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climate problems

CATHERINE ABBOTT

THE EVERYTHING SMALL-SPACE GARDENING BOOK

Dear Reader,

I am passionate about teaching and inspiring others to experience the joy and benefits of growing a food-producing garden. It was perfect timing when I was asked to write this book. I had just recently downsized, from growing veggies commercially on two acres to living in a condo with a front balcony for my only outdoor space. When I moved I immediately started growing some veggies and herbs in containers and found a new love of growing in my very small space. I was still craving a little bit more garden space and missed chatting with other gardeners, so I signed up for a 4-foot by 12-foot community garden plot. Now I have the best of both worlds: I can run out my front door to pick a handful of salad stuff for dinner, or run down the alley (yes, I created a community garden just a block away) to drop off my compost, pick some carrots or a head of broccoli, and chat with fellow gardeners. An hour or so of “fun” work each week is all my garden takes.

Happy creating and growing in your own small-space garden!

Catherine Abbott

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THE
EVERYTHING.
SMALL-SPACE
GARDENING
BOOK

All you need to plant, grow,
and enjoy a small-space garden

CATHERINE ABBOTT

 **adamsmedia**
Avon, Massachusetts

*This book is dedicated to every reader who
wants to grow some of their own veggies, no
matter how small of a space they may have.*

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The Top 10 Tips for Small-Space Gardening

1. Use containers for growing veggies, herbs, and small fruit trees. Containers do not require a lot of space and can be placed on balconies, patios, or hung in front porches.
2. Grow vertical crops to maximize your space. Some veggies grow better if they are allowed to climb up a trellis or if they are staked. Also, vertical crops allow more space for other plants to be grown around the base of the upright plant.
3. Grow plants that produce a large crop for the amount of space they take. You can get a large harvest of tomatoes or cucumbers from one plant, whereas planting a potato in the same area will not yield as much of a harvest.
4. Grow plants that you can eat more than one part of. For example, with beets you can enjoy the tops as baby greens, and once the plant matures, you can enjoy the root.
5. Grow intensively. Utilize the square-foot growing method to maximize the number of plants you can grow in your small-space or container garden. Just make sure you keep your soil rich and fertile to allow enough nutrients for all the plants to grow well.
6. Interplant fast- and slow-growing plants. Vegetable plants mature at different times and take up different amounts of space. Intermix a variety of plants in the same space—you'll harvest one plant while the slower growing one matures.
7. Plant several different crops throughout the season. Plant an early spring crop, and once it has been harvested, remove the used plant. Replant with a summer crop, and use the area again with a veggie you can harvest in the fall or winter.
8. Avoid planting too many large plants. Some plants, such as potatoes and squash, can take up a lot of garden space. Limit the number of large plants, making more room for a larger amount of smaller ones to increase your harvest.
9. Choose dwarf or small-size vegetable varieties. There are several varieties of smaller vegetable plants and fruit trees being developed as more gardeners are growing in small spaces.
10. Grow perpetual or perennial vegetables. Choose varieties of vegetables that can be harvested over several seasons, such as Swiss chard or kale. Grow asparagus or perennial herbs so you will be able to harvest from the plants for several years with only a little maintenance.

Introduction

VINE-RIPENED TOMATOES. SUCCULENT SQUASH. Plump cucumbers. Growing vegetables is a rewarding and cost-effective way to eat better for less, but you might think you lack the space necessary to grow a food-producing garden. With this guide, however, you will learn how to maximize your space and grow delicious vegetables, herbs, and fruits cheaply and efficiently—whether you have a small backyard or just a window sill.

You're most likely used to seeing your backyard, front yard, or existing flower beds in a certain way and might not even realize that there may be different options for utilizing those spaces. This book will help you take a look around your property, see it with fresh eyes, and find those hidden spots that may have potential for starting a food garden. A green patch as small as a square foot can nourish and grow some lettuce plants or even a tomato plant, so long as the area gets enough sun. Once you see the potential in one area, you will be surprised how every little nook and cranny in your small space could be the next perfect spot for growing some veggies or herbs.

