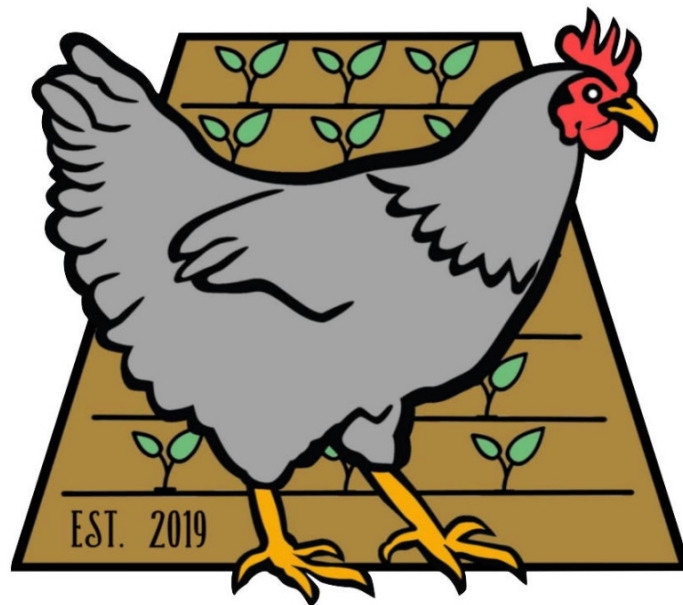


The Heirloom Acre's Beginner's Guide to Gardening

THE HEIRLOOM ACRE



Welcome!

For me growing food has become such a passion and way of life, that I couldn't imagine life without it. I find it not only enjoyable but it's also therapeutic, in addition to that, my family is eating better than ever thanks to the food it provides.

Many others garden for these same reasons. For many people, it is a hobby, but also a way to save money but still provide yourself and your family with healthy food. According to online statistics the average backyard gardener spends about \$70-90 per year on their gardens and they yield an average of \$600 in produce. That's an incredible return on investment, in addition to the enjoyment and health benefits of it.

Here at the Heirloom Acre, we haven't kept perfect records of what we have spent, but as we enter our 4th growing season here, I am sure that it's beyond the \$70-90 mark. That's not to be discouraging though. We started with bare ground and now have a greenhouse and about 1500 sq. ft of fenced garden space, in addition to berries and fruit trees and some outside the fence setups. We have made the investments, and they are paying off. In 2020 we grew over 500lbs of food. In 2021, we yielded over 600lbs. In 2 years, that's over 1100lbs of organically grown produce. That's eating well and saving thousands of dollars.

When starting a garden, or any project, you don't have to go full throttle. We knew we were wanting a lifestyle change and that our garden was going to be a big part of our diet, so we went big, and we still aren't done adding and expanding. I encourage everyone to grow something they can eat. In my opinion, no matter how small it may seem, there is nothing more rewarding!

I've had a lot of people ask me how to get started in growing some of their own food, so I have put together this quick beginner guide to help anyone that wants to start but doesn't know where!

Please note that this is a general guide to get started. Every topic I cover here can be its own book, so there aren't a lot of details or deep dives. This is meant to help walk you through the process of figuring out what you need to get started, how you want to grow, what to plant and when to plant it, and how to care for your space. I am always happy to give advice and expand on topics, so please reach out to me on the Heirloom Acre social media pages if you need clarification or want to know more. If I don't know the answer, I almost always know where to look to find it!

Happy Gardening!

The Heirloom Acre's Beginner's Guide to Gardening

Getting Started:

1. What kind of garden do you want to grow?
2. What tools do you need to get started?
3. What should you plant?
4. When should you plant?
5. How do I plant?
6. Now its time to watch your garden grow!
7. And now for what we've all been waiting for!

What Kind Of Garden Do You Want To Grow?

When deciding on a garden you have several options. You can start with just some pots, or some raised beds; you can also just dig a plot on the ground. Depending on your space, you can also do a combination. Whichever option you choose, you'll want to be sure your chosen area gets adequate sun. There are pros and cons to each option, read below to help you decide which option is best for you.

