

Dig in!

A Guide for NEW NORTHERN GARDENERS



- + Learn how to **PREP AND PLAN**
- + How to grow a **VEGETABLE GARDEN**
- + Garden season **TO-DO LIST**

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Ready, Set, Grow!



So, you're starting a garden? High five! We *love* that idea. And you're in good company—more than 16 million new gardeners dug into gardening for the first time last year, growing everything from fresh veggies to flowers for bees and butterflies. Whether you're embracing a new hobby in the wake of the pandemic, finding new ways to get your sweat on all summer long, helping our planet by adding more native and pollinator-friendly plants or just craving more fresh air and sunshine, we're here to help you get started and cultivate what we hope will become a lifelong love of growing.

Before you dig in

STEP 1: PREP

It's as important as planting. Before digging in, let's talk about two key elements of a healthy garden: sun and soil.

Many plants love to bask in full sun while others thrive in shadier spots, and some require a bit of both. Grab a lawn chair and spend time in your intended garden space—see how much direct light that area gets and when because not all sunshine is equal. The most intense hours of sunlight are between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. Gardens in direct sun during those four hours will make a great home for plants that thrive in full sun.

Whether your soil is thick, wet clay or dry and sandy, the solution is almost always adding compost. It introduces important nutrients and improves soil structure, helping sandy soil retain water and breaking up clay so water will flow and roots can grow.

- ▶ **How to build a raised bed**
northerngardener.org/building-raised-bed-gardens-2-options
- ▶ **Make your own compost**
northerngardener.org/compost-for-beginners

SOIL PREP TIP

If your plants aren't thriving and pests or diseases aren't present, get a soil test in the fall to see if your bed's lacking minerals and nutrients. In spring, you can amend your soil or switch to raised beds filled with compost and a rich, well-draining soil mixture.



STEP 2: PLANNING

Whether you're laying out a small vegetable bed or planning a major renovation with patios, paths and new plants, ask yourself a few questions first. How do I want to use the space? How do I want the space to feel? What practical considerations do I have to think about (water flow, traffic patterns, light, wind, wildlife and neighbors)? If you're growing edibles, what do you like to eat and cook with?

PLANNING TIP

Start a garden journal. Sketch plans and jot down plants to try. Make notes during the season so you can remember what worked (and what didn't) and what you liked (and didn't) when you start planning again next year.



Must-Know Garden Lingo

Annual: A plant that completes its life cycle in a year or less. Annuals require sowing every year and their flowers usually bloom profusely throughout the summer.

Perennial: A plant that lives two or more years outdoors in the ground. The foliage usually dies back each winter and the plant sends up new shoots from the same root system in spring.

Full sun: At least six (and preferably eight) hours of sunlight per day.

Part sun/part shade: Four to six hours of sunlight per day.

Full shade: Less than four hours of direct sunlight per day.

Deadhead: To cut spent flowers off a plant and encourage the plant to bloom again.

Compost: Organic matter often made up of decomposed plant material and added to soil to replenish nutrients.

Amend: To improve soil quality and structure by adding organic matter, such as compost.

Direct sow: To plant seeds directly in their permanent growing space.

Mulch: A layer of material (we recommend wood chips, pine bark, leaves, straw or grass clippings) covering exposed soil to minimize weeds, reduce erosion, moderate soil temperature and retain moisture.

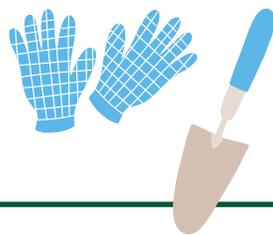
Native: A plant type that has been present in a specific geographic area for hundreds or thousands of years, that is well-suited to the climate, supports native wildlife and requires fewer resources to thrive.

Pollinators: Bees, butterflies, hummingbirds and other wildlife that transfer pollen.

Hardiness: The degree to which a plant can withstand cold temperatures. Perennials are rated using the USDA zone system to indicate in which geographic areas they can survive. If you're growing in the Upper Midwest, chances are you're gardening in zone 3, 4 or 5.

► **Find your zone**
northerngardener.org/find-your-hardiness-zone

Getting Dirty



With prep and planning done, that means one thing ... time to plant!

WHEN

It depends ... on weather, soil temperature and specific plant requirements. Some plants can tolerate cooler temperatures and be planted earlier in the season (think pansies, ornamental kale, dianthus, violas, peas, radishes and sweet alyssum).

