



# Key to a successful Vegetable Garden

Q&A with Peg Reynolds

Nothing is more mouth-watering than fruits and vegetables eaten fresh off the stem from your very own garden. Recipes taste better, marinades are more flavorful and herbs taste tangier when ingredients are garden ripe. Despite their abundance on grocery store shelves, however, there is nothing simple or easy about vegetable gardening—proper planting and care is essential to produce healthy and tasty produce. Below are answers to a few basic questions to help improve your chances for a productive bounty.

## When should I plant my vegetables?

The proper planting time for vegetables is essential for their survival and is determined by the average minimum temperature in your Hardiness Zone—for Manahawkin and environs, this is Zone 7.

There are two types of vegetable plants—‘cool season’ vegetables and ‘warm season’ vegetables. ‘Cool season’ vegetables can typically be planted between 2-4 weeks prior to the date of the average last spring frost. These include beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, lettuce, onions, peas, potatoes, radishes, kale and collard. ‘Warm season’ vegetables include beans, cucumbers, eggplant, peppers, squash and tomatoes and must be planted

after the last threat of frost—typically after May 15th in Zone 7.

Be advised, however, that there are always exceptions to the rules—for example, in the spring of 2020 when we experienced our final frost advisory in mid-May. It is always prudent to check local weather forecasting trends or seek the advice of local garden experts at Reynolds Landscaping before moving forward with your planting schedule.

## Do my vegetable plants need any special care?

Vegetables are the ‘prima-donnas’ of the garden when compared to flowering trees, shrubs and perennials. They are shallow rooted, fairly tender and do not compete well for nutrients and water when compared to other plants.

They need soil that is well-drained and high in organic matter—the ‘vegetable soil mix’ sold at Reynolds Landscaping will more than suffice. They benefit from continuous fertilization—preferably a slow-release fertilizer that will feed the plant over time. A top-dressing of mulch will not only deter weeds but also help maintain a consistent soil temperature and soil moisture.

Full sun to part shade is needed to successfully grow vegetable plants. Consider the following guidelines for sunlight requirements when locating your vegetables in the garden:

### ‘Warm Season’ vegetables

(tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, squash, beans):

a minimum of 6-8 hours

### ‘Rooty Vegetables’

(carrots, potatoes, turnip): 6 hours minimum

### ‘Leafy Greens’

(spinach, lettuce, endive): 4-5 hours minimum

## What are the watering requirements for my vegetable plants?

Remember, vegetable plants are 75% to 90% water—they need consistent, regular watering to survive. It is also best to water in the morning and to water at the plant base—evening watering and overhead watering allows water to collect on the leaves making them susceptible to mildew and other leaf pathogens. An automatic irrigation system or soaker hose system is recommended so that water is applied slowly and directly to the root system.

In general, water is needed most during the first few weeks of development, immediately after planting and during the development of edible plant parts. Watering needs are greater for container plantings which can dry out rapidly from exposure to the dry, hot sun. Water your container vegetables daily to prevent stress on the plants.

Finally, monitor the physical appearance of the plant leaves to determine their watering needs. If a plant begins to wilt and the green color of the leaves begin to fade, watering is most likely needed. On the other hand, yellow leaves are an indication that the plant is receiving too much water, so reduce water amounts.

*To learn more about the proper care of fruit, vegetables and herb plants or to purchase your starter plants from a vast and well-tested selection of garden varieties, visit Reynolds Garden Shop and Garden Center located at 201 East Bay Avenue in Manahawkin, NJ. Hours of operation are Monday through Saturday from 9:00am to 6:00pm and on Sunday from 10:00am until 5:00pm.*