Containers

Pros:

Portable, easy to move

Small

Can be used anywhere- apartment balcony, patios, sun porch, etc.

Easy to care for and maintain

Less weeding

Less potential for vermin

Great for controlling the growth of a plant- I'm looking at you mint family!

Cons:

Upfront cost of containers

Upfront cost of dirt to fill containers

Some plants do not successfully grow in containers

Requires more frequent watering than other options

Container size can limit plant growth, small container may not allow roots and plant to reach potential- make sure to choose a large enough container for your chosen plant

Raised Beds

Pros:

Easy to care for and maintain
More accessible for those with mobility restrictions
Great for most plants/ vegetables
Easy pest control- harder for rabbits and other vermin to cause trouble
Can buy kits or DIY to frame beds
Less weeds - if using new soil, less likely to be full of weeds/ seeds, no weeds coming up from the ground

Cons:

Upfront cost of materials to build them
Upfront cost of dirt/soil to fill them
Material may degrade/ need replaced over time, quality of materials varies greatly
Small but not portable like containers

In Ground Planting

Pros:

Low upfront cost- with the exception of optional fencing
No limitations on what plants can be grown in ground
Less restriction on size of growing area than with containers and raised beds
Less need for frequent watering

Cons:

More susceptible to animal damage (without fence) and insect damage
More labor intensive- bending over, kneeling, larger areas etc.
More weeds due to seeds existing within the soil
Existing soil will need tested and possibly amended to ensure proper nutrients and components are present.

Soil Test Note: If you are planting in ground, I highly recommend a soil test, so you know exactly what your soil is composed of. There are DIY soil test kits that can be bought for around \$10 to help you determine pH. You can also contact your county extension office for a soil test kit, they are around \$15. With this kit you will be instructed to collect a soil sample and then mail it to them. They will mail you a printout of the results that tells you soil type, pH, and nutrient composition. If you need amendments, they will tell you what you need. This is an inexpensive way to make sure your soil is healthy or what you need to get it there.

What Tools Do You Need to Get Started?

Soil- for containers, raised beds, or if ground soil is poor quality

Pots, containers, grow bags for container gardening

Building materials for raised beds

Fencing if desired for raised beds or in-ground garden

Seeds

Plant starts

Hand tools- garden trowel, garden rake, garden knife/hori hori, hand weeder, etc.

Full size tools for in ground or raised beds-shovel, hoe, rake, etc.

Fertilizer

Soil test

What Should You Plant?

I have been asked countless times “what should I grow?” This is the easiest gardening question, even though I don’t have the exact answer. My reply never changes, *grow whatever you and your family like to eat!*

If you don’t like zucchini, don’t grow zucchini! If you love tomatoes, then grow tomatoes! Of course, it has to be a vegetable that will grow in your area, but once you know that pick your favorites and start with them. Keep in mind, some veggies are harder to grow than others. For example, carrots will not do well in clay soil, however they do great in raised beds or deep containers. There are many vegetables that are great for beginners- tomatoes, peppers, beans, lettuce and other salad greens, and many others will grow easily with the right amount of light, water, love, and care!

Looking ahead, as your confidence grows, keep those favorites you have been growing, but try new veggies too! We look at the seed catalogs each year for something new to grow and try! For example, we love green beans, so last year we grew Dragon’s Tongue beans, and loved them. This year we are planting them again, and also trying some Chinese noodle beans.

When Should You Plant?

This is a loaded question! First, you have to know your first and last frost dates. You can find this info at www.Almanac.com; all you need is your zip code. Write those dates down and keep them somewhere that is easy to reference. They will guide you in knowing what to plant at what time! Second, know your hardiness zone. This can be found also using your zip code, at www.planthardiness.ars.usda.gov. This will be helpful in determining what is going to grow in your area as well as when to plant it.

