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For the avid gardener

Start a vegetable garden

Increasing numbers of Americans are digging up their backyards each summer to make room for neat rows of tomatoes, beans, cucumbers, peppers and

strawberries — some of the fruits and vegetables they love best.

Besides helping with the food budget, vegetable gardening can provide better eating, healthful

exercise and an enjoyable hobby for the whole family.

When planning a vegetable garden, University of Delaware extension garden specialist Dave Tatnall says to consider these three important points: site, soil and seed. The site, or location, should be as convenient to the house, water and tools as possible. It should also be in the full sun, have a workable, well-drained soil and be reasonably level.

Good soil is an absolute must if you want a successful garden, Tatnall says. It should be fertile, deep, crumbly and well-drained. It should be fairly free of stones and other debris. You can improve the soil and make it more productive by working in organic matter, lime and fertilizer. If there is a lot of silt in the soil, the addition of construction sand can also help.

A soil test will indicate the exact amount of lime and fertilizer to add. The University of Delaware soil test laboratory will perform this test for a small fee. (Check with the county extension office in

Newark, Dover or Georgetown about the proper procedure.)

Buy vegetable seed from a reputable dealer. Order seeds well in advance of planting time to be sure of getting your choice of varieties. Some of the newest introductions are often in short supply their first year. Be sure to select those varieties which are recommended for this area, preferably those listed as disease-resistant. The county extension office can provide a list of recommended varieties.

In some cases it is more practical to buy started plants than seeds, Tatnall says. Tomatoes, peppers, cabbage, cauliflower and eggplant are usually purchased this way. Wait until the frost-free date in your area before setting out

tomatoes and other warm weather plants. In Delaware this is usually around May 10-15.

Early arrivals at the University of Delaware's Ag Day on Saturday, April 28, will have an opportunity to buy young plants at bargain rates. In addition, extension agricultural agent Derby Walker will be on hand to advise inexperienced gardeners. Educational programs on lawn and garden care, tree planting, lawn mower maintenance and other topics of interest to homeowners will be interspersed with family fun activities such as games, pony rides, and a chicken barbecue luncheon.

Ag Day will take place from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. at Townsend Hall on Route 896 in Newark. Admission is free, and the public is invited.

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Data on plants released

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Descriptions of plant variety characteristics for nine crops are being made available to the public as part of an effort to collect additional data on specific crops, a U.S. Department of Agriculture official said today.

James E. Springfield, an official with USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service, said the descriptions will be available for alfalfa, barley, beans, corn, cotton, cowpeas, narrow-leaved fescues, peas and soybeans.

The descriptions are among 6,000 collected by USDA's Plant Variety Protection Office.

"We hope plant breeders will review the information and those who have additional information on the crops will share that information with USDA," he said.

The information is available from Kenneth Evans, Plant Variety Protection Office, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rm. 500-NAL, Beltsville, Md. 20705.

The plant variety protection program is administered by USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service and provides marketing protection to developers of new and distinctive seed-reproduced plants ranging from farm crops to flowers.

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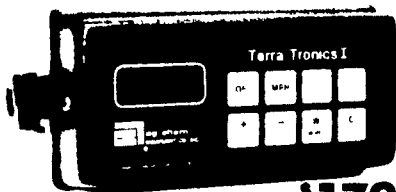
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