Backyard Gardening

Backyard gardening isn't just for farmers and people in rural areas anymore. People in the cities are growing their own gardens and producing their own food as well. The size and bounty of your garden is limited only by your space and your ambition.

Follow these tips to grow a successful garden in your backyard!

BEST PRACTICE AREA: COMMUNITY HEALTH

BEST PRACTICE AREA: SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

DID YOU KNOW?

The Central Minnesota Sustainability Project operates several community gardens within the St. Cloud area.

IN-GROUND VS. RAISED BEDS:

In-ground beds:

- Easiest and cheapest way to establish a garden—no lumber to buy or bed to build
- Requires less watering than raised beds during times of high temperatures
- Pathway weeds can creep into the garden bed
- Requires you to reach lower to tend to plants and weeds

Raised beds:

- Allows soil to warm up quickly in the spring for early planting
- Provides the best drainage
- Sides prevent weeds and other pests from creeping into the garden bed
- Easier to tend plants at a raised level
- More expensive to buy lumber & import soil

SETTING UP YOUR BACKYARD GARDEN:

Garden Size and Siting:

- Choose a garden size appropriate to suit your input and output desires. A garden too small could be disappointing. A garden too large could overwhelm and frustrate you with the time and energy commitment required.
- Think about the garden's orientation to sun and shade and the plants' needs for both.
- Trees have expansive root systems. Locate your garden at least 10' from the drip line of any tree to prevent root infiltration. Also think about the possibly of future trees.
- Locate your garden in an area of the yard that is relatively flat to provide even watering and lessen soil erosion during heavy rains.

Preparing the beds and the soils:

- Determine which type of garden bed you plan to have (see left). Plan out the location of the beds and the pathways around the beds. A 24" wide pathway between beds is ideal to allow wagons and wheelbarrows between the beds.
- Determine your soil components. Check for levels of ph (acidity), water level, organic matter, and soil composition.
- Add organic matter, peat, compost, and/or manure as necessary. The first year or two of gardening may be a little trial-and-error until you get a good handle on what components your plants need and what your soil is lacking.

MAINTAINING YOUR GARDEN—LESS IS MORE:

Maintaining your garden should be enjoyable, not a weekend burden. Basic chores should be kept to a minimum if the garden is properly maintained:

- Add nutrients as necessary. Nitrogen, Phosphate, and Potassium are essential nutrients to successful plant growth and should be applied when needed.
- Watering in the morning is best. Install a rain barrel to your downspout to provide free, natural rainwater to your garden.
- Weeding is necessary to prevent weeds from choking off plants from water and nutrients. Pull weeds early and often before they are too large to disrupt desired plants.
- Add mulch when plants are tall enough. Ideally a 4-6" layer of mulch will insulate and provide moisture. The mulch will occasionally need to be "topped off", and it gradually breaks down into the soil, providing nutrients.

BENEFITS OF A BACKYARD GARDEN:

- Lowers the cost of providing healthy, organic fruits and vegetables for your family.
- Reduces the environmental impact of warehousing and transporting food.
- Makes your meals more personable and interesting.
- Connects your family to the natural cycles of weather, growth and renewal.
- Provides a wholesome activity and lasting memories for your children.

HARVESTING YOUR CROP:

- Individual fruits and vegetable ripen and mature at different rates and times. Research your plants to know when to harvest for the best results.
- Leave the garden clean-up until the spring. The remaining stalks and roots will break down during the winter and provide additional nutrients to the soil. Some plants might even go to seed and sprout on their own in the spring.