Something that often comes as a surprise to new gardeners is that not everything gets planted at the same time. Some plants are cold/ frost tolerant and can be planted earlier in the spring than some of the heat loving plants. I live in zone 5b, it is mid-March and I currently have kale and lettuce growing, and broccoli will be planted soon, with peas and onions not long after that. However, tomatoes and peppers cannot be planted until almost June. By July the broccoli and lettuce will be done because it will be too hot, but the tomatoes and peppers will be just getting started! Seed packets from reputable companies will often have the grow zone and frost hardiness listed on the packs, as well as other planting information. This is a great starting point for knowing if the plant will work in your area. In addition, knowing your zone and dates will help you determine when to plant each of the veggies that you want to grow and enjoy!

How Do I Plant?

Now that you know your container type, what you need, what you want to grow, and when to grow it, you just need to know how to plant it. Some plants grow best by sticking a seed in the ground, watering it and waiting for the sun to work its magic! Lettuce, squash, carrots, and beans are examples of this. As mentioned above seed packets are good for information like spacing and seed depth. It's important to follow the guidelines for the best results. An example of seed depth variation is carrot seeds are tiny and just need a light cover of soil over them, whereas garlic is planted about an inch deep. A spacing example would be that leaf lettuce can be spaced about 3" apart, but watermelon needs 3'! Some plants need planted as starts, instead of seeds for best results. Examples of these are broccoli, peppers, cabbages and tomatoes. If you want to start them as seeds, you need to start them inside about 3 months before they can go outside. This requires heat mats, grow lights, trays and other equipment. For beginners, I recommend buying starts from a grower or greenhouse. You should wait until these plants can be planted outside in your area, buying them too early can cause them to become root bound and stunt their growth.

Watching Your Garden Grow, and What to Look for!

Once your garden is planted your next steps are maintenance steps so that you have healthy plants and bountiful harvests! You need to water it as needed, weed, fertilize if needed/as needed, and watch for pests!

You don't want to water during the day, aim for early morning or evening. Don't over water; overwatering can lead to yellowing of the leaves in many plants and also can cause root rot as well as encourage disease. You also want to remember to water the dirt, not the leaves. Of course, we have no control over the rain and mother nature, so this advice is for manual watering. Containers and pots will lose moisture quicker than raised beds and in ground planting, so they will need watered more frequently. This is because they hold heat which causes moisture to evaporate faster. Raised beds,

depending on size and style may still need frequent watering. In ground gardening holds moisture the best and thus will need watered less often than the other growing options. Newly planted seeds and seedling transplants will need more water than established plants. Daytime temperatures can also affect watering frequency, as the hotter days will require more watering, as summer ends and the days are cooler you may still have veggies growing but you'll find that you need to water them much less. Of course, some plants require more water than others. Watermelons and pumpkins take a lot of water, so even on days that the rest of the garden doesn't need a drink, you may still need to water them.

Weeding is an important, but often the least favorite, step in gardening. If weeds get out of control, they compete with plants for soil nutrients and water. They are often fast growing and can overtake vegetable plants, blocking the sun and stunting growth and production.

When using new dirt, you will have fewer weeds because there is less seeds in the dirt-for now. Over time wind and birds will help seeds find their way to your new soil, so watch regularly and remove as soon as you see them pop up. In ground gardening always involves weeds, these can be minimized with barriers like weed cloth or heavy mulch layers. Straw, grass clippings and leaves are great for mulching around garden plants. They will eventually breakdown and provide nutrients to the soil, but over the course of a growing season they will help stop the weeds.

NOTE: if you use leaves and grass clippings be sure they were not treated with any type of weedkiller.

Fertilizer needs vary depending on the plant, the growing method, and the soil health. If you are container gardening or planting in raised beds and you used new soil, it's unlikely you will need much fertilizer, at least in the first year. If you are planting inground I recommend the soil test I discussed up above to help guide you to know your fertilizer and amendment needs. I also recommend getting some kind of compost bin to collect weeds, leaves, and kitchen scraps, these will break down into a black compost that can do wonders for soil health.

Pests in the garden can mean many things. First up, animals; for large gardens fences are helpful to keep out dogs, cats, rabbits and other mammals. Dogs like to dig and can destroy plants. Cats are great for rodent control, but sometimes struggle to know the difference between vegetable garden and litter box, thus killing plants and/ or making fruit inedible. Deer, rabbits, groundhogs, mice and others enjoy the fruits of your labor as much as you do and can really be hard on the overall bounty. Fencing, berry or fruit tree netting or other physical barriers can help ward off these types of garden pests.

