



How to Harvest Your Way through a Year-Round Gardening Plan

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Many of us are interested in the idea of growing our own fruits and vegetables, yet feel intimidated by the expense and work involved. There is also a lot to learn: what types of plants are most suited to your own particular environment, what steps are involved in keeping your garden going, and even how to know when your produce is ready to be harvested!

One thing that can really help prospective amateur gardeners get started is organizing their plan for the year. If you have a schedule in front of you, it will help make the process feel less overwhelming.

Here is what you need to know to create a plan for your garden:

1) Decide what you want to grow:

There are a few different approaches to this. You could start by coming up with a wish-list of fruits, vegetables, and other plants that you are interested in having in your garden, and then researching each one in order to find out whether it is suited to the particular environment you live in. If you live in a very cold climate, like Minnesota or New England, you will likely have to cross warm weather plants like avocado and orange trees off your list. Many vegetables can be planted in the spring and harvested before autumn cold kills them off. Even northern gardeners have lots of options to choose from.

Alternatively, you can take the opposite approach ? look for a list of what will work in your environmental conditions and then decide which of those plants you are interested in growing. In particular, if you go to a local Garden Center instead of ordering seeds online, they will only stock flower seeds and shrubs that work for your weather. They can also help you figure out which particular fruits, vegetables, and flowers are most manageable for a new gardener.

2) Create a Planting Chart

There are different ways to approach creating a planting chart. There is no right or wrong method; you simply want to choose the one that works best with your learning style and that will help you feel organized and prepared. Here are some different types of charts you might try:

- A simple list of what activities to do in each month, like the one found here: <http://www.humeseeds.com/projndx.htm> [1].
- A chart with rows and columns to keep track of different types of information
- An Excel spreadsheet.
- A planting wheel like this one: http://www.al.com/images/hg/spring_garden_calendar.pdf [2] (especially suited to artistic or creative personalities). Keep in mind that this example is appropriate for climates similar to Mobile, Alabama.

Just remember the point is not to come up with the most impressive planting chart. It's to organize the information you need in order to tend your garden successfully. It can be as simple or as elaborate as you want. To make your chart, you will need certain information:

- The months of the year
- What plants you intend to sow
- What activities are needed to maintain the plants
- What activities are needed to maintain the garden generally

It's really that simple. All you need to do is figure out which activities are needed for your garden and for each plant and what month you need to do them in. Everything else is just plugging that information into the chart.

Getting Started With A Simple Chart:

A basic chart could have a row for each month of the year and columns for garden maintenance and plant maintenance. So, in January, you will look at the garden maintenance column, and note that it says to select your plants; purchase your fruit, vegetable, and flower seeds; prune your trees; and get rid of any weeds in the garden. Under the plant maintenance column, you will note that this is a good time to plant roses, certain types of flower bulbs, and flowering and shade trees. You will do the same for each subsequent month. Which month these activities fall into will depend on where you live.

Special Gardening Techniques:

Make sure to also look into strategies like raised bed gardening, planting seeds indoors, mini and underground greenhouses, plastic-covered tunnels, and cold frames that will allow you to garden year-round and extend the versatility of your garden, perhaps letting you grow fruits and vegetables and flowers that would not normally work in your particular climate.

How do you go about planning your garden?

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