

Winter a great time to design your garden space

Want to put in a vegetable and/or a fruit garden this spring? Winter is a great time to design a space that will provide enough vegetables and/or fruit for each growing season.

Making a garden you'll love really starts with asking questions. Dig into what you want and need a garden to do with these questions.

Get growing

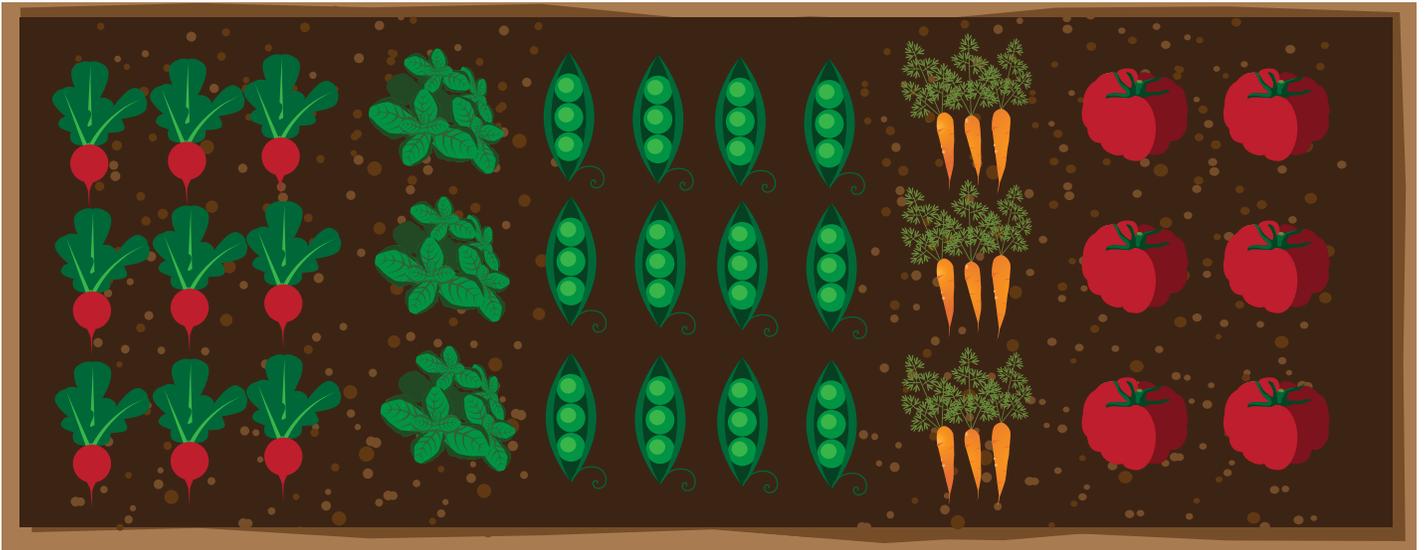
1 What do I want to grow? There are many fruits and vegetables that look great in a seed catalog, grocery store, or farmers market but might not be well-suited for your growing environment. Select fruits and vegetables that can handle the environment of your garden. Deciding what you want to grow will also influence garden size. There is a drastic difference in space if looking to only grow a few lettuce and spinach plants compared to a dozen squash plants.

2 How many people am I trying to feed? Is it one person, one family, or the entire neighborhood? Do you plan to only consume the vegetables, or will you also preserve fresh produce?

3 What do I like to eat? Select types of produce you or others enjoy eating. Growing plants that end up in the compost can be a major waste of time, money, and resources.

4 What resources are available for my garden? Some gardens can be simple and inexpensive, while others can be very complex and require lots of inputs. Larger gardens require more physical space, water, soil, plants or seeds, monetary expense, and time for management. A 10 x 10-foot garden requires much less time for weeding, watering, and harvesting than a 100 x 100-foot garden. Vegetables enjoy high-quality soil. Amendments will be needed if planning a garden in an area with poor soil. Is the location close to water, easy to get to, in a sunny spot (most vegetables need sun)? This article looks at the economics of a home garden <http://bit.ly/gardenagability>.

No matter the size, there is always work that needs done. Plants need watered, heavier material such as compost will need moved, produce will need harvested, covers might need placed over plants during cold temperatures, and many other tasks. Gardens with no easy access can become neglected and not cared for properly.



The sun is a gardener’s most valuable resource. Luckily, it is free, but getting enough can be a challenge for some gardeners who have large trees or shaded areas. Try to find an area that receives full sun throughout the growing season. Remember, a space might have sun during the end of June but might become shaded during the end of the growing season in September. Keep in mind some locations that receive full sun next to buildings might become too hot for some vegetable and fruit crops.

5 What is my water situation?

Wyoming is very dry, which can often be a limiting factor when it comes to gardening. Water can be expensive depending on the municipality and might only be available for use on lawns and gardens during certain days or times of the week. If using a well, test the water before applying to a garden. Some well water might contain a high amount of dissolved solids such as salt, which can have major effects on soil and plants. Close access is also important. Garden spaces that require water to be hauled or

pumped from a long distance can become a challenge. Automatic timers and drip irrigation systems can help manage water effectively for many home gardens.