Even a concrete jungle with no green in sight (other than an occasional green storefront canopy) can have great possibilities for supporting food-producing areas. Both your high-rise balcony or the rooftop of your apartment or office building can sustain growing vegetables in containers or hanging baskets. Another great option for the urban dweller is to check out community gardens in your neighborhood, and if there aren't any, perhaps there is a park or empty lot that would be the perfect place to start. There is so much potential for growing food no matter where you live. You just have to know where to look—and this book can help.

Perhaps you are already growing in your small space or on your balcony or patio and are looking for new ideas to improve what you are already doing. Have you thought of growing upward? In this book you will find information on what plants are best grown vertically using trellises or stakes, while maximizing your lower space for growing even more veggies and herbs.

Are you totally new to gardening and not sure where to begin? Or are you on a very tight budget and do not want to waste any money or time on something that may not work for you? In the following chapters you will find several garden designs in a range of price points that will work in a variety of small spaces. You can follow these designs as they are given, or use them as inspiration for making your own garden plan.

This book is divided into chapters focusing on specific topics relating to small spaces, making it easier for you to find what you need to get started. Feel free to jump from chapter to chapter as you have questions about how best to utilize your own small space. You will find specific information on how to plant, care for, and harvest many common vegetables, herbs, and fruits.

Growing in a small space can have its challenges, but the successes will definitely outweigh any concerns you may have. A productive garden can and should be a reality for everyone, regardless of

the amount of land you live on. This guide has everything you need to grow fresh produce in any size space, at any time of the year!

Designing a Small-Space Garden

Small-space gardening can be done anywhere you have access to soil, water, and light; it can be in a few pots on your balcony, in your front or backyard, in a community garden, or any kind of space available if used creatively. If you are new to vegetable gardening or just want to reinvent your existing space, this chapter will offer the information you need to make the best choices when getting started.

Why Do You Want to Grow Vegetables?

The first thing to consider when deciding to grow vegetables is *why* you want to start. What you want the vegetable garden to do for you will determine what size you may need and what you may want to grow.

Here are some questions to get started on your plan:

- Do you want to save money on your grocery bill?
- Do you want to feed your family healthy organic vegetables?
- Is gardening a hobby, and you just love to grow things?
- Do you want to spend time connecting with your family?
- Do you want to garden for fun, relaxation, and exercise?
- Do you just want to have pretty plants to look at on your patio?

You can definitely save money on your grocery bill as well as feed your family healthy organic produce by growing your own vegetables. As a hobby, gardening is a wonderful way to connect with other gardeners, neighbors, nature, and most of all, your family. Children love to get into the garden planting; they love watching things grow and then eating the fresh picked vegetables and fruits. You may have many other reasons for wanting a vegetable garden. But for whatever reason you choose to garden, it can be fun and a great way to stay active and enjoy the outdoors.



Soil contains bacteria, which boost serotonin levels. Serotonin is the neurotransmitter responsible for mood elevation and for staying awake. So to lighten your mood, go play in the dirt.

Planting a vegetable garden can be very rewarding. It is miraculous how a tiny little seed can

produce enough vegetables to feed your family for several meals. Your health and the health of your environment are important. Growing some of your own vegetables is a great place to start to get healthier. By growing one or two types of vegetables for yourself, you will save on trips to the supermarket, you will know exactly where your food came from, and you'll know how it was grown. These are all important steps for building a healthier body and environment.

How Much Time and Space Do You Have?

Whatever the reason you want to grow your own vegetables, it is important to consider that gardening does take time, money, and energy. Now that you know why you want to grow, it is important to be realistic with how much time you have to devote to your garden. Do you have a tiny little plot or balcony, or a front or backyard you want to turn into a garden? The size of your space will determine the amount of time it will take. A small-space garden can have its own challenges; for example, many veggies often grown in containers need more watering.