Don't plant everything in one back-breaking session. Spread it out—plant some hardy annuals in early spring, direct sow seeds when the chance of frost has passed and sprinkle in perennials, herbs and more annuals for color throughout the season.

Soak up that warm sunshine and the smell of fresh soil—you can plant to your heart's content all season long.

► When to plant

northerngardener.org/three-ways-to-determine-when-to-plant

WHERE

Whether you're growing a small window box of annuals or creating a full-blown pollinator garden, consider how much space your plants will need. Plant spacing is determined by what you plan to grow and how many of each variety you plant. Most plants need plenty of space around them for air to circulate and to avoid crowded roots. Look for planting and spacing details on the seed pack or plant tag.

► Veggie garden spacing tips

northerngardener.org/how-far-apart-to-plant-in-the-vegetable-garden

PLANTING TIP

Study and hang on to plant tags for important details! They tell you plant size, bloom time, sun exposure, and are a good reminder of what to plant again next year. Try gluing any favorites into your garden journal—rock stars are worth planting again!

WHAT

Here's where the real fun begins. Now that you know about hardiness zones and soil and sun conditions, it's time to pick plants that will fit and thrive in your particular area. Here are some of our easy-to-grow favorites.

FULL SUN

Annuals: calibrachoa, snapdragon, bachelor's buttons (bonus: pollinators love them!)

Perennials: catmint, coneflower, liatris, rudbeckia, salvia, sedum, Shasta daisy

Veggies: Tomatoes, cucumbers

FOR SHADE

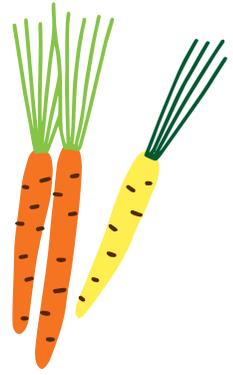
Annuals: fuschia, begonia, impatiens, torenia

Perennials: astilbe, bleeding heart, hosta, turtlehead

Veggies: broccoli, peas, radishes, beets, turnips, carrots

► **Grow your own bouquets all season:** northerngardener.org/cut-flower-garden

How to Start a Vegetable Garden



If your main gardening goal is to have fresh, homegrown tomatoes, basil, lettuce and zucchini in your backyard, welcome to the club! Our top six tips for new veggie gardeners:

1. Start small. Try growing patio-sized tomatoes or cucumbers in a container, or fill a small raised bed with herbs and lettuce.

2. Look for a convenient location drenched in full sun and close to a deck or path, so you can easily weed, water and harvest.

3. Mix plenty of compost in with the soil to add the nitrogen most vegetable plants require.

4. Start with plants or seeds from your local garden center, and pick easy-to-grow vegetables, such as cucumbers, beans, lettuces and tomatoes.

5. Feed your garden. Fertilize twice a month with liquid seaweed or fish emulsion fertilizer.

6. Weed early and often.

TOOL STARTER KIT

Shovel or spade

Trowel

Pruner

Gloves

Rain gauge

Hose and watering wand or can

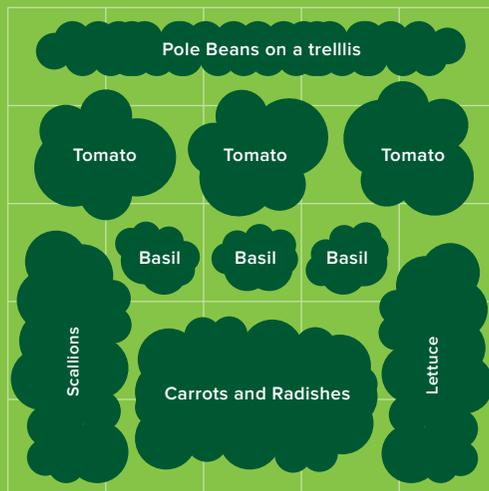


SMALL-SPACE GARDENING IDEAS

- ▶ Try growing up! northerngardener.org/try-vertical-gardening
- ▶ Tiny vegetables are trending northerngardener.org/garden-trends-2021-tiny-vegetables
- ▶ Plant a rug garden northerngardener.org/plant-a-rug-garden

NOT SURE WHERE TO START?

Here's a simple 5-by-5-foot veggie garden plan we love.



