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Colorado State University Cooperative Extension

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Planning the vegetable garden

Charles W. Basham[1]

Quick Facts

The first consideration is to plant only those vegetables a family will enjoy.

F_1 hybrids usually are more vigorous, productive and uniform than standard varieties.

Fresh vegetables can be enjoyed over a long season by making an early spring planting and a summer planting for late harvest.

Considerations

Beans—the bush types are earlier, but pod set is more concentrated so they are productive over a shorter period than pole beans. Most bush beans have a rather bland flavor compared to the stronger characteristic flavor of the pole beans.

Cabbage—early varieties usually produce smaller heads; late varieties larger. Smaller heads are good for cooking and for salads, larger heads for making kraut. Red leaf and savoy (crinkled leaf) varieties are available; reds mature later.

Cauliflower—most varieties require blanching (leaves drawn up and tied to protect the developing head from light). This is not required for purple varieties and some of the new white ones.

Carrot—for heavy soils (not sandy) the stump-rooted or half-long varieties may be more satisfactory than slender-rooted ones.

Cucumbers—newer varieties and hybrids generally have resistance to several diseases. Slicing and pickling varieties are generally listed separately, but most picklers will make acceptable slicers when the fruits mature. The long, slender "burpless" hybrids are excellent for fresh use.

Lettuce—leaf lettuce is high quality and the plants can be productive for a long period if leaves are picked rather than cutting the plant. It also produces earlier than the crisp-head varieties. The butter-head varieties are a little earlier than crisp-head and of very high quality.

Onion—the sweet Spanish group is generally satisfactory here. Yellows are more disease resistant and store better than whites.

Peas—the smooth-seeded Alaska types are earlier and more dwarf than the wrinkle-seeded, sweet types. Sweet types yield better and are preferred for fresh use and freezing.

Potato—seed source is more important than variety; use certified seed (tuber pieces) for assurance of freedom from disease.

Squash—many very productive summer squash hybrids are available. Winter squash varieties with bush rather than vine habit take less garden space.

Sweet corn—the hybrids are very uniform so all ears will reach edible maturity at about the same time. Plant several hybrids of differing maturity or use nonhybrid varieties for longer harvest period. Some of the very early varieties produce small ears with fewer rows of kernels.

Tomato—hybrids are used almost exclusively in gardens for vigor, productivity and disease resistance. Earliness is generally associated with smaller plant and fruit size. The smallest are satisfactory as container plants on the patio.

Perennial vegetables to be located where they can occupy the same area for several years:

Asparagus, Rhubarb, Horseradish

Vegetables requiring relatively large amounts of space:

Cucumber	Sweet corn
Muskmelon	Sweet potato
Potato	Tomato
Pumpkin	Watermelon
Squash	

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Vegetables requiring a long, warm growing season; marginal or unsatisfactory at 5,000 feet (1524 meters) elevation:

Okra	Sweet potato
Muskmelon	Watermelon

Vegetables that may be unsatisfactory or require special attention at elevations above 5,000 feet (1524 meters):

Cucumber	Squash
Eggplant	Sweet corn
Pepper	Tomato
Pumpkin	

Some vegetables for summer planting—fall harvest:

Beet	Kohlrabi
Bush beans	Lettuce
Celery	Radish
Collards	Spinach
Escarole (endive)	Swiss chard
Kale	Turnip

Vegetables for which transplants* are commonly used:

Broccoli	Eggplant
Brussels sprouts	Onion
Cabbage	Pepper
Cauliflower	Sweet potato
Celery	Tomato

**If transplants are to be started, they should be planted indoors 6 to 8 weeks before transplanting time. Onion plants or sets are best purchased.*

Vegetables for training on fences, trellises, or poles:

Cucumber	Pole beans
Peas	Tomato

Some vegetables that can be stored for winter use:

Beet	Kohlrabi
Cabbage	Onion
Carrot	Parsnip
Celery	Potato
Garlic	Rutabaga
	Squash (winter)

Special fertility considerations—If possible, the following vegetables should not be planted where high applications of nitrogen fertilizers or manure have been made because fruiting may be delayed by excessive vegetative growth:

Cucumber	Squash
Melons	Tomato

Vegetables for which F_1 hybrid** varieties are available for home gardens:

Broccoli	Muskmelon
Brussels sprouts	Onion
Cabbage	Pepper
Carrot	Squash (summer)
Cauliflower	Sweet corn
Cucumber	Tomato
Eggplant	Watermelon

***An F_1 hybrid is the first generation result of a cross between two inbred parents. They usually are more vigorous, uniform and productive than other varieties.*

Spring planting succession:

About 4 weeks before date of average last frost.	Broccoli	Peas
	Cabbage	Potato
	Lettuce	Radish
	Onions	Spinach
		Turnip
About 2 weeks before date of average last frost.	Beets	Parsnip
	Carrot	Swiss chard
	Mustard	Sweet corn
		Tomato (t)
2 or more weeks after date of average last frost.	Eggplant (t)	Okra
	Pepper (t)	Squash
	Sweet potato	Cucumber
	Beans	Melons

t: transplant

Representative average dates of last frost in Colorado:

Location	**Date**
Boulder	May 3
Burlington	May 4
Denver	April 26
Durango	May 28
Fort Collins	May 7
Glenwood Springs	May 24
Grand Junction	April 16
Hayden	June 10
Leadville	June 17
Montrose	May 10
Pueblo	April 23
Rocky Ford	April 28
Saguache	May 30
Trinidad	May 2

Some vegetables that thrive in cool weather, particularly recommended for gardens at high elevation:

Beet	Kale	Rutabaga
Broccoli	Kohlrabi	Spinach
Cabbage	Lettuce	Swiss chard
Carrot	Peas	Turnip
Chinese cabbage	Potato	Onion (green)
	Radish	

Approximate amount to plant per person (experience will allow personal adjustments):

6 ft. (1.8 m) row	**12 ft. (3.7 m) row**	
Beans	Peas	
Beets		
Carrots		
Kale		
Lettuce		
Mustard	**25 ft. (7.6 m) row**	
Onion	Potato	
Swiss chard	Sweet corn	
Turnip		
6 plants	**2-4 plants**	
Broccoli	Cabbage	Melons
Peppers	Cauliflower	Squash
	Cucumber	Tomato

Vegetables for successive planting to prolong harvest period:

Bush beans***	Peas***
Beets	Radish
Cabbage***	Spinach
Lettuce	Sweet corn***

****Varieties with different maturity dates may be planted at the same time to spread harvest interval.*