If all you have is a few minutes a day to spend on your vegetable garden, perhaps a few pots are what you want to start with. If you have a few hours a week, you could manage a small garden spot, or perhaps a 4-foot by 8-foot raised bed in your front or backyard is the better choice. If you want to grow enough food to feed your family all year round, you may need to set aside at least one day a week to tend to a much larger garden. No matter where you live, you can find a spot to grow some of your own vegetables.

What Do You Want to Grow?

When choosing to grow in a small space, it is important to know what you would like to grow as well as what will grow best in that space. Certain vegetables need specific requirements to grow well. Some need warmth and lots of sunlight, whereas others can be grown in a shadier spot. Deciding what you want to grow is your second step in choosing the best course of action for your garden.

Planning what you want to grow will save you time, money, and energy in the long run. It is important to grow what your family will eat. Does your family eat a lot of salads, or do they love tomatoes or cucumbers? Write down a list of vegetables that you love to eat and get your family involved so they are part of the decision making. That way they will be willing to help plant and take care of the garden.

Some vegetables take much more effort than others to grow well, so when choosing what you want to grow, consider how you will be growing it. Swiss chard or salad greens are easy to grow and can be harvested several times from just a few plants. A 10-foot row of asparagus will initially take some

time to plant, and you will not get a harvest for a couple of years; however once the bed is established you will be harvesting asparagus in the spring for years to come. Some root crops such as carrots, beets, or radishes need to be thinned as they grow and that can be time-consuming, especially if you have large rows of these vegetables. It is important to check to see what kind of time you want to put into gardening before choosing what you want to grow.



Children love to garden. Choose quick-growing veggies like radishes or lettuce so the children can watch them grow, or fun-eating veggies like peas or corn. Find a spot where your children can easily be involved in making their own little garden or pot. Teaching them how to plant, weed, water, and take care of that area is an invaluable tool in getting them in touch with where their food comes from.

Picking and eating fresh vegetables from your garden can be a joy. You can experience this with only a few vegetable plants grown in pots; however, if your goal is to preserve food for eating during the winter, it is important to plant more than you would need for fresh eating alone. So here again, planning ahead and deciding what you want to do with your harvest is also important.

Since space is a consideration for you, there are plants that give bigger yields than others in the space they take up. The only root crop that takes up a lot of room is the potato, but read on to find creative ways to plant yours. You can train tomatoes, cucumbers, and beans to grow vertically, giving you more of a harvest for the space used. Consider growing vegetables that have more than one edible part, such as beets; you can eat the root or enjoy the leaves in a salad. Another example is onions: You can eat the greens in your salad and then wait until the bulbs are large enough to harvest to save on space as well.

Here is a list of ten common vegetables you can grow in a small space:

1. Beans
2. Beets
3. Carrots
4. Cucumbers
5. Garlic
6. Lettuce/Spinach
7. Onions
8. Peas
9. Peppers
10. Tomatoes

Growing vegetables (even in a small space) takes effort and your time, so it is important to grow what you or your family will eat. However, do not be afraid to try something new. A vegetable fresh

from the garden has much more flavor than most veggies bought at the local grocery store. You could be surprised by what you or your family may eat! If you find you do not like something or have an overabundance of certain veggies, give some away to friends, neighbors, or your community food bank.

Consider Your Climate

When deciding to grow your own vegetables, you need to consider your climate. The United States and Canada are divided into plant hardiness zones ranging from one (the coldest areas, such as Alaska) and up to eleven, which are the warmest areas (like southern California, southern Florida, and Hawaii). These zones are based on temperature variations and first and last frost dates, and give the gardener an idea what plants will grow best in each zone.

These zones can be important when choosing perennial plants. However, with vegetable gardening most people grow annuals within the growing seasons of the area in which they live. Most areas in the United States and Canada also have four seasons—spring, summer, fall, and winter. The majority of gardeners grow vegetables in the spring and summer. Some gardeners in the South can grow during the fall and winter months as well, but usually only in the southernmost parts of the United States. Growing seasons can be extended by using greenhouses or other structures to give vegetable plants protection from inclement and unpredictable weather.



