

KITCHEN GARDEN Checklist



Information provided courtesy of USDA's People's Garden Initiative.

Make It A Family Affair

Start by talking to your family members. From selecting plants and seeds to harvesting vegetables, gardening is a fun way to spend time together and enjoy delicious meals around the dinner table.

Gardening to Fit Your Space

Whether you have a backyard or a kitchen window, you can garden at home. A good gardening space receives at least six hours of sunlight per day and has a conveniently located water source. Consider container gardening on your porch or balcony if you're low on outdoor space.

Sowing Into Good Ground

Before growing food in your backyard, take samples of the soil and have them analyzed to find out soil type and quality. Consult a Cooperative Extension Office – part of the USDA and a national educational network – in your county to learn how to take a soil sample and where to send it. The quality of your soil will affect the health of your crops and the design of your garden. Mulch the soil around your plants to improve your soil quality, lock in moisture and keep out weeds. In the winter, you can grow a cover crop or add nutrients to your soil.

Map It Out

Even though the White House Kitchen Garden is 1,500 square feet, you don't need that much space to grow your own food. A garden takes tending, so start small at first. Spend an evening with your family sketching out a simple design for your garden to determine how much space you have for each plant. Discuss how you will garden and where each item will grow.

Helpful hint: Put the tallest plants in the back of the garden to prevent the small plants from getting too much shade. Set your garden rows north to south to maximize the sun's rise and fall.

Plant Your Favorites

Your local Cooperative Extension Office is a great resource for finding out which crops are specific to your local growing region. With expert staff and practical and research-based guidelines, these offices are a great resource for: information about planting dates for warm and cool season crops and the best time to plant, depending on the crop.

Some plants grow best in cool weather and are planted in early spring and fall. Others thrive in heat and are planted in late spring or summer. Try these hardy, easy-growing crops in your kitchen garden:

Cool season crops

- peas
- lettuce
- broccoli
- collards
- radishes
- onions

Warm season crops

- beans
- melons
- cucumbers
- peanuts
- peppers
- tomatoes

As you plant, mark your rows with sturdy labels so you remember what you planted. Invite your neighbors and friends over to help you plant and maintain the garden. Teach your family members to water the garden and pull weeds to keep your plants healthy.

Helpful hint: Different crops require different growing environments. For example, seeds, peas, and beans go directly into your garden soil, while other crops like tomatoes need to be started indoors and later transplanted outside as young plants.

Don't give up! If you are having trouble with your garden, don't get frustrated. Trial and error is normal in gardening – your garden will get better over time, year after year. If you have questions about insects, disease or plant nutrients, you can contact your local Cooperative Extension Agent. Each county has a Cooperative Extension Service where you can find useful gardening resources, including a local Extension Master Gardener volunteer to help with gardening challenges or lead training sessions.

Homegrown Meals

When your vegetables are ready for harvest, plan a family dinner! Consider sharing your extra harvest with neighborhood food pantries, kitchens and shelters.

