

Decker's Veggie Gardening Seminar: Space planning and crop maximization

April brings Spring showers but also is the perfect time to get planting outdoors! Whether you are starting new gardens, raised beds, containers or window boxes the most important first step is to walk your yard and determine where you get the most sun. 6 hours is best to grow healthy plants, bearing bountiful crops. Map a plan to get 3 seasons of nourishing vegetables, rotating plantings of seedlings and sowing additional seeds to maximize your crop.

1. 6 hours of sun. Remember containers are easy to move and "chase the sun" on patio, steps or driveway!
2. Add organic compost to soil each spring in existing beds to nourish the roots. Soil and night temps need to be in the **mid 60's for summer veggies** to flourish.
3. Containers and window boxes: best to fill with Espoma Organic Potting Mix that includes compost. Select containers with good drainage. To avoid soil seeping out place double layer of newspaper or coffee filter over the holes and fill 1-2" below edge to avoid overflows. Soil warms up faster in containers, plant a mix of salad greens, carrots, radishes and use rainbow chard as your "Thriller"
4. Plan your garden bed space 1/3 for early spring-cool weather crops and 2/3 for warm weather favorites.
5. Check heights and plant tallest on East side or back of garden bed to minimize shadows on lower growing veggies – Tomatoes/cages, Pole Beans, Pole Peas, Corn in the back row.
6. Add Espoma Organic Biotone or Plantone fertilizer as you plant to stimulate root growth.
7. Sequential seeding: No need to sow the entire packet of Botanical Interests at one time, Beans, Lettuce, Zucchini all benefit from additional sowing 2 weeks apart to spread out the crop throughout the season.
8. Benefits of Companion Plants: Tomatoes & Borage/Marigolds, Squash & nasturtiums, 3 Sisters
9. Herb Gardens are great in a container or strawberry planter on the deck where you'll enjoy the scents and remember to add flavor to your meal preparation.
10. Options to minimize weeds: plant close together, lay mesh weed protector fabric before adding garden soil to raised beds, or leave space between rows, adding 2" of mulch or straw.
11. Tips for best harvest: Pick veggies early am, except for beans which shouldn't be disturbed when their foliage is moist.

Spring Cool Weather Veggies: Bok Choy, Cabbage, Peas, Parsley, Chives, Spinach, Lettuces

1. Peas: seeds or seedlings planted around stakes/tomato cages or trellis using string for these quick climbers. Edge beds with parsley- grows well in semi shade and attracts swallowtails
2. Interplant veggies to maximize space constraints: Sow broccoli between 2 rows of spinach, cabbage between 2 rows of lettuces, kohlrabi row with radish seeds sprinkled around them maximizes seasonal growth.
3. In smaller beds plant fast growing crop (radishes and lettuces) alongside carrots. After 30 days harvest radishes and plant cauliflower or broccoli to replace them. Root crops with leafy veggies that grow on the surface.

Summer Crops: Beans, Peppers, Cucumbers, Squash, Corn, Tomatoes, Zucchini, Eggplant,

1. Mid-April outdoor sowing 4 weeks before last frost date for LI.
2. Arugula, Beets, Bok Choy, Collards, Leeks, Swiss Chard, Watercress, Onions.
3. End April: Borage, Chinese Cabbage, Celery, Cauliflower, Cilantro, Kale, Dill, Sage, Sorrel.
4. May 15th: Basil, Beans – bush and pole, Corn, Cucumbers, Fennel, Squash, Melons,
5. May 30th – **2 weeks after last frost soil temps 65degrees**: Eggplant, Oregano, Tomatoes, Peppers, Pumpkins
6. To avoid squash vine borers plant squash late June
7. 3 Sisters: Corn in center, pole beans and squash seeds at base. Corn provides support for pole beans while squash provides shade, keeping roots cool.

Fall Crops: Cool weather veggies Brussels Sprouts, Parsnip, Rutabaga, Winter radishes, lettuces

1. Bountiful harvests of cool weather veggies planted end Aug. early Sept that bear fruit until frost
2. Kale, Collard greens and root veggies (ie carrots, beets) will have better flavor as night temps drop.
3. October plant cover crop seeds: grow all winter then turn into the soil for added nutrients in the spring