Vegetables have the same basic needs as humans: they need light, food, water, and warmth. The amount of these basic needs given to a vegetable plant will determine how it will grow, mature, and produce healthy food. These four essentials always need to be considered when choosing your garden site.

During the year temperatures go up and down. The length of your growing season will be pretty standard but can vary depending on the weather and the amounts of rainfall you get. You need to be aware of these things when choosing your site. The general climate of your area is important too; however, each garden site will have specific issues to consider:

- Does your small garden site have good soil
- Does it retain water or is it well drained?
- Is the pot large enough for what you are growing?
- Is the area protected from the wind?
- Does the site have many mature trees or a large fence that will block out the sun, or does it get full sun?

Often, all of these factors can be controlled by choosing different ways to grow on your site. For example, growing in raised beds, in a pot on a balcony, or in a greenhouse can solve a multitude of site problems.

Your Light Conditions

Sunlight plays a big part in growing a successful vegetable garden, whether in a pot or in your backyard. One of the most important aspects to growing your own vegetables is sunlight, and often this is the area over which you have the least control. When choosing your garden site, you will need to consider the amount of sunlight the area gets throughout the day. Most vegetables need an average of six hours of sunlight in order to grow. If you only have a shady spot, do not fret too much as there are a few plants that do okay in a bit of shade; perhaps you can grow other vegetables in containers that can be moved around to follow the sun's path. Choose the sunniest spot in your space for your veggie patch. It can often be your front lawn.

The sun alters its path throughout the seasons, so take the time to jot down when the sun hits your area during the different seasons and how long it stays there. The area may not get any sun during the winter months. But likely you will not be growing anything at that time, so it does not matter. However, if you get no sun during the spring and summer, you will need to choose another site. When you first start a garden, these are all things you can learn as you go. If things are not working out exactly as you planned, make a note so you can improve on things in your next growing season.



How do I keep pests away from my plants?

When planning your vegetable garden, include aspects that will attract healthy insects and animals to your space such as butterflies, ladybugs, and some birds. Drawing these creatures in can be done by planting certain veggie plants and shrubs, or including a small water feature. Attracting these insects and animals will help to keep at bay any harmful pests that may be attracted to your garden.

You also want to consider how the trees or fences in the area affect the amount of sun your site will get. In the winter months, when the leaves are off the trees, you may get full sun; however, the site will become shadier as the leaves come out. Again, find a sunnier spot if you will be growing your veggies during the spring and summer. Large trees and shrubs will compete for soil nutrients as well, so planning your site near trees will affect how many nutrients your vegetables will get. You always want great soil and it will need to be even more fertile if your garden site is near large trees. Perennial shrubs are not usually that much of a problem as they do not need as many nutrients and as much water as larger trees. Many attractive vegetable gardens use these shrubs as borders to attract

beneficial insects to the vegetable patch.

Most gardeners do not have the ideal garden site; however, you can still grow a great vegetable garden with a little knowledge and desire. With the amount of sunlight plants need being such a big consideration, here is some more information on how much certain veggies need.

Here is a list of vegetables that do well with four to six hours of sunlight:

- Carrots
- Lettuce
- Kale
- Peas
- Swiss chard

Vegetables that traditionally need more sunlight and warmth are the ones that produce fruit. These need at least eight hours of full sun to grow best:

- Cucumbers
- Eggplant
- Peppers
- Squash
- Tomatoes

No matter how large or small your garden site is, choosing an area that will get the most possible sunlight, has good drainage, and reasonably good soil will ensure you will have veggies to harvest.

Your Water Source

Water is another very important aspect to having a healthy vegetable garden. You cannot depend on rainfall alone as it can be variable in most areas. A good water source near your garden site is essential. Most people will be less inclined to water if they have to pack it from a long distance. Make sure your garden hose is attached to the water source so it can easily reach across the full length of your garden site, or that you have a large enough watering can to do all your pots at one time. This will make watering easier.

