

Digging up dinner: Get in on the growing trend and raise your own veggies

(ARA) - Across the country this spring, more Americans will be cutting out sections of lawn, retiring flower beds, building raised vegetable beds and turning their spare time over to gardening. Many of them will be first-timers, inspired to try their hand at tilling the soil for economic reasons as well as the many benefits gardening offers.

In addition to pruning your grocery bill, raising your own veggies offers the benefits of freshness, flavor, convenience, healthful exercise, socialization opportunities and the ability to have more control over what your family eats.

So if you're ready to try your hand at picking your own produce this year, roll up your sleeves, dig in, and arm yourself with this helpful advice from the experts at **Bonnie Plants**:

***Pick your plot:** Most vegetables thrive when they get plenty of sun, so pick a plot that gets at least six to eight hours of direct sun every day. It's OK to plant leafy greens like lettuce and spinach in shadier spots, but get them in the ground early in the cooler part of the season. Tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers and squash will do best in the hotter months.

***Think outside of the box planter:** Get creative with space. You don't need a huge yard to plant a veggie patch. Try planting lettuce under tomato vines, or mix veggies into flower beds among the bright blooms.

***Give veggies a raise:** Try raised beds; they're quicker than planning out a plot. Raised beds will enable you to use near-perfect soil, better organize your garden, improve drainage and provide easier access for maintenance. Time saving tip: Use transplants instead of seeds.

***Feed natural plant food:** Since one of the reasons for growing your own vegetables is to control exactly what your family consumes, be sure to use all-natural, safe products in your gardens like **Bonnie Plant Food** which is derived from oilseed extract such as soybean seed extract. Research shows plants are healthier and more vigorous using organically based foods, rather than chemical based options.

***Water wisely:** One inch of water weekly is adequate for most vegetables. Soaker hoses or drip systems deliver water

efficiently and keep foliage dry, fending off leaf diseases.

Pick your produce: Be sure to pick the right plants. To maximize your grocery savings and ensure successful gardening, choose vegetable and herb plants that are easy to grow, useful in a variety of dishes, and produce high yields throughout the season. Some sure-fire winners include:

*** Tomatoes** - The most popular home-garden vegetable in America, tomatoes are hard to beat in terms of taste, health benefits and versatility. **Bonnie Original Tomato** can easily yield 50 pounds of tomatoes.

*** Yellow squash and zucchini** - Although their growing season is shorter than tomatoes, squash are very productive. You'll pick them every day once the season starts.

*** Lettuce** - As long as the weather is mild, leaf lettuce will keep on producing. If you eat lots of salad, growing your own lettuce can save you lots of money.

*** Cucumbers** - Grown in a cage or on a trellis, a single cucumber plant can produce 5 to 10 cukes. You can get two or three plants on a cage that is just 18 inches in diameter and 4 feet high, so that's a yield of 15 to 30 cucumbers from a slice of ground no bigger than an end table.

*** Specialty peppers** - Price specialty peppers like jalapeno, or even regular chili peppers, in the grocery store and you'll be inspired to try growing your own. Hot peppers are especially high yielding and productive in areas with a long, hot summer.

*** Herbs** - Expensive in the grocery store, fresh herbs are easy and economical to grow. Plant one each of sage, rosemary, mint, thyme and chives, and at least three plants of basil. There are several varieties of basil. Good choices from **Bonnie Plants** are Sweet, Cinnamon, Thai and Boxwood basil, each with a unique taste.

Bonnie Plants offers a wide selection of

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You Can



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vegetables and herbs in eco-friendly, biodegradable pots; just tear off the bottom of the pot and stick it in the soil. Biodegradable pots not only protect varieties from transplant shock, they save tons of plastic pots from entering landfills. For more gardening advice and tips visit www.bonnieplants.com.