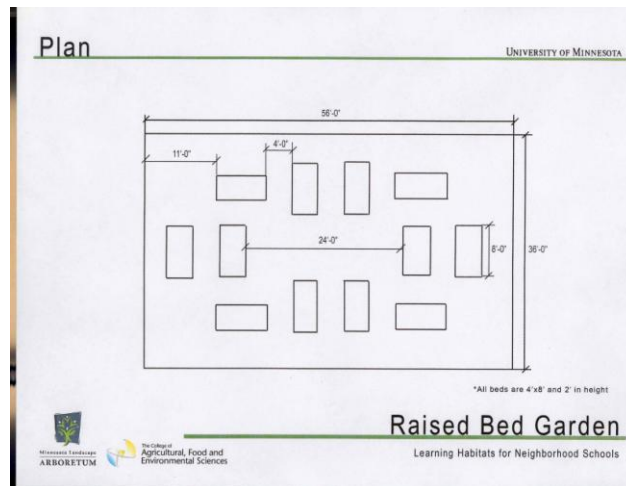


February 3, 2016



Planning this Year's Veggie Garden
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Hello – this is your garden calling!

Now is the time to dust off those seed catalogs and figure out what is going into the vegetable garden this spring.

According to the UCCE Master Gardener Foothill Vegetable Planting Guide (available for \$5.00 at the Master Gardener's office at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville), mid-February is the ideal time for starting tomatoes from seed indoors, in order to transplant in late April. The exact planting date depends on your elevation and last frost date. That's all coming up very soon, so it's time to get moving!

So, what's your plan? Really -- each vegetable garden should have a plan drawn on paper mapping out each vegetable-type. The plan should be kept from year-to-year to avoid planting the same crops in the same place as the previous year. Rotating vegetable crops in the garden or changing the sequence of plants can be effective against soilborne insects and pathogens. Moving crops to different sites isolates these pests from their previous year's food sources. You will also want to avoid planting members of the same plant family in the same location, such as planting melons where cucumbers, squash or gourds grew the year before, as they are all part of the cucurbits family.

You may also wish to consider Companion Planting -- that is determining what plants work well in the vegetable garden together. Many companion planting guides reference the Native American "Three Sister Planting." This popular grouping involves growing corn, beans and pumpkins in the same area. As the corn stalks grow, beans naturally find support by climbing up the stalk. Beans, as all legumes, fix nitrogen in the soil, which supports the large nutritional

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needs of corn. Squash grows rapidly and the large squash leaves serve as natural weed block. Good plant companions grow in support of each other.

Along the same companion lines, flowers such as Marigolds and Nasturtiums do well to attract beneficial insects to the vegetable garden that may prey on problem pests, such as aphids. Nasturtiums are also interesting in that the petals are edible, and add color not only to the garden, but also to the salad bowl -- try some!

The Sherwood Demonstration Garden (SDG) hosts a fantastic veggie garden, which was constructed using mostly raised beds. The public can look forward to seeing various tomatoes, peppers, cucurbits, beans, and running vines when the SDG reopens this spring and summer. Several beds were planted this past fall with cover crops as an organic alternative to using chemical fertilizers. So it will be interesting to see how nitrogen-hungry veggies do in those beds, compared to beds that weren't planted with the organic nitrogen-fixing cover crops. Come check out the veggie garden at the SDG!

So, now you know how to answer that vegetable garden call: Consult our planting guide for optimum planting times, draw up a basic plan to help with what goes where, consider companion planting, and finally, stop by the SDG for ideas and inspiration!

Find out more about vegetable growing in the foothills at Master Gardener Zack Dowell's popular "Spring and Summer Vegetables" class this Saturday morning, February 6th from 9:00 a.m. to noon. Garden plant selection, planting times, site selection, soil preparation, proper seed planting techniques, and pest management will be covered in this free class at the Government Center Hearing Room, Building C, 2850 Fairlane Court in Placerville.

Join UCCE Master Gardener Eve Keener at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden this Saturday afternoon for the free class "Pruning for Next Year's Fabulous Rose Display." Timing of rose pruning in El Dorado County is critical, and should not be done before the middle of February at the earliest. Whether you are a novice or need some review, this class will demonstrate the basic why, when and how of rose pruning. Class is from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. on February 6th (rain date February 13th); at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, Folsom Lake College El Dorado Center, 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville.

UCCE Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County website at <http://ucanr.edu/edmg>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.