Most vegetable plants need 1 to 2 inches of water each week; some will need more if you live in an extremely hot climate. Containers and raised beds may also need more water, depending again on the temperature in your area, if the plants are under cover, and how much rainfall you get. There are several different ways of watering your vegetable garden—sprinklers, soaker hoses, drip irrigators, or

hand-watering containers are some of the most common.



A water measuring tip: place small empty cans (tuna or salmon can work well) in four different areas of your vegetable garden. Turn on the overhead sprinkler and leave it on for one hour; then measure the amount of water in each can. This will give you an indication of how much water your garden is getting in that hour.

If you live in an area that gets plenty of rainfall, a rain gauge is a useful tool. This will help you keep track of the amount of water your vegetable garden is getting. Too little water will not allow the vegetable plant roots to grow deep enough to reach the reserves of water and nutrients in the soil. Too much water will saturate the soil, reducing the amount of air space needed for the vegetable roots to grow strong, deep, and healthy. Either way is harmful to your vegetable plants. Stressed plants will not produce as much as they could if they were healthy, so make sure you keep track of the amount of water your vegetables are getting.

Designing Your Site

It is now time to decide on how you want to grow your vegetables. The kind of space you have, the terrain, the soil, and the amount of sunlight your garden site will get can help with your design decisions. Do you have a tiny balcony, porch, patio, or alley way and the only space available will hold just a few pots? Or is the space a large patio that will enable you to have some larger planter boxes, perhaps to grow a dwarf fruit tree? Is the space fairly flat and rows will work best for you? Do you have poor soil and a raised bed would be the best option? These are all great ways to grow a fabulous vegetable garden. Consider the following design options to see what's best for you.

Container Gardening

If you live in the middle of a city and the only sunny area you have available is on a balcony, porch, or in some other small space, growing in containers is the perfect option to make a lovely vegetable garden. Containers come in various sizes and can sit or hang in your space. Some vegetables grow better in containers than others, so to get the best results possible, you want to be informed when choosing your vegetable plants.

In some urban homes or offices all the access you may have to the outdoors is a concrete patio. These are often areas that get a lot of sun. Sometimes these spots are a little too hot, but they might offer ideal conditions for growing your food using containers. Patios are usually big enough to accommodate larger planters, enabling you to easily grow larger vegetables and even some fruit trees.

and berry bushes.

Row Method

Row gardening is best used if you have a flat area. Even though row gardening is usually used on larger plots, this method of growing can be easily utilized in small spaces, such as in a flat sunny front or backyard. When planning a row garden, it is important to make sure you allow space for pathways between and at the end of each row to accommodate a place for you to walk and use any larger tools, like a rototiller or wheelbarrow. Walking on the soil where you will be planting your veggies can compact it and harm the soil structure. When designing this style of garden, make designated pathways.

Rows can be as long or as wide as you want or need them to be. Often the width is dependent on the type of equipment you will be using to till the beds. If you are going to be using a rototiller, measure the width of the tines. This will give you an idea of how wide you want your bed to be. When choosing the width of your garden bed, consider how long your reach is; if you are weeding on one side, can you easily reach across the bed without straining your back?

Growing in Raised Beds

Raised beds are structures that have four sides and hold soil. They are a great option for a small space, for areas with poor soil, for a hillside garden, or if you want structures in your garden. If you want to grow in a moist area that has poor drainage, the raised bed will allow for better drainage. If you have a sloped or terraced garden site, raised beds will help define these areas and make it easier to grow plants in the more difficult to reach areas. If the garden is replacing your front lawn and you want it to look attractive to your neighbors, using raised beds is a great way to add structure, definition, and tidiness to your vegetable garden. Raised beds are often used in community gardens as they can be easily designated to individual growers.



Even in the smallest garden, make room for a place for at least one person to sit. This adds purpose to the space and will be a lovely place to enjoy your garden. You can place your seating in a shady spot so you can relax after a hot day of working.

Another great reason for using raised beds is that the bed can be made to any height. If you have physical disabilities, have limited mobility, or cannot bend easily, the raised bed can work very well for you. Make sure it is built to the height that works best for you. If it is a low bed, adding a ledge on the top will allow you to sit while gardening. And the ledge is great for older gardeners or those that cannot easily get down on hands and knees to plant or weed.

