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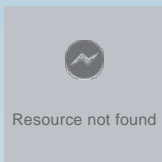
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## Time to grow for it: Homegrown on your own



Published:  
Monday, March 26, 2012 8:00 PM EDT

(ARA) - Who would have thought getting dirt under your fingernails would ever be considered one of the hottest trends going? According to Doug Jimerson, garden core director for Better Homes and Gardens, "growing your own fruits, veggies and herbs is something Americans are doing in record numbers this season."

"It's cheaper to grow your own produce than buy it - one \$3 tomato plant will yield pounds of produce all season long," Jimerson says. "Plus, the produce you grow just tastes better than even your grocer's best. And while it's healthy to eat and grow your own, gardening is rapidly gaining popularity as a great way to get some exercise, relieve stress and spend healthful family bonding time."



Eating foods grown in your own backyard means you won't be contributing to the carbon footprint left behind by the "food miles" it takes to bring imported produce to your local grocers - so you're helping the environment, too.

Growing vegetables is easier than you think. Plan it properly, and you can enjoy a healthy, homegrown harvest from the fruits of your labor - without having to spend hours tending it.

### Gardening 101

Sunshine is sustenance - Vegetables need at least six hours of full sun per day. The easiest thing to do is to place your garden in full sunlight. Make sure it's easily accessible for watering; if the garden is too far from your house it could get neglected. Check the last frost date in your region and wait until threat of frost is past before you begin planting.

No yard necessary - Gardening doesn't require a lot of room - although if you have the space and time to go large, go for it! Many popular vegetables and herbs grow just fine in containers, making them a great option for those with limited space. For smaller yards, raised beds are an easy, low-maintenance option. If your garden is going right into the ground, just turn the earth with a shovel, toss out roots and rocks, mix in a soil amendment for healthy soil, and plant.

Water relief - Water regularly, but avoid doing so during the heat of the day when evaporation will diminish the effectiveness of irrigation. Water to wet the soil about 8 inches deep, but don't over-water.

Feed your food - All edible plants draw nutrients from the ground, and can quickly exhaust the soil without the help of a fertilizer. Always follow label directions.

### Growing for it

Now that you've got an idea of the basics, it's time to pick your plants.

Start with transplants - seedlings are way easier to get growing than seeds, so you'll save loads of time and enjoy improved success. Fortunately, national purveyors like [Bonnie](#)

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[Plants](#) make it easy to find hardy, high-quality, regionally appropriate plants at your local garden retailers. Bonnie offers time-tested vegetable and herb favorites, as well as new varieties, in eco-friendly, biodegradable pots that not only reduce plastic waste in landfills, they reduce transplant shock. Simply tear off the bottom of the pot and set the whole thing - plant in pot - directly into the ground. Be sure to pay close attention to plant tags, they're packed with facts and details to help you successfully grow your plants.

Here are some favorites to consider for your garden:

\* Tomatoes - The most popular, most-grown vegetable, tomatoes are always a best bet. Disease-resistant Bonnie Original is a hardy, flavorful addition to any backyard garden. For containers or small spots, try Sweet n' Neat, a prolific plant that sets fruit in grape-like clusters.

\* Basil - The perfect complement to tomatoes, basil works well in gardens and containers. New Greek Columnar Basil is particularly bountiful, as it grows high, leafy and densely and rarely flowers. The flavor blends traditional basil with spicy overtones of cinnamon, allspice and cloves.

\* Bell peppers - Versatile, flavorful and nutritious, bell peppers are great raw snacks and make an awesome ingredient for a variety of cuisines. Harvest peppers when they're green or red when the vitamin levels are higher.

\* Eggplant - Black Beauty is the quintessential eggplant with a deep purple, glossy skin and meaty texture, and thrives in hot weather. White-skinned varieties like Cloud Nine offer a sweeter, bitter-free flesh.

\* Mints - Easy-to-grow mints are available in traditional spearmint and peppermint and in more exotic flavors like Bonnie Plant's new apple mint, orange mint and even chocolate mint, which has a flavor that echoes the classic Girl Scout cookie.

Hefty harvest - The general rule: If it looks good enough to eat, it probably is. With many vegetables, the more you pick, the more the plant will produce. For more gardening tips, ideas and advice, visit [www.bonnieplants.com](#).

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