

Home Gardening in Washington DC area

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Home Gardening Basics

Home gardening is an intoxicating hobby. What kind of garden, flower or vegetable or any mix of these, one wants to accomplish is purely a personal choice. We have been doing home gardening since 1973 in America starting with Poi (A.K.A Malabar Spinach; *Basella alba* L., Green vines; *Basella rubra* L, Red vines) in the kitchen of our apartment in Albany, New York. Products of our small backyard patch garden supply us with a partial dish of something year around plus the comfort of our childhood food connection. (**Tip:** garden grown vegetables are generally testier because those have not been



conditioned for lasting during long haul travel.)

This writing intends to give a snap shot of our Odia cultural vegetable basic gardening adaptable to Washington DC metro area and based on our own experience. Others living in another climatic and soil condition areas can adjust their gardening habits gathering information from references provided in this paper. (Note: When using treated wood for raised bed or container gardening only use Alkaline Copper Quaternary (ACQ) treated wood.)

(Picture downloaded from Google site)

Spot Selection

Any south facing well drainage land beyond the house shadow is the best selection. You can alternately use containers or [raised gardening](#) for growing vegetables without any problem.

Time is Everything

Timing is everything. For DC metro area summer vegetables should be planted after the Mother's Day. By thumbs rule the desired soil temperature (not the air temperature which in the spring is lower than that of soil) should be higher than 70⁰ F. for most of the Asian vegetables. Herbs, onion, garlic, Methi, spinach, beans, and cucumber and etc. can be planted in late April and early May. You can consult the [Time Chart](#) referenced in this write up. Cucumber seeds can go into soil one week apart several times before the temperature goes to 90 degrees or above. It is always a good idea not to put all seeds of a variety one time in the garden. Anticipate a loss of 25% of the seeds and therefore keep some seeds on hand to replace them later. (**Tip:** early starting of seeds inside house generally not required for our area)

Tools

Garden tools are a fun for adults and kids working in the garden. Recommended tools are shovel, hammer, wreck, hand shovel, weed tools, garden gloves, vegetable stakes, twines for vines, watering jugs.

Soil

Maryland area is clay and one has to supplement it with additives to loosen the soil, normalize acidity, and add some nutrients. We recommend equal parts of garden soil, top soil, composted manure, peat moss, and peat humus to be mixed to make a garden bed of 10"-12" depth. The required soil pH (a major of acidity) should be close to 7.3 for usual vegetables we grow in our garden. Our soil is usually acidic and if you did not measure the pH it is safe to add 1-2 handfuls of lime (available in any garden or hardware stores) per 16 square foot (4X4) surface area. For tomato, a manure and lime tea (manure and lime mixed in water) is recommended one every month to avoid fruit rot. (Tip: materials are cheaper in the hardware stores than the garden stores)

Fertilizers

We recommend 10-10-10 (N-P-K) fertilizer of any company commonly available in garden or hardware stores. We walk in to the Starbucks and ask for coffee grinds and add to vegetable and flower gardens. Also think about composting.

Watering

A conservative approach to watering is both beneficial and earth friendly. Remember roots need water NOT the leaves. Water thoroughly when couple of inches of top soil feels dry to your hand. The best part of the day to water is the early morning. We have found that an inexpensive garden sprinkler (only available in the Lowe's store) is available which is both fun (kids like it) and water saving.

Appropriately adjusted and left there for an hour or so, one saves time. Too much water and keeping leaves wet all the time is a waste of water and invitation to plant diseases. (Tip: Deep and infrequent - in water logged soil roots are deprived of oxygen.)

Useful references:

Maryland Agriculture Information by University of Maryland Extension

<http://www.marylandagriculture.info/index.cfm>

Soil

http://extension.umd.edu/sites/default/files/images/programs/hgic/Publications/HG42_Soil_Amendments_and_Fertilizers.pdf

Bitter Melons

<http://yourhomegardenblog.com/vegetable-gardening/how-to-grow-exotic-and-delicious-bitter-melons-on-your-backyard>

Timing Chart

http://www.hgic.umd.edu/media/documents/publications/planting_dates_pfv.pdf

Soil pH

Soil pH is a measure of the hydrogen ion concentration of soil. A pH value of 7.0 is neutral. Readings below 7.0 are acidic and those above 7.0 are alkaline. Soil nutrients are most available to plant roots and microbial activity is greatest when soil pH is in the 5.5 to 7.0 range. Plants may show symptoms of nutrient deficiency or toxicity at very high or low soil pH. For example, azaleas grown in high pH soil may have yellow leaves due to a deficiency of iron (iron chlorosis). Liming is best accomplished in the fall, because lime requires time to change pH.

Fertilizers

The main chemicals that must be supplied to plants are called primary nutrients. Those required in the greatest amounts are nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P), and potassium (K). Fertilizers are labeled with a three number analysis corresponding to N, P, and K. It tells what percentage of the net weight is actually composed of these three nutrients. A fertilizer containing all three nutrients is a balanced fertilizer. A 50-lb. bag of 10-6-4 fertilizer will contain 5 lb. of nitrogen (N), 3 lb. of phosphate (P₂O₅), and 2 lb. of potash (K₂O). (Phosphate and potash are the available forms of phosphorus and potassium respectively.) Some common N-P-K analyses of inorganic, granular fertilizers are 10-6-4, 5-10-5, and 10-10-10.

Mind your mulching

Another way to keep your garden moist (and reduce weed problems by up to 90 percent!) is to top off your beds with a fresh layer of organic mulch. Mulching with materials like dried grass clippings, straw, bark, wood chips, and even small rocks will decrease soil moisture evaporation and reduce your garden's water needs. Bonus: Mulching may also prevent certain kinds of soil diseases from coming in contact with your plants' lower leaves.

Organic Gardening

<http://www.organicgardening.com/learn-and-grow/water-well>

Raised Gardening

<http://www.popularmechanics.com/home/how-to-plans/lawn-garden/4308264#slide-1>

<http://cdn.blogs.sheknows.com/gardening.sheknows.com/2011/03/raised-garden-beds.jpg>

Container Gardening

<http://t3.gstatic.com/images?q=tbn:ANd9GcSCvSNtzOES1rxY7aYxQLfK6Mhw7ZNwf6DU45zm8fFjEkq88JVOzQ>