

Start your own vegetable garden (Part 1)

Starting a vegetable garden is a good idea for many reasons. First, when you have your own vegetable garden, you are more likely to eat vegetables because you have very easy access to them. You can also teach your children the benefits of eating and growing vegetables.

You can also expand your vegetable garden in order to make some money out of it, by selling it from your own stall or on the market. Setting up your own vegetable garden is not that difficult.

Choose a site for your garden

Most vegetables do best in full sun. Pick a spot that is flat and gets a lot of sun. If you do not have a lot of space, you can plant some of your vegetables in containers. Tomatoes, lettuce and peppers are some of the vegetables that grow very well in containers.



Once you have selected the site for your garden, you must decide how big it is going to be. It is best to start small, and expand as you go on. Remember that the bigger the garden, the more you will have to weed, water and control pests. A garden of about 3 x 3 metres is probably a good start.

A good starter vegetable garden might contain lettuce, spinach, tomatoes, pepper, squash and carrots. These vegetables are quite easy to grow. Just remember that squash takes up a lot of space.

Many vegetables can be grown from seeds, but when you are starting out, it is better to start with established plants. You can buy these from the market, cooperative or nursery. But before you can plant anything, you must prepare the soil of your garden, so that it will accept plants.



Preparing the soil

First you will need to get rid of all the grass. Make sure that you get out as much of the roots as possible, otherwise the grass and weeds will grow back. Once you have cleared the ground, you need to apply fertiliser and compost.

Fertiliser will provide all the nutrients that your plants will need to provide good, healthy vegetables. Buy a general purpose fertiliser from your cooperative or nursery. Read the instructions carefully and keep it away from children, animals and from your mouth, nose and eyes. Always wash your hands after working with fertiliser.

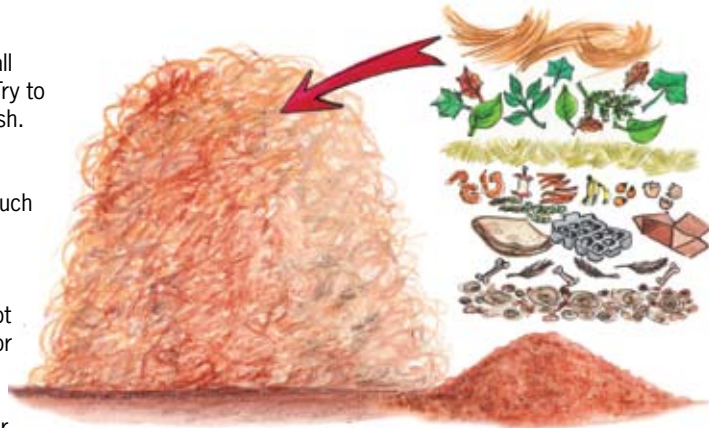
Compost improves the drainage of the soil, which means that water will go into the soil well, and the roots of your plants will establish themselves well. Compost must be mixed into the soil. You do not have to buy compost, as you can easily make your own.

Make your own compost

Make your own compost by collecting rubbish (which we call organic waste) in black bags. Try to collect about 12 bags of rubbish. Ask your neighbours if you can also collect theirs:

- Fruit and vegetable waste such as skins, pips and cores
- Pot scrapings (such as old pap and vegetables)
- Egg shells (they contain a lot of calcium, which is good for soil and plants)
- Animal bones and feathers
- Cardboard pieces and paper
- Grass cuttings, dry leaves and other garden waste
- Manure from pigs, cattle, sheep and chickens.

Anything that will rot, can be used to make compost. Now you are ready to start preparing the trenches in your vegetable garden.



Digging and preparing trenches

Start by dividing your vegetable garden into sections. The number of sections will depend on the types of vegetables you would like to plant. If you want to plant three types of vegetables, you can divide your 3 x 3 metre garden into three rows with some walking space (paths) inbetween. If you want to plant six types of vegetables, you can divide the garden into six blocks.

A trench is a ditch in which we prepare the soil for our vegetable bed. Start by digging out about 30 cm of topsoil and leaving it at one side of the ditch. The head of a normal garden spade is about 30 cm long. So you will dig to the depth of one spade head.

Then you can dig out 20 cm of bottom soil (a little bit less than a spade head) and put it on the OTHER side of the ditch. Remove large stones and rocks from the top- and bottom soil. Loosen the soil at the bottom with a fork and cover it with cardboard.



Now you can put the compost in the trench. Start with a 20 cm deep layer of compost, and cover it with a 10 cm layer of bottom soil. Put another 20 cm layer of compost and another 10 cm layer of bottom soil. Remove pieces of glass, bottles and plastic as you go along. Water each layer before adding the next layer.



Now you can replace the topsoil. Add it to the top of the trench. You now have a vegetable bed. You will see that the bed is about 20 cm higher than the paths around the trench. This is fine, because the bed will slowly sink as the compost under the surface starts to decompose.

Spread another bucket of compost over the topsoil and work it into the soil with a fork. Use one bucket of compost for one square metre. Level the bed using a rake or a flat piece of wood. Cut sticks of about 50 cm each and mark the corners of your trenches, so that you do not stand or walk on the bed.

Cover the bed with a layer of mulch. Mulch is a blanket that protects the soil. You can use straw, grass, leaves and even newspapers as a mulch blanket. Finish the other trenches in the same way and let them stand for a few weeks. Apply fertiliser a few days before you start planting. Wet the soil well.

In the second part of this series, we will show you how to plant and care for onions in your new vegetable garden, while at the same time planting tomatoes in containers. [UM](#)

