News Release

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Suggested headlines:
Beginners Learn to Grow Vegetables
Growing Vegetables Delivers Delicious Results

So, you want to start a vegetable garden. Good for you. Growing your own food is healthy and deliciously rewarding. Nothing, but nothing, tastes better than a tomato fresh from the vine.

Let’s cover the basics. The first is location, location, location. As with real estate, location is crucial. You want your vegetable garden in full sun, near a water source, and in a relatively flat, dry area.

Start small. Most newbies think too big and get overwhelmed. You can grow over 80 pounds of vegetables in an 8 foot by 8 foot area.

What should you grow? Grow what you like to eat. If you go gaga for tomatoes, grow tomatoes. If you love peppers and onions, grow those. And know that as early crops fade, you can pop in others for fall harvest.

Visit the University of Maryland’s Grow It Eat It website for tips on creating a basic garden plan. You’ll find it at www.growit.umd.edu. It has a fact-filled “starting a vegetable garden” section, vegetable profiles, garden blogs and more.

Should you start with small plants – called transplants – or seeds? Transplants are easier for beginners, but seeds give you more variety. In your first year, try mostly transplants and a few seeds you can plant directly in the ground like basil and squash.
Now, let’s talk soil. Good gardens are built from the ground up, so start with a soil test. It tells you exactly what your soil needs to grow healthy plants and costs only about $10. We have soil bags and information on soil tests at our offices and online at www.hgic.umd.edu.

If you’re putting in a garden where you have lawn, you have options. You can turn over the sod and let it rot for a few weeks before working it in, layer on organic matter and plant into that (called “lasagna gardening,”) or build the soil up into a raised bed. The Grow It Eat It website shows all three options.

When can you plant? It’s a bit early now – too cold and wet. I just want to get you thinking and planning. To see if the soil is ready, grab a handful and squeeze it gently into a ball. Bounce it in your open hand. If it crumbles, the soil is ready to work. If not, it’s too wet and you need to wait.

You can plant cool season crops like peas and onions in mid- to late March, but most warm weather crops like tomatoes and peppers want the warmth of mid-May. Pick up a free planting dates chart (HG-16) at our offices or download it at www.hgic.umd.edu – under publications, online, vegetables.

Want more? Come to the Master Gardeners’ workshop on starter vegetable gardens on Saturday, April 20, from 9:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. For $10, you will learn how to grow vegetables in small spaces including containers, raised beds and lasagna beds. Request a registration form at dwoodring@umd.edu or 301-791-1304.

Enjoy your new vegetable garden.

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