Prepping Your Small Space

When planning for a successful small-space garden, an important first step is getting to know your garden space. Whether you're growing in front of your home or in your backyard, you'll need to know the nature of your area before you plant the first seed. Read on to learn about different soil types, how to amend garden soil, the proper way to fertilize, easy composting, and the importance of good drainage. Following these crucial steps while prepping your small space will ensure healthy plants and the abundant crop you desire.

Your Soil

Fertile soil is a necessary element to a successful garden in the ground or in containers. Soil supports the vegetable plants by providing them with nutrients, warmth, air circulation, and the moisture they need to grow to maturity. Most gardens do not have ideal soil; however, with a little work and attention, you can develop healthy, fertile soil that your plants will love.

Soil is made up of soil particles, organic matter, humus, water, and air. Soil particles are mineral materials that have been broken down into pieces smaller than pebbles. The organic matter and humus are made from decaying organisms, mainly plants that are at various stages of decomposition. About half of soil is actually solid; the rest is filled with air and water.

Air space is needed so that oxygen and carbon dioxide can move freely in and out of the soil; both are needed for vegetable plant roots to grow. Clay soil can impede airflow, as it is heavy and soil can get compacted by machinery or by being walked on. Either practice can inhibit good air circulation in the soil—another reason to have designated pathways to prevent your garden beds from becoming compacted.



When planting containers it is important to use a light soil mix or good compost. If you use soil from your garden, it is often too heavy and will not allow air to circulate in the container. Garden soil will impede the growth of your plants rather than support it.

Proper moisture is another very important ingredient needed in soil to support healthy plants. The water in the soil encases the soil particles and dissolves them; this enables the vegetable plant to absorb the nutrients through the water. If the soil gets too wet, it becomes saturated and does not leave any room for the oxygen and carbon dioxide to reach the plant roots or for the water to dissolve the soil particles. The plants are left nutrient deficient. Your soil needs a healthy balance of soil particles

organic material, water, and air circulation so plants can get the oxygen, moisture, and nutrients needed to grow to maturity.

When used in containers, the soil has more restrictions. So a lightweight soil mix is important to allow proper movement of the water and air. This will ensure the plants get what they need.

Consider What Your Plants Need

Now that you know more about what soil is and what your plants need to grow well, it is time to take a look at your own garden soil. Does it look healthy? Is it dark in color, rich smelling and crumbly, or is it hard, grayish in color, and dry? Are there earthworms when you dig around in it, or is it rocky with some straggly weeds? No matter what you are starting with there are always ways to improve it; soil is a living thing and will need amending and fertilizing along the way.

So what kind of soil do you have? There are four basic types: sand, silt, clay, and loam (sometimes called humus).

Sandy Soil

Sandy soil is mostly made up of sand and is the opposite of clay soil. Sandy soil is made up large particles that do not hold together well. As a positive, sandy soil is often the warmest soil, which can benefit heat-loving vegetables. The main drawback to this type of soil is that it does not hold the water that is needed to move the nutrients from the soil to your plants. To tell if you have sandy soil or not, pick up a small handful, rub your fingers through it, and if it falls apart and feels gritty, your soil is made mostly of sand.

To improve sandy soil you will need to add organic matter such as compost, rotted manures, and shredded leaves. Doing this every year, or even twice a year if you have enough material, is ideal. Organic matter adds nutrients to the soil and helps it to retain moisture. Both nutrients and moisture, which may be lacking in a sandy soil, are needed to grow healthy vegetable plants.

Clay Soil

In clay soil the particles are very tiny and bind together to make the soil heavy and difficult to work with. Another disadvantage is clay soil stays colder than other soils, so plants often have a tendency to grow slower. It also can get waterlogged, and prevent oxygen from reaching the roots of your vegetable plants. On the positive, clay soil is richer in nutrients and retains more moisture than sandy soil, which means it needs less water in the hot summer months. To check if you have clay soil, take a small handful of soil, add a little water, and roll it between your hands. If it forms an elongated shape

and does not easily fall apart, you have mostly clay in your soil.