6 What are the growing conditions for my garden space?

Wyoming has extreme climatic conditions for gardening, with many areas that experience high winds, low relative humidity, short growing seasons, low precipitation amounts, relatively cold daytime temperatures, and periodic frosts during the growing season. Wyoming’s basins and lower elevations provide the best areas for gardens. Topographic differences with regions can also mean some gardens might experience freezing temperatures, while others remain frost-free. Find microclimates that best suit your garden. Natural or man-made windbreaks are great for preventing water loss and damage to plants. The wind can be harsh for both young and mature plants. Try to find a south-facing space to receive the

greatest amount of sunlight and heat during the growing season.

Garden layout

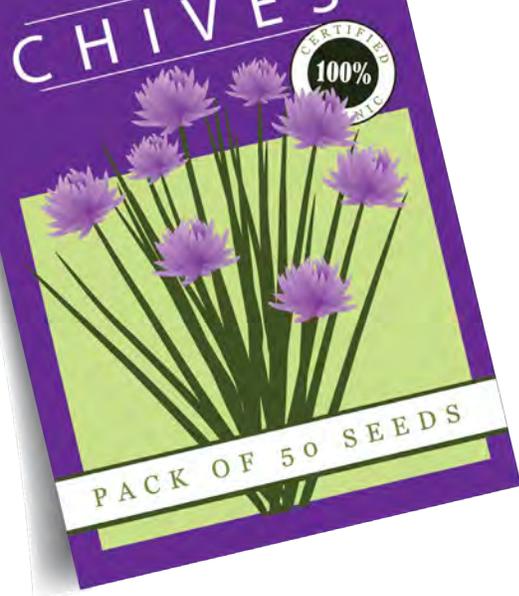
After selecting a location, start fitting crops into the physical garden space. There are many options available for the garden layout. Here are some options:

Raised or framed beds

Raised beds help warm the soil earlier in the spring, provide a space for a garden that has unsuitable native soils, and allow for greater intensity for management.

Raised or frame type beds use material that make a border for the garden space. The frame is raised above the soil. Raised beds contain the soils for the garden and allow space to walk between beds.

Beds can be filled with native soils or an outside soil source. The beds should not be made with wood, such as railroad ties or treated wood, that contain harmful chemicals. Various types of metal, plastic, or natural wood can be used for the frame that will not release chemicals into the soil. The size of raised beds can vary. Make raised beds small enough the middle of the bed can be reached for weeding and harvesting



produce. For ideas and information on raised beds for individuals who need a little extra help gardening, please refer to this Agrability article at <http://bit.ly/gardenagrability>.

Direct planting or seeding

Directly planting seeds or transplants is the oldest and perhaps most common method for gardening. Direct planting into the garden allows for plants to be seeded into rows, mounds, hills, or other patterns. The distance between rows, hills, and plants will depend on the specific crop. Most home gardens do not have the room or space for large equipment. Marking out the garden space before planting can help organize where to plant specific crops. Keep in mind some plants can be planted close together and in many ways to fit in a garden. Read the recommendations on seed packets for spacing and planting depth.

Final considerations

Look to plant taller crops on the north end of the garden and shorter crops on the south

end. This allows for the greatest amount of sunlight to reach all the crops. Remember, crops need to be rotated throughout the garden space over time. Rotating crops from different families in each physical space helps break disease cycles and solve soil nutrient issues. Try to avoid planting the same family in one spot for five to seven years. For areas with cold and short growing conditions, this can be a challenge since cool-season crops will perform the best.

Season extension and cold frame products are important pieces for making the most of a Wyoming garden. Consider any additional inputs or space requirements needed for your garden space if planning to incorporate some type of season extension.

For more information related to crop selection, planting tips, and gardening considerations, please go to barnyardsandbackyards.com then click on Vegetables under Treasure Trove of Information. If feeling overwhelmed or have questions, please contact your local University of Wyoming Extension office.

*The ground may be frozen and/or smothered by snow, but we bet **Brian Sebade** is thinking vegetables and gardens. Sebade is the University of Wyoming Extension educator based in Albany County and serving southeast Wyoming. He can be reached at (307) 721-2571 or bsebade@uwyo.edu.*

Don't have enough room for a traditional garden? Consider these.

Container Gardens

Containers can also be used for gardening. Containers provide options when access to a garden space is not possible. A sunny location on a porch, driveway, or patio provide great locations. Container plants can also be moved to protected indoor locations during cold or bad weather events. For more information on container gardening, please review the following article <http://bit.ly/wyocontainergarden>.

Go Vertical

Luckily there are many options that can be purchased or built for vertically growing vegetables. Grow walls, fencing, used gutters, and various other options exist for building or purchasing vertical structures. Vertical gardening does not work for all vegetables but can be an excellent addition to many gardens. Look to add vertical garden to the space where it will not shade other plants.

