



Garden Planning for Beginners - Part 1

CGM CLASS HANDOUT

I. Crop Selection


Find  by scanning:



1. Figure out what you want to grow

Think about the foods that you like to eat. What veggies, herbs, fruits, and berries are used in these foods?

What produce do you most commonly buy?

Consider adding calorie-dense plants to your grow list. These plants will be more filling and therefore, will give you the most bang for your buck. Check out Rachel's presentation entitled Planning Your Garden for info on what crops will provide you with the most calories. 

2. Can it grow where you live?

Most of California—like Santa Clara County—has a Mediterranean climate which means that people can have a garden growing all year round due to the mild winters.

Gardeners have to consider local growing zones and microclimates when figuring out what to grow.

a. USDA Plant Hardiness Zone

Based on average low temperatures. Santa Clara County is zone 9b. If you're not in SCC, you can check your zone by zip code 

b. Sunset Garden Climate Zones

More precisely identify growing zones. Take into consideration more than just winter lows. They also look at summer highs, length of growing season, rainfall, wind, and humidity. San Jose is zone 15.

c. Microclimates

A microclimate is a local atmospheric zone where the climate differs from the surrounding area. You should try to identify differences in humidity, heat, and wind so you know how to best plan your garden.

3. Grow Vegetables in the Right Season [R]

Certain plants will only grow in certain gardening seasons.

a. There are two general groups: Warm Season and Cool Season

I got the following information from the UC Master Gardeners of Santa Clara County [🔗](#)

Warm season vegetables

These are vegetables that grow best in the summer (April–September) and generally can't tolerate temperatures below about 50° F. Perennial vegetables that produce in the summer are included here.

Asparagus	Green Onions	Tomatoes
Beans	Honeydew	Watermelon
Belgian Endive	Melons	Winter Squash
Cantaloupe	Okra	Zucchini
Chayote	Peppers	Sweet Potatoes
Chiles	Potatoes	Tomatoes
Corn	Pumpkins	Watermelon
Cucumbers	Summer Squash	Winter Squash
Eggplant	Sweet Potatoes	Zucchini

Cool season vegetables

These are vegetables that grow best in the fall, winter, and early spring (September–April). Some of these can be grown in the summer as well, with some care.

Artichoke	Cauliflower	Lettuce
Arugula	Celery	Mâche
Beets	Chard	Mustard Greens
Belgian Endive	Collards	Onions
Bok Choy	Fava Beans	Parsnips
Broccoli	Fennel	Peas
Brussels Sprouts	Garlic	Radishes
Cabbage	Kale	Sorrel
Cabbage, Napa	Kohlrabi	Spinach
Carrots	Leeks	Turnips

b. Use a Zone-Specific Planting Calendar

My favorite Zone 9b Planting Calendar comes from the Master Gardeners. I highly recommend it to everyone! It's very well organized. It's also available in Spanish and Chinese.

II. Site Selection

1. The must haves

a. SUN

When fruiting plants are grown with optimal light, the fruit they produce ends up with higher sugar levels and with a more complex flavor. In other words, a good amount of sun results in a higher quality crop. Choose a spot where your plants will get full sun or 6-8 hours of direct sun a day. **Sun mapping** [↗](#)

b. WATER

There are ways to grow plants without soil—like hydroponics—but you can't grow plants without water.

When plants aren't getting water or enough water, fruiting plants might produce small fruit or no fruit at all. Their texture and flavor might become unpleasant. They might wilt. Their growth might become stunted. Or worst of all, they might straight up die.

Put your garden in place near a water source. Getting water needs to be convenient.

2. Other Considerations

a. Convenience: Don't put your garden in an area that's inconvenient or difficult to get to.

b. Terrain: A vegetable garden can't have any significant high or low spots.

What to do in the meantime if you're not ready to start your garden

- Map out sun and shadows until you find the ideal spot
- Identify the microclimates in your space
- Test your soil > amend your soil according to test results
- Build up your soil health
- Work on an irrigation plan: do you need to add more spigots?
- Decide what you want to grow and collect information on each crop