Raised beds or containers are always great options if you have poor soil or live in an urban area where there is no open ground available. There are good packaged soil mixtures sold at garden nurseries. Be sure to consider the initial cost; however, raised beds or containers are great ways to grow some of your own veggies.

To improve clay soil, you want to add as much organic matter as you can. By adding in compost, shredded leaves, and rotted manures (such as horse, cow, or chicken manure), you will help to enlarge the amount of space between the soil particles and make the soil lighter. This will increase air circulation, allowing the oxygen and nutrients to be absorbed by the plants.

Silt Soil

Silt soil has medium-sized particles, larger than clay and smaller than sandy soils. Silt drains better than clay soil and holds nutrients better than sandy soils. This type of soil is very rare and is really only found near rivers or in areas that were once under water. The main disadvantage to silt soil is that it lacks organic matter, but that can be easily remedied by adding it in. To test if you have silty soil, put a small amount of soil in your palm, add a bit of water, and rub it between your fingers. Silty soil will have a soapy feel to it.

Loamy Soil

Loamy soil has the ideal soil structure, which is a mixture of sand, clay, and silt. It holds nutrients, retains moisture but does not get soggy, and it is easy to work with. Gardeners who have been gardening for years usually have made what soil they started with into a loamy, rich soil. A rich, loamy soil is slightly moist and crumbles easily by just poking your fingers into it. It is very similar to rich, well-rotted compost.

Most soils are a combination just with a bit more sand or clay in them. But no matter what your soil type, it will need to be replenished with healthy amendments (organic materials) and organic fertilizers on a regular basis. Your vegetable plants are drawing nutrients continuously while they are growing. Rain and wind can wash or blow away nutrients as well, so it is important to know your soil and to take care of it in order to have healthy vegetable plants.

Drainage Concerns

The amount of moisture present in the soil plays a huge part in allowing nutrients to be used by the plants. Too much or too little water is a concern when trying to grow healthy veggie, fruit, and herb plants. If you have water sitting in your garden after a rain or if your water seems to drain away too quickly, you probably have a drainage problem. In containers, if the plants become waterlogged or drain out, their growth can be affected. So drainage holes in containers are extremely important for keeping your plants healthy.



Nature's plants rely on fallen limbs, leaves, seeds, and eventually huge trees that decompose over time, making a forest a blanket of rich humus. High-fiber woody materials are exactly what some soils need. Sawdust and wood chip mulch will conserve water, control weeds, and build long-term soil fertility.

Organic matter in soil helps to lighten it, offering better drainage and the ability to hold the correct amount of water for your plants. Add in as much organic materials as possible such as compost or aged animal manure (several inches if you have that much), and till or dig it under. Mulching with straw or leaves can protect the soil from erosion and leaching of nutrients; the mulch will decompose over time, adding organic matter to the soil. With container gardens, it is important to renew your soil every year before planting a new crop, as well as regularly fertilizing every few weeks.

If your garden area has a drainage problem and you are not sure how to go about fixing it, call a landscaper to assess the situation for you. Drainage pipes, which can help remove any excess water you may have in your garden site, can be placed underground. Well-drained soil helps to keep plant roots from becoming waterlogged, allowing the plants to absorb the nutrients and oxygen needed to grow and mature. Poorly drained soil leaves your vegetable plants more susceptible to root rot and disease.

Backyard Composting

Making compost can be a huge benefit for your vegetable garden. It does take some work but for a little time and effort, the rewards are great! A compost pile makes use of your kitchen waste that otherwise would go into the garbage, and is an excellent spot to recycle your weeds (just make sure they have not gone to seed). You can allow other garden debris to decompose in the pile rather than having it go to the landfill. Having a compost pile is also a great way to keep your garden clean. The resulting compost is perfect for using in your garden beds or containers.

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