

Date: February 15, 2006
Release: Home Gardening
Writer: Tony Melton, County Agent
Florence County

Time to Plant the Cool-Season Vegetable Crops

After taking 4 years to build, decorate, and landscape my own home, I now begin to develop my vegetable garden. Even though I have a show garden at the Pee Dee Research and Education Center, I want a vegetable garden right out my back door. When most people say they built a home, they mean they hired someone to build it. I really built, decorated, and landscaped my own home, mostly by myself. As I start to till my little 300 square foot vegetable garden, I can picture my dad with his straw hat pulled down over his eyes and setting on that old Farmal tractor. His garden may have only been about ten acres but when I was small it seemed to have been half of the world. We grew enough to feed all eleven of us, to give some to family and friends, and some to sell. Dad loved to garden and always had a gleam in his eyes this time of year. One of my fondest memories was to go with dad to McBee High School and buy vegetable transplants from Mr. Earle our Ag. Teacher. However, a lot of things have changed since dad's ten acre garden.

First of all, Dad had to plant on bottom land and count on rainfall, but I am putting trickle irrigation in my garden. With trickle you don't wet the leaves of the crop; therefore, you don't encourage disease, you can water anytime day or night, and you put exactly the amount of water the plants needs. Also, you can add fertilizer through the irrigation water, called fertigation. This allows you to give the perfect environment for plant growth and crop yield.

Next, Dad spread things over ten acres, but there will be no wasted space in my garden. Bare spots allow weeds to grow, erosion and leaching of nutrients. Every gardening guru seems to favor a certain gardening technique such as square-foot, relay, interplanting, succession or vertical gardening, I suggest using a combination of all techniques; however, whatever gardening technique you choose, the important concept to remember is conservation. Conserve light, space, water, time, nutrients and etc. In other words, do not allow anything to be wasted.

Finally, Dad had plenty of planters, hoers, picker and eaters. Were they better, stricter or meaner parents, I do not know. We were tired but happier, healthier, and less stressed in those days. In your planning, always consider who will be doing the work and eating the fruits.

To learn more about decorating, gardening and country living watch both of our Emmy Award winning T.V. programs, Making-It-Grow (MIG) and Down Home with Tony and Amanda. MIG can be seen at 7:00 p.m. on Tuesday nights on regular ETV. However, at present Down Home can be seen on digital cable and some satellite systems on the SC Channel (channel 802 on Time Warner Cable). Both can be seen at anytime on www.mig.org.

The Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service offers its programs to people of all ages, regardless of race, color, gender, religion, national origin, disability, political belief, sexual orientation, marital or family status and is an equal opportunity employer.