

Garden Thymes

North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Ashe County Center

Spring 2017



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SELECTING A VEGETABLE GARDEN SITE

Here are a few considerations if you are a new gardener wanting to start a garden or an experienced gardener in need of a refresher on the basics for siting a garden. A good site is vital for healthy plants and good production.

- ✓ **Size** - If you are a beginning gardener with an average sized family, a 25 feet square area should be adequate. Be careful not to start with too large a space; it is easy to “bite off more than you can chew.”
- ✓ **Sunlight** - The garden should receive at least six hours of direct sunlight each day. Eight to ten hours each day is ideal. Some leafy vegetables, such as broccoli, collards, spinach and lettuce tolerate shadier conditions. If your garden does not receive at least six hours of sunlight daily, summer vegetables will not be productive.
- ✓ **Proximity to the house** - The closer and easier it is to reach the garden, the more you will probably use it and keep up with jobs, such as weeding, watering, insect and disease control and succession plantings.
- ✓ **Soil** - Garden soil should be fertile and easy to till (*loose, well drained loam*). Avoid any soil that remains soggy after a rain. Improve soil by adding organic matter or growing cover crops.
- ✓ **Water** - Including rain and irrigation, the garden needs at least one inch of water per week. Locate the garden near a spigot, rain barrel, or other water source.
- ✓ **Air drainage** - Locate vegetable gardens on high ground to allow cold air to drain off. Vegetables (*including small tree fruit*) on high ground are more likely to escape light early/late season freezes. Frost pockets can develop at the foot of a slope bordered by a solid fence where cold air cannot drain away.

With proper planning the garden can be both functional and attractive. Consider incorporating edible plants into the home landscape and ornamental plants such as flowering annuals into the vegetable garden. These ideas, coupled with our favorable climate, can offer gardening opportunities nearly all year long.



Contact Us

North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Ashe County Center
134 Government Circle, Suite 202
Jefferson, NC 28640

Phone: (336) 846-5850

Fax: (336) 846-5882

<http://ashe.ces.ncsu.edu/>

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EASY SEED GERMINATION TEST

If you have seeds on hand that are more than a couple of years old (*and have enough to spare*) and want to know how viable they are, then a seed germination test may be for you. The seed germination test may help you know if you need to purchase additional seeds.

To test for germination, count out at least ten seeds and place them on a damp paper towel. Roll up the towel and place it in a plastic bag in a warm location. Check the paper towel daily for moisture and germination. Germination could take three days to three weeks depending on the type of seed.

When you think the majority has germinated, count them and calculate the percentage that grew. If more than half sprout you may need to sow more to compensate. If less than half germinate, you may want to purchase a fresh supply of seeds. If you have extra seed, bring them to the High Country Seed Swap on March 4, 2017 at Ashe Family Central from 8:30 a.m.-12:00 noon.

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ASHE COUNTY VEGETABLE PLANTING DATES

Depending on your ability to work the soil in your garden, the window of the spring garden is open!

Below are some dates for specific crops

- ✓ Asparagus - March-May
- ✓ Onion sets - March 15-May 1
- ✓ Peas, *garden* - March 15-May 1
- ✓ Cabbage, *plants* - April 1-May 15
- ✓ Carrots - March 15-May 1
- ✓ Kale - March 15-May 15
- ✓ Radishes - March 15-May 15
- ✓ Rutabagas - March 15-May 15
- ✓ Spinach - March 15-May 15
- ✓ Turnip - March 15-May 15
- ✓ Lettuce, *leaf* - March 15-May 15
- ✓ Lettuce, *head* - April 1-May 15
- ✓ Mustard - March 30-May 15
- ✓ Potatoes, *white* - April 1-May 1
- ✓ Beets - April 1-May 15
- ✓ Broccoli, *plants* - April 1-May 15
- ✓ Swiss Chard - April 15-May 30

Warm season crops like beans, corn, cucumbers, peppers, tomatoes and squash can safely be planted around May 15-June 1 after soil temperature has reached 60° F.

PLANT OF INTEREST *HELLEBORES, LENTEN ROSE*

A welcome sign in late winter and early spring, the blooms of hellebores are a delightful discovery when you walk around inspecting the garden, looking for anything that might be blooming or emerging from winter dormancy. These early bloomers sometimes last from February through May since the weather is cooler during this time period. There are around 15 species of hellebores (*Helleborus spp.*).

Hellebores grow best in part shade and prefer moist but well drained soil. The foliage is evergreen, sometimes lasting throughout the winter in the garden. The plants grow around twelve inches in height and are in clumps that spread slowly, growing to about two feet in width. The new foliage and blooms appear sometime in early February (depending on species) and provide color throughout the season. The flowers are purple, pink, white and newer cultivars include a combination of these colors. There are also double flowering cultivars. Breeders are working on cultivars that have blooms that are a little more upright.



There are very few pest problems with hellebores. This is a plant on the list of perennials that deer won't bother.

Don't miss out on these spectacular flowers—get on your hands and knees and really take a close look at the beauty of the blooms.

Sincerely,



Travis Birdsell
Extension Agent, Agriculture