Gardening To-Do List

MAY

Start planting after the last chance of frost has passed (early May, usually).

Add compost to garden beds.

Visit your favorite garden center to purchase and plant hardy annuals, like pansies, for early season blooms.

Start direct seeding outside: peas, onions, leeks, spinach, lettuces, radishes.

Mulch to protect roots and keep weeds at bay.

In mid- to late May, buy annual flowers for containers.

Late May to early June, transplant tomatoes, peppers and eggplants into garden.

Set up cages, trellises and other supports before plants get too large.

JUNE

Sow seeds for green beans, zucchini and squash outside in the garden.

Deadhead repeat-blooming annuals and perennials regularly to keep them looking their best and to encourage more blossoms.

Monitor rain—most plants need 1 inch per week. If you don't get that in rain, supplement with the hose. Water deeply, rather than frequently. During hot spells, containers will need daily watering.

Harvest early lettuces, spinach, arugula, radishes and peas now, when they're tastiest.

Weed regularly to keep beds tidy.

JULY

Fertilize annual flower containers with a liquid fertilizer every one to two weeks for maximum blooming.

Keep an eye out for problems—pests, chewed leaves, mildew and nutrient deficiencies tend to become noticeable in July, when plants finish their first burst of growth and turn their attention to flowering and fruiting.

Prune spring-flowering shrubs that have finished flowering to encourage development of young shoots that will bear flowers next year.

Harvest herbs and early vegetables such as greens, beets, zucchini and summer squash.

Gardening on a Budget

Don't let an empty wallet stop you from growing. Budget-minded gardeners look for discounts at local garden centers and greenhouses, use seeds to grow plants, and save seeds from one year to the next. Ask friends or neighbors with robust gardens if they might be willing to divide some of their overgrown perennials and share. Visit your local garden center in June, July or August and take advantage of mid- and late-season sales—pick up discounted plants to fill in any garden holes. Store seeds from the plants you love in a cool, dry spot and sow them next year.



AUGUST

Reduce fertilizer applications to allow perennials, shrubs and trees time to harden off before cooler weather

Continue watering and weeding. Tie up floppy flower spikes.

Harvest often. Usually, the more you pick (beans) or cut back (lettuce), the more you'll get!

► Harvesting tips

northerngardener.org/when-to-harvest-vegetables

► Garden to table: northerngardener.org/recipes

Remove worn out annuals and veggies and replace with new ones.

Cutting back some annuals and perennials will encourage new growth and give the plants a fresh look for fall.

Look for pests on or around plants. Taking care of insects now may keep several generations out of your garden next summer.

SEPTEMBER

Collect seeds from favorite herbs and flowers in your garden.

Plant spring-blooming bulbs, such as tulips, daffodils, hyacinths and snowdrops.

OCTOBER

Fall garden clean-up. Remove any diseased or unhealthy plants, and leave all other perennials standing as food and protection for wildlife.

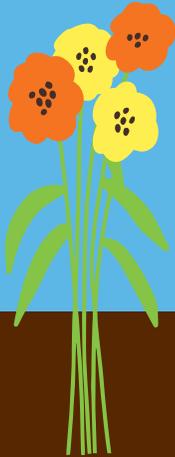
► Plant garlic—it's easy!

northerngardener.org/growing-garlic

Gardening for the Planet

On a larger scale, gardeners can help minimize climate change and support local wildlife with every native and pollinator-friendly plant we add to our landscape.

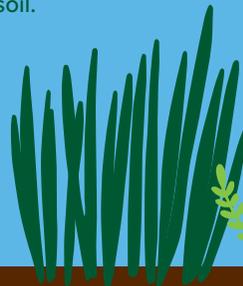
Planting natives such as blazing stars, coneflowers and asters provides food and habitat for birds, butterflies, insects and other important wildlife.



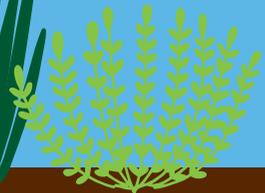
Legumes like beans, peas, clovers and lupines fix nitrogen and build organic matter in the soil.



Including grasses like little bluestem can absorb rain and prevent runoff and erosion.



All plants pull carbon dioxide out of the air and turn it into the oxygen we need to breathe.



► 10 reasons why gardens matter:
northerngardener.org/10-reasons-gardens-matter

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northerngardener.org/blog
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