just think of all the money you can save. But before you jump right in and invest money, time, and sweat, there are a number of things to consider

First a garden takes some planning. Decide what you're going to grow, where you will plant it on the plot and how much of each vegetable you will grow Will your purchase be a wise investment or just a financial disaster after the long season is over?

Remember you have an initial investment (if a beginning gardener) in tools, seeds, fertilizer, sprays and fencing (to keep rabbits from helping you garden) and water (which has been in short supply this year) Add on the cost of your labor to plant, weed, and pick your crop Remember, like farming, home gardening does not guarantee a successful crop yield, in spite of your skill and hard work But some people may argue that

nothing beats the taste and satisfaction of growing your own vegetables. Fresh vegetables are abundant in essential vitamins and pulling weeds is almost as good an exercise as swimming - or so parents always tell kids

And if you have read this far, you undoubtedly already decided to try a garden So good luck and how about some helpful advice

Before You Start

When you decide on vegetable varieties think of specific use, growth habit and mature size, vigor and yield, adaptability, and disease and insect resistance

Specific use includes planning ahead Will the vegetable be used for immediate use or for freezing or canning?

The qualities of vigor and yield depend on soil fertility, available water, and growing conditions Usually it pays to select "hybrids." These are plants that have built in vigor, improved quality and higher yield than standard varieties

Most gardeners are lucky

enough to have extra space for their vegetable garden, especially when they reside on a farm But good planning can make the most of the land you have got to use

helpful hints in using land wisely are

-Keep paths to a minimum They are not necessary. Grow crops there instead

-Mix slow growing and fast growing vegetables (such as carrots and radishes) in the same row The fast ones will be harvested before slower ones need the space

-Find other places to grow vegetables Some look rather attractive in flower beds, and tomatoes grow rather well in containers on a patio

-When you pick a spot for your garden, avoid trees and buildings that cast shade and rob the land of moisture

The Harvested Crop

After the vegetable garden is up and thriving, you may think it's time to relax, but it's not What are you going to do with all those

goodies once they have ripened? Take them to work and hand them out to friends? Sell them along the road?

Most people decide to can, freeze, dry, and make jams and jellies of their vegetables

Preserve only what you can use in a single year. Frozen and canned produce will still be safe to eat after a year, but the quality quickly disappears

Make sure you label and date each container, just as you label

meat when you wrap it for freezing.

As an extra incentive to work at that garden, remember how satisfying and tasty it will be to eat the fruits of your labor next fall

Add Fruits to Your Garden

For a special change, if you have had success with gardening in the past, why not spend extra time growing fruits in your garden?

Fruits like strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, and

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