

## Four Weeks to a New Garden

Vegetable gardening is all the rage – but not in a trendy sense. It has become a must-have for many health conscious people. Today's vegetables are often harvested before they are ripened and shipped across the country, even the world, ripening along the way. In fact many fruits and vegetables come from seed that have been genetically modified. The seeds have been altered to produce fruit or vegetables that will withstand the early harvesting and transportation.

The transportation brings in the issue of the amount of gas and pollution required to get the produce to your kitchen. Think about it, if you live in Arizona and are eating a Texas or Florida grapefruit, how far did it travel to get to you? Most produce today travels farther than most of the U.S. population does in one year!

Today people are growing their own so they know how the food has been grown. Starting a garden might seem like a daunting task, but tackling the work over several weekends makes the work load lighter.

September marks the beginning of the fall/winter planting season here in Phoenix. Not sure what to plant? Download a free Phoenix planting calendar at the Phoenix Permaculture Guilds website  
[http://www.phoenixpermaculture.org/notes/Gardening\\_and\\_Garden\\_Supplies](http://www.phoenixpermaculture.org/notes/Gardening_and_Garden_Supplies)

Here's a week-by-week plan that even novice gardeners can follow to get their gardens ready to plant:

**Week one: Determine what kind of garden you want.** Vegetables, flowers, or both? Raised beds, pots, or in-ground? There are many possibilities. Think about the location, making sure that the chosen spot has a convenient source of water and that your plants will get the light they need. For hard ground, raised beds may be an easier option. If you have thoughts of moving, pots can travel with you. Vegetables need lots of sunlight, at least six hours a day this time of year. A flower garden may need full or partial sun, or shade. If part of your yard is crushed granite or dirt, you may want to plant a wildflower garden there this year to add color. Wildflowers do well in full sun.

There are many vegetables that do well in our fall/winter/spring planting season. Beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, cucumbers, all lettuces, peas, radishes and spinach can all be started by seed. Flowers can be started by seed or from transplants available at nurseries. Some of my favorites are carnation, hollyhock, nasturtium, pansy, petunia, snapdragon, sweet pea, verbena and viola. Think about the full size of the plants so you don't overcrowd when planting.

Mark the borders of your garden using natural items like river rock or bricks and take a break until next weekend rolls around.

**Week two: Prepare the soil.** Remove all weeds and grass by old-fashioned weeding, a herbicide, or solarization before preparing your soil for planting. (Solarization involves covering the area with clear plastic sheeting for a few weeks while the vegetation dies.)

**Week three: Mulch and compost.** If planting directly into the ground, spread a six inch layer of compost, mulch, sand and topsoil on the ground. Dig down at least six inches (the depth of most shovels and shovels) and mix in well. (Beds should have soil mixture at least six inches deep.) Then wet the area completely making sure the water soaks down at least 12 inches. This guarantees good drainage and deep root watering.

**Week four: Plant!** Purchase your seeds or transplants at the nursery. When buying seeds, make sure they suit your garden location and that they are not passed their expiration date. When buying transplants, make sure the leaves look healthy and the root ball is loose.

Allow space for the mature plant size. Many plants, especially vegetables, need room for their 'fruit.' When planting from seed, read the seed packet for recommended spacing. To plant wildflowers from seed, mix with sand for easier scattering and then lightly rake soil over the mixture to protect them from becoming bird food.

Water well after planting, then relax.

**Now it's just a matter of time.** Protect your garden as it becomes established. Keep birds, cats and other critters away from your garden by tying ribbons to sticks and placing them around the garden. For cats, consider laying down chicken wire over the top of the soil after planting. The seeds will grow up in between the holes in the wire.

Water your new garden daily at first, keeping the soil moist until seedlings are a few inches tall. Once they are, test the soil to see how much moisture it retains and water based on need. A soil probe, pushed one foot into the soil will help with this.

Enjoy your harvest! The flowers will look brighter and the food taste fresher as a result of your tender loving care.

*Doreen Pollack is the Garden Goddess and owner of Down 2 Earth Gardens. Join her for free gardening tips at monthly What to Do in Your Garden this Month workshops. To find a workshop near you, visit [www.down2earthgardens.com](http://www.down2earthgardens.com) or call 623.217.6038.*