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Plan before You Plant

Easter the traditional start of the gardening season is early this year and just around the corner. Before you plant this spring, it's important that you start with a plan. We are lucky in South Carolina where fresh herbs and vegetables can be grown and harvested year-round.

- Plan the garden on paper first. Graph paper where 1/4 inch represents a foot works well. A space, 12 by 16 feet, is enough to grow a good selection of greens, some herbs, a supply of tomatoes, peppers, beans, and cucumbers. Orient the rows east to west. Allow room to walk between rows to take care of the garden. Draw a map showing arrangement and spacing of crops. For a four-season garden, use a different sheet for each season
- In your plan, place tall and trellised crops on the north side of the garden so they will not shade the shorter vegetables.
- Group plants by length of growing period. Plant spring crops together so that later crops can be planted in these areas after the early crops mature.
- Vegetables can be categorized as low, medium, and heavy feeders (Table 1). Consider grouping similar types of vegetables together so you can fertilize sections of the garden based on plant needs.
- Consider length of harvest as well as time to maturity. Place perennial crops to the side of the garden where they will not be disturbed by annual tillage.
- Finally, practice crop rotation. Try not to plant the same vegetable or a related vegetable in the same location year after year. For example, in the spot that you had tomatoes (Nightshade family) last year, grow another family of vegetables, such as sweet corn (Grass family) or okra (Mallow family).

Additional planning hints should include:

- Who will be doing the work? Will the garden be a group project with family members or friends who will work willingly through the season to a fall harvest or will you be handling the hoe alone in between camping and swimming? Remember, a small weed-free garden will produce more than a large weedy mess.
- What do you and your family like to eat? Although the pictures in the garden catalog look delicious, there is no value in taking up gardening space with vegetables that no one eats. Make a list of your family's favorite vegetables, ranked in order of preference. This will be a useful guide in deciding how much of each vegetable to plant.
- Repeated or successive plantings of certain crops, such as beans, can be harvested over a longer period of time and increase your yield. As you plan, list recommended varieties and planting dates.

· Finally, how much space is available? How much area can be converted into usable garden space, and how much garden do you need?

To learn more specifics on gardening we have both free and for-sale publications at our office in the back of the Public Services Building on the corner of Third Loop and Irby St. You may also visit our Home & Garden Information Center through our web site at www.clemson.edu/florence. I may be contacted through our web site, amelton@clemson.edu or 661-4800.

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