



Homegrown food is safer, cheaper, and pretty easy

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April 27, 2011

Homegrown in the city can be as good as homegrown on the farm, especially when it comes from your own backyard garden.

There are several smart reasons to grow the produce that your household eats, even if you do it on a small scale.

When you grow what you eat, you know it's as fresh as fresh can be. No traveling hundreds of miles in trucks on a hot summer day.

You know it's safe to eat. No wondering what's been sprayed or not sprayed on the plants.

You save on your food bill, especially if you use share seeds and transplants with friends and family. No more fretting about the \$2.99 for one English cucumber or \$2 for one red pepper.

You also engage in an outdoor activity that enhances a healthier diet and lifestyle. No more just admiring gardens on HGTV while you sit on the sofa and munch a bunch of chips.

Creating a small backyard vegetable garden for planting warm-season crops in May and cool-season crops in fall and late winter is easier than ever before, thanks to ready-made raised garden kits that simplify design, digging and weed control. The kits, typically made from cedar or composite lumber, come in all sizes, shapes and price ranges, so it's hard to find any good excuse for not raising at least a few tomatoes for tasty BLTs.

Assembly is easy. Usually all you need is a screwdriver and hammer. Fill the frame with a vegetable-growing medium like soil mixed with compost and you're ready to plant. No drainage problems to worry about. No voles to fight. Even bunnies are less likely to hop over the boards to nibble. You can even set the gardens on concrete if your plants have shallow roots.

TIPS TO GROW ON

Survey your soil. If you garden in the ground, the best soil is loam, which is soft, dark and crumbly. Loamy soil retains moisture but drains so it's not soggy; it's also easy to dig. If you encounter clay or sandy soil, amend the soil with aged compost or shredded hardwood mulch.

Size up your space. When plotting the size of your garden, make sure it's large enough to yield the harvest you want. Your plants should have room to mature and allow for good air circulation, which reduces pest

and disease problems. If you have limited yard space, or none at all, grow vegetables and herbs in containers on a deck, terrace, balcony or even on the windowsill.

Let the sunshine in. Vegetable plants need plenty of sun - at least six hours a day.

Pick your plants for your plot. Grow vegetables that are expensive to buy in the grocery store or at the farmer's market, such as specialty tomatoes and peppers.

Source: BonniePlants.com

PER PERSON PLANTS

Asparagus: 5-10 plants

Bush beans: 12-15 plants

Beets: 5-10 feet of plants, thin to 3 plants per foot

Cucumber: 1 vine, 2 bushes

Carrots: 4 feet, thin to 12 plants per foot

Corn: 10-15 plants,

Eggplant: 2-3 plants

Leaf lettuce: 8 feet, think to 3 plants per foot

Melon: 1-2 plants

Onion: 12-20 sets, 4 sets per foot

Peas: 15-20 plants, 6 plants per foot

Pepper: 3-5 plants

Potato: 10 plants

Spinach: 5-10 feet, 6 plants per foot

Squash: 1-2 plants

Tomato: 2-4 plants

Zucchini: 1-2 plants

Source: Bonnie Plants

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