Time to Prepare Gardens

Springtime is here, so it is time to start preparing gardens for the upcoming season. To have a successful garden you need to start now and prepare a garden plan. Hopefully, in the remainder of this article you will find tips that will make your gardening adventure successful.

Garden Plan

A gardener needs a plan just as an architect does. Careful planning lessens gardening work and increases returns on labor.

Long-term crops require a long growing period. Plant them where they won't interfere with care and harvesting of short-term crops. Plant all tall-growing crops where they will not shade or interfere with growth of smaller crops. Planting vegetables such as okra, staked tomatoes, pole beans, and sweet corn on the garden's north side to avoid shading lower-growing crops such as radishes, leaf lettuce, onions, and bush beans will prove to be beneficial.

Group crops according to the rate of maturity. By grouping vegetables according to maturity rate, one crop can be planted to take the place of another as soon as it is removed. Try to plant crops totally unrelated to the previous crop. For example, follow early beans with beets, bush squash, or bell peppers. Crop rotation helps prevent diseases and insect buildups.

Table 1 shows the planting dates for East Texas. If you follow these guidelines, you will help ensure a successful garden.

Table 1 – Planting Dates

CROP	SPRING PLANTING DATE	FALL PLANTING DATE
Asparagus	2/1 – 3/15	N.R.
Beans, Bush	3/15 – 4/15	8/1 – 9/1
Beans, Pole	3/15 – 4/15	8/1 – 9/1
Beans, Lima	3/15 – 4/1	7/15 – 8/15
Beets	2/1 – 4/1	9/1 – 10/15
Broccoli (plants)	3/1 – 3/15	8/1 – 9/15
Brussels Sprouts	N.R.	8/1 – 10/1
Cabbage (plants)	2/1 – 3/1	8/15 – 9/15
Cabbage, Chinese	2/1 – 2/15	8/15 – 9/15
Carrots	2/1 – 2/15	8/15 – 10/15
Cauliflower (plants)	2/15 – 3/1	8/15 – 9/15
Chard, Swiss	2/15 – 4/1	8/1 – 10/15
Collard/Kale	2/1 – 2/15	8/15 – 10/1

Corn, Sweet	3/15 – 5/1	8/1 – 8/15
Cucumber	3/15 – 4/15	8/1 – 9/1
Eggplant (plants)	4/1 – 4/15	7/15 – 8/1
Garlic	1/15 – 2/15	9/1 – 10/15
Kohlrabi	2/1 – 3/1	8/15 – 9/15
Lettuce (leaf)	2/1 – 3/1	9/15 – 10/15
Muskmelon (Cantaloupe)	3/15 – 5/1	7/15 – 8/1
Mustard	2/1 – 3/1	9/15 – 10/15
Okra	4/15 – 7/1	
Onion (plants)	2/1 – 3/1	N.R.
Parsley	N.R.	8/15 – 10/1
Peas, English	1/15 – 2/15	8/15 – 9/15
Peas, Southern	4/15 – 6/1	7/1 – 8/1
Pepper (plants)	4/1 – 4/15	7/1 – 8/1
Potatoes (Irish)	2/1 – 2/15	8/15 – 9/15
Potatoes (Sweet) (slips)	4/1 – 5/15	N.R.
Pumpkin	4/1 – 5/15	7/1 – 8/1
Radish	2/1 – 4/1	9/15 – 10/15
Spinach	2/1 – 3/1	9/1 – 10/15
Squash, Summer	3/15 – 4/15	7/15 – 8/15
Squash, Winter	4/1 – 4/15	7/1 – 7/15
Tomato (plants)	3/15 – 4/1	7/15 – 8/1
Turnips	2/1 – 3/1	10/1 – 11/1
Watermelon	3/15 – 5/1	7/1 – 8/1
Watermelon (Seedless)	3/25 – 5/1	7/1 – 8/1

Soil Preparation

Many garden sites do not have deep, well-drained, fertile soil which is ideal for vegetable growing. Thus, soils must be altered to provide good drainage and aeration. Soils in this area mainly consist of sandy-loam, which is very good for growing multiple garden vegetables. Adding organic matter to our soils can be very advantageous.

Apply 1 to 2 inches of good sand and 2 to 3 inches of organic matter to the garden site surface and turn under in late winter or early spring to improve the soil's physical quality. Work on the soil's physical condition over a period of time rather than trying to develop desirable soil in a season or two. Make periodic additions of organic matter in the form of composted materials, barnyard

manure, leaves, grass clippings, or other organic matter. Turn the soil to a depth of 8 to 10 inches -- the deeper the better. Gypsum improves soil structure and drainage. Add gypsum at the rate of 6 to 8 pounds per 100 square feet where the soil is tight, heavy clay.

Never work wet garden soil. Soils containing a high degree of organic matter can be worked at higher moisture content than heavy clay soils. To determine if the soil is suitable for working, squeeze together a small handful of soil. If it sticks together in a ball and does not readily crumble under slight pressure by the thumb and finger, it is too wet for working.

Seeds germinate more readily in well-prepared soil than in coarse, lumpy soil. Thorough preparation greatly reduces the work of planting and caring for the crop. Breaking up your garden spot now can also help prevent weeds and grass later. For more information, contact me at the County Extension Office at 903-473-4580.