

From the Ground Up! National Nutrition Month

National Nutrition Month® is a nutrition education and information campaign created annually in March by the American Dietetic Association. This year's theme is "From the Ground Up".



What could be more delicious and nutritious than fresh fruits and vegetables straight from the garden? Now that the March sunshine is peeking through the clouds, our Montana minds turn to gardens. Is the toil and trouble of your own garden really worth it? Anyone who has tasted a vine ripened tomato or a sun-warmed carrot freshly washed from their own garden, will give you a resounding, "yes!" Let me give you a few basic tips from [MSU extension](#) to get you started and make it easier.

Having a successful vegetable garden depends on how you garden and planting enough of the right vegetables at the right time to supply your needs. This varies with air and soil temperature and the needs of individual crops. Hardy crops tolerate frost in early spring but tender crops need more heat to mature properly, so plant them when the soil has warmed to 60° F. Check your local [frost to freeze dates!](#)

How you organize garden crops is also important. Orient rows "north to south" to take advantage of the best sunlight distribution. Plant small to tall in order to reduce shading. Place vegetables that need heavy fall watering away from those like onions, potatoes and other root crops, which need to be dry to be stored properly. Proper spacing between plants is also important.

Many tender vegetables can't mature during our [short Montana seasons](#). Start plants indoors or buy transplants from a garden center. Purchase a good soil-less grow mix to raise your transplants or make one yourself by mixing equal parts ground sphagnum moss and horticultural vermiculite or perlite. Harden transplants (acclimate to outside conditions) before planting in the garden. Slowly reduce temperature and watering while increasing light levels. Place plants outside in favorable weather for 2-3 weeks before transplanting. Starting your transplant seedlings early is crucial.

Eliminate many pest problems by using artificial soil mixes or sterilized garden soil for seeding. Space plants properly so circulating air dries the foliage. Never water at night. Rotate vegetable crops annually and clean up debris at the end of each season.

Enjoying the bounty of your harvest with family and friends is the "coup de gras". Not only does using fresh produce ensure optimum nutrition, but you'll find the entire family enjoying sumptuous garden recipes from your favorite cook book. Perhaps you're feeling adventurous and would like to try something new using this link: [Cooking from Your Garden](#) (One of my favorites by Margaret Leibenstein).