

MESSENGER-INQUIRER

	University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, Food and Environment <i>Cooperative Extension Service</i>
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Start Early for the Next Gardening Season

After freezing temperatures arrive, the vegetable growing season slows down. Take this opportunity to get ready for gardening in 2025. Evaluate the amount and quality produced this past year and make note of your favorites. Making a plan helps save time in the spring, spend money wisely, and protect the environment. The plan should include evaluating the garden site, testing the soil, and planning the layout of the vegetables in the garden.

Assess the length of daylight that the current or proposed new gardening location receives. Direct sunlight for at least eight hours a day is best for production. Avoid areas shaded by trees and buildings.

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 tilling the soil. Laying a raised bed on top of the roots suffocates them.

Well-drained soil is required for growing vegetables. Evaluate how well the site drains. Some drainage issues can be improved by building raised beds or laying drainage tile.

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.

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A vegetable garden planted close to the back door makes it easier to watch for weeds, insect pests, and water needs. It makes harvesting vegetables at their peak maturity handy.

If space is limited, select several mini gardens in areas around the yard instead of planting one plot.

Plan for soil preparation by collecting a soil sample from the selected site and having it tested. A soil test should be conducted every 3 to 4 years. The results help 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 one-inch-thick slice of soil from the back of the hole down to six to eight inches deep. Keep the center one to two-inch-wide core of soil on the spade or shovel and remove the rest. Place the core of the soil in a clean plastic container. Repeat this process six to eight times in different locations throughout the garden to collect a representative sample. Mix all the cores of soil together and take two cups to a Cooperative Extension Service Office. Currently, Daviess County residents receive free 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.

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

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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 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 right 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.

Finally, plan the vegetable 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 number of seeds needed. If too much is planted, taking care of the plants and the amount of vegetables produced can be overwhelming. Guides in “Home Vegetable Gardening in Kentucky” ID-128 provide average vegetable yields and the amount to plant per person per foot of row with the proper spacing. For example, about 10 pounds of broccoli per person is grown from 3-5 plants spaced 14-18 inches apart within the row. When growing from seed, plan on sowing more than needed and thin it to the proper spacing.

The plan provides a record to aid 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

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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 <https://publications.ca.uky.edu/sites/publications.ca.uky.edu/files/ID128.pdf>.

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.

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