

MESSENGER-INQUIRER



December 10, 2022

Planning Ahead for the Next Gardening Season

While taking a break from holiday activities and looking outside my window, my garden site grabs my attention. In order to be ready for the next gardening season, planning needs to take place. By developing a plan, time and money will be saved, as well as the environment protected. Steps to take for getting ready for the new gardening season include evaluating the garden site, testing the soil, and planning the layout.

Evaluate the current or new gardening location for the length of daylight it receives. The site needs direct sunlight for at least eight hours a day for best production. Avoid areas shaded by trees and buildings. Over time trees grow and shade more area.

Keep the garden away from trees to prevent their roots from competing with the vegetables for water and nutrients. Tree roots can be damaged by tiling the soil. Laying a raised bed on top of them suffocates the tree's roots.

Evaluate soil drainage because the site must drain well. Some drainage issues can be improved by building raised beds or laying drainage tile.

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A location on high ground is best. Low areas warm up slowly in the spring, lack air drainage, and are areas where light frosts occur.

A vegetable garden planted close to your back door makes it easier to watch for weeds, insect pests, and water needs. Also, it makes it handier to harvest vegetables at their peak maturity.

If space is limited, select several mini gardens in areas around the yard instead of planting one plot. Locations could include a flower bed or along a fence.

Another step in preparation for the next season is taking a soil sample from the selected site and having it tested. It is best to test the soil to adjust the pH if needed in the fall and early winter and plan for fertilizer needs before planting in the spring. It is not too late to test the soil. Even testing the soil in early spring is better than not testing at all. Plants need a continuous supply of nutrients for producing high yields of quality vegetables. Applying fertilizer according to soil test results allows less chance of under- or overfertilization.

To take a soil sample from the vegetable garden, make a hole 6-8 inches deep with a spade, shovel, or hand trowel. Then take a 1-inch-wide slice of soil from the back of the hole down to 6-8 inches deep. Keep the center 1- to 2-inch-wide core of soil on the spade or shovel and remove the rest. Place the core of soil in a clean plastic container. Repeat this process 6 to 8 times in different locations throughout the garden to collect a representative sample. Mix all of the cores of soil together and take 2 cups to a Cooperative Extension Service Office.

Currently, Daviess County residents receive soil tests courtesy of a grant through the Daviess County Soil Conservation Service. Results and recommendations are usually provided within 10 to 14 working days.

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The soil test indicates the recommended amount of phosphorus and potassium if needed. These nutrients are necessary for the development of plants.

The test also determines pH. The ideal range of pH is 6.2 to 6.8 for most vegetables. If the pH is lower than 6.2, results will indicate the amount of lime needed to raise the pH. The pH of the soil is important because it has a direct effect on the nutrients available to the plants.

The soil test does not measure the amount of nitrogen in the soil because plants need it. Apply the recommended amount of nitrogen in the spring before planting and again as a sidedressing during the growing season so that the plants capture the nitrogen instead of it leaching out of the soil.

Then plan the garden on paper. Draw a scale model of where the vegetables will be planted and the projected planting date to determine the number of transplants and amount of seed needed. The plan provides a record to aide with crop rotation for next year to prevent the buildup of insects and diseases. Place perennial crops, such as rhubarb and asparagus, along the edge of the garden where they can grow from year to year without being disturbed.

For more information about vegetable gardening, contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service at 270-685-8480 or annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu. The publication, ID-128, "Home Vegetable Gardening in Kentucky" is available at the office or online at <http://www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/id/id128/id128.pdf>.

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Annette's Tip:

Animal manures used as organic matter in the garden should be incorporated into the soil immediately following application and must be applied 120 days before harvest for all crops with edible portions in contact with the soil. Avoid applying manure to areas where leafy greens will be grown. Therefore, it is best to apply manure in the fall and till it into the soil. Raw manure has not been composted and may contain bacteria harmful to humans. A manure pile sitting for several years is still considered raw manure. Do not use cat and dog feces in the garden.

Upcoming Event:

The Kentucky State Fruit and Vegetable Conference for the commercial producer is scheduled for January 3 and 4, 2023 at the Sloan Convention Center in Bowling Green, KY. This conference covers educational topics such as marketing produce, beginning growers, cut flowers, high tunnel production, and organic production. Early registration is open with a discount on meeting registration until December 16 at <https://kyhortcouncil.org/2023-kentucky-fruit-and-vegetable-conference/>

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