

Community Horticulture Fact Sheet # 2 Deciding What to Plant



Deciding what crops to grow is fun, but it's also serious business. We usually can't grow everything we might like in a small, backyard garden or in a community garden plot. Your first consideration should be - what does your family like to eat? Then think about the value of the crop and its nutrition.

Value Vegetable value can be due to either a high price per pound or a high yield of produce. The vegetables highest in value for the space they take up are:

1. Tomatoes, staked to save space
2. Rhubarb
3. Green bunching onions
4. Leaf lettuce
5. Turnips, for greens and roots
6. Summer squash: zucchini, scallop and yellow types
7. Asparagus
8. Edible podded peas
9. Onion bulbs for storage
10. Beans, pole or runner types (green or wax pod)
11. Beets, for green tops and roots
12. Beans, bush (green or wax pod)
13. Carrots
14. Cucumbers, trellised to save space
15. Peppers, sweet or bell
16. Broccoli
17. Kohlrabi
18. Swiss chard
19. Mustard greens
20. Spinach

At the bottom of the list are potatoes, Brussels sprouts, celery, corn, winter

squash and melons. Other veggies are in between.

Nutrition People have lots of reasons for gardening. Whatever our primary motivation, nutrition should be at least a secondary one. Unfortunately, most gardeners seem to give little thought to nutrition. A few years ago, a Gallup poll done for the National Gardening Association showed that none of the 10 most popular vegetables grown by American gardeners are among the 10 most nutritious that they could grow.

Actually how you define "most nutritious" is up for debate. American Health magazine (May '87) came up with their rating (list is on the back page, left side) after looking at concentrations of protein, calcium, iron, vitamin A, vitamin C, potassium, phosphorous, thiamin, riboflavin and niacin.

The Center for Science in the Public Interest created a score for each vegetable by adding up the percent of the RDA (recommended daily allowance) for six nutrients -- vitamins A & C, foliate, iron, copper and calcium. Vegetables are an important source of fiber and they felt fiber should influence the ratings. There is no RDA for fiber, so they assigned it one. Their choices are in the column on the right of the list on the back page.

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| 1. Collard greens | Sweet potatoes |
| 2. Shelled beans
(like limas) | Carrots |
| 3. Peas | Spinach |
| 4. Spinach | Collards |
| 5. Sweet potatoes | Red bell pepper |
| 6. Turnip greens | Kale |
| 7. Winter squash | Broccoli |
| 8. Broccoli | Brussels sprouts |
| 9. Kale | Potatoes |
| 10. Brussels
sprouts | Winter squash |
| 11. Mustard greens | Swiss chard |
| 12. Swiss chard | Snow peas |
| 13. Tomatoes | Mustard greens |
| 14. Corn | Kohlrabi |
| 15. Beet greens | Cauliflower |
| 16. Potatoes | Asparagus |
| 17. Carrots &
Parsnips | Green bell
pepper |
| 18. Summer
squash | Peas |
| 19. Cauliflower | Romaine |
| 20. Green beans | Endive |

The lists are very different, but there are some similarities too. Both lists contain lots of leafy greens and those orange, vitamin A powerhouses -- sweet potatoes, carrots, and winter squash. Don't worry too much about exactly where a vegetable placed on the list, after all, these are all winners.

Are you growing crops that aren't on these lists? Tomatoes, peppers and green beans, the top three most popular garden vegetables, each only made one list. Cucumbers, onions and lettuce, the next three most popular crops, aren't here at all. Neither are radishes, beets and turnip roots, eggplant or celery.

I skipped okra, cantaloupe and avocados in reprinting these lists, since local gardeners are unlikely to grow these crops. I left in sweet potatoes as a challenge. It did so well that perhaps we should be trying harder to grow some of

the cultivars adapted to cool climates. I also skipped parsley, which appears in the teens on both lists. Most of us don't eat much parsley, though perhaps we should!

Community Horticulture Fact Sheet #25 "Vegetable Varieties for the Puget Sound Area" can help you pick the particular variety to grow. In some cases, the wrong variety can give you poor results, even if you do everything else right.

Advice for Beginners Don't try to grow more than about 8 vegetables in your first garden. With experience, a couple more can be added each year as gardening skill and confidence grows.

New gardeners should avoid the crops that are difficult to grow here. The vegetables in the easy list are mostly ones that are fairly quick to mature. These are good choices when gardening with children, who often don't have a lot of patience.

Easy	
beets	bush beans
collards	green onions
kale	leaf lettuce
mustard greens	radishes
peas	summer squash
Swiss chard	turnips
Hard	
cauliflower	celery
eggplant	lima beans
melons	okra
peppers	sweet potatoes