The other pests you need to be aware of are the bugs, but not all the bugs! So many insects, wasps, arachnids, and arthropods are great for gardens, but there are many others that are not.

We all know bees and butterflies are pollinators and thus they are necessary for the garden, but hover flies and wasps are also very effective pollinators. Wasps are an

often-overlooked beneficial insect. In addition to pollinating, they help control the populations of tomato hornworms, fly larva and other unwanted insects.

Gardens are very much a part of the ecosystem. A healthy garden will be full of all kinds of insects. It's important to know which ones are good, and which ones you want to watch for. In addition to the ones already listed, spiders, earthworms, wheel bugs, lacewings, and lady bugs are great to find among your plants.

However, most caterpillars are leaf eaters and will decimate plants and are thus not welcome in many gardens. Caterpillars are butterfly and moth larva; to grow they need to eat the leaves of their host plants. Cabbage loopers and cabbage moths will take over brassicas. Netting and insecticide sprays can help, as well as watching for the moths and butterflies that lay the eggs. Another option is planting extra sacrificial host plants.

Black swallowtail butterflies lay their eggs on plants in the carrot family, when the eggs hatch the larva devour the plants. We deal with swallowtails by planting additional potted parsley and dill plants. These extra plants are used to relocate and caterpillars that show up on our primary plants. I also sacrifice a tomato plant away from all the others for any hornworms I find. Hornworms will destroy tomato and pepper plants but having some in the garden will draw in braconid wasps (which help with pollination and pest control). I like to keep them around to keep my backyard ecosystem balanced.

Many types of beetles are also destructive: cucumber, potato, and squash varieties are all ones that have to be watched for and dealt with as soon as they are spotted. There are also aphids, vine borers, grasshoppers, and many others to watch for. Know your area's insects and always ID before you destroy. I always keep my phone nearby so I can snap a photo of an insect, there are some great apps for identifying insects. Once you have an ID, look and see if it's a beneficial garden friend, or a garden foe, then you can react accordingly. There are both organic and traditional treatment methods to choose from.

I know many people that fear bees, spiders, and other bugs, but while startling sometimes, they are much more beneficial than many of us realize.

Finally, The Good Part!

As you are weeding, watering, fertilizing and watching for insects, you will start to see blossoms on your fruiting plants, and soon after you will start to see baby fruit behind many of those blossoms. You'll see the lettuce, kale and chard growing taller and taller. Those blossoms, baby fruit and tall leaves mean you made it! You are going to have veggies soon!!! Go cut some lettuce, pick that tomato and enjoy the fruits of all of your hard work.

On the last page, I have included a chart that I hope you will find helpful. It lists some vegetables that I think are great for beginner gardens. I've included the best method for growing, as well as some growing tips.

Final Note

To wrap-up, I hope this guide has given you a good base to start from. It's my belief that anyone can garden no matter how big or small their space and anyone that wants to grow something can. Sometimes we have to be a little creative and think outside the box, while not overcomplicating the process. I look forward to seeing and hearing about all of your garden adventures in the seasons ahead!



Garden Vegetables for Beginners

Plant	How to start	Container, Raised Bed, or In Ground	Notes
Herbs	Plant	Any	Great for smaller containers Many are perennials and will come back each year
Beans	Seed	Bush variety- Container Pole variety- Any	Beans do not transplant well, always start from seed
Tomatoes	Plant	Any	Container should be 4-5 gallons to allow for root development growth and production
Peppers	Plant	Any	Containers should be 4-5gallons to allow for root development, growth and production
Squash/ Zucchini	Seed or plant	Raised Bed or In Ground	Note that these can grow to take up a lot of space
Lettuce/ Salad Greens	Seeds	Any	Grows best in cooler weather; spring and fall When ready to eat, do not pull them, instead cut to harvest and they will continue to grow back