



Where do I start?

If you've never grown food before, the task may seem overwhelming, but it really is a lot easier than you may think. Plants want to grow. Put a seed in the ground, and given roughly the right conditions - healthy soil, some water and usually a bit of warmth - it will flourish. The best place to start is by starting, get in there and get your hands dirty. While learning from books, courses and talking to other gardeners can provide extremely helpful guidance, there is nothing like learning by doing. There is no 'right way' to garden, so it's important to develop a style that suits you; your needs, lifestyle and physical environment. There are three important things to consider when planning a garden - the location, the plants and the soil.

Where should I put my garden?

Most vegetables prefer a spot with 'full sun' except in the height of summer. Whether you have a back or front yard, a terrace or balcony, certain parts will receive more sun than others, and this will change throughout the day and with the seasons.

Spend some time observing which part of your garden gets the most sun and which parts receive the hotter afternoon sun. The best spot is the sunniest for the longest, other than a summer garden which will do well to receive afternoon shade.

What should I grow and when?

The best things to plant are those which are suited to your climate and the things which you like to eat. Some plants grow for several months, while others take a full year or two

to reach maturity, and yet others grow permanently or die back in winter to re-sprout each spring.

Understanding the growing conditions (especially frost tolerance) and seasonality of plants is important for timing and location.

Three circular icons are arranged horizontally. The first is a green circle containing a black outline of a tree. The second is a blue circle containing a black outline of a globe showing the continents. The third is an orange circle containing a black outline of a snail.

Permaculture Principles that help you get started include 'observe and interact', 'apply self-regulation and accept feedback' and 'use small and slow solutions'.
Spend time getting to know your garden, then start small and don't be afraid to experiment - it's fun and a great way to learn!

Plants belong to families, and often share characteristic with their relatives. These similarities can be useful for remembering how plants grow and what they like, so try to get to know these.

Refer to a good seasonal planting guide, local gardeners and community groups for advice about what to plant when.

Your garden won't need a great deal of attention, but it needs a little bit of love on a regular basis, especially in hot spells when you will need to water every day.

How to get healthy soil?

Soil is the foundation of gardening. Healthy living soils cycle nutrients and hold moisture, making them available to plants. A rich dark coloured soil is high in organic matter (humus), meaning it has a greater capacity to provide plants with what they need.

The soil can be improved by adding compost and/or organic fertilisers each time you plant and by growing cover crops (these can even be 'weeds').

Never leave the soil bare; always have something growing or cover it with mulch. Unless the soil is compacted, try to disturb it a little as possible, only loosening and aerating, not turning. When exposed to light and heat, many of the microbes and other soil creatures, who cycle nutrients and create good structure, are killed. They are also killed by inorganic fertilisers and chemical application, so use organic methods and look for products with organic certification.

Where to now?

Gardening is both a creative and practical art, good for the mind, body and soul, and extremely rewarding. When you pick that first green leaf from your baby all grown up, you'll know what I mean. But it's hard to get things right the first time, so don't be discouraged! Sometimes it takes even an experienced gardener years to grow some plants well.

Gardening is all about experimenting, so think about possible reasons for the state of your garden and things you could change, and keep trying!



Suggestions for further reading and viewing

Linda Woodrow, **Permaculture Home Garden**, Viking, 1996

Lyn Bagnall, **Easy Organic Gardening (and Moon Planting)**, Scribe, 2012

Australian City Farm & Community Gardens Network

www.communitygarden.org.au
