



**BETTER LIVING  
FOR TEXANS**  
TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION

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# BLT News

## FEATURED THIS MONTH:

*April is National Garden Month  
Tips for Planning Your Texas  
Garden*

*Where Does Your Food Come From  
Why Eat Vegetables  
Vary Your Vegetables  
Corn Types and Uses*

*Recipes of the Month:*

*Blueberry and Broccoli Salad  
Sunshine Corn and Bell Pepper  
Salad*

*A Note from Carolyn*

## Upcoming Programs

Hamilton Early Childhood Center  
April 2, 2024 3:00 pm

Gustine Senior Center, April 3, 2024

DeLeon Senior Center, April 5, 2024

*Total Solar Eclipse, April 8, 2024*

Comanche Housing Authority, 3rd in Series  
April 11, 2024, 10:00 am

Gustine Senior Center, April 17, 2024

Comanche Housing Authority, Final in Series  
April 25, 2024, 10:00 am

\*All programs are subject to change

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# *April is National Garden Month*

A good plan is the first step in establishing a flourishing home vegetable garden. Planning includes selecting the garden location; deciding on the size of the garden; determining the types and varieties of vegetables to plant; and planning where, when, and how much of each vegetable to plant in the garden.

## **Site Selection**

Choose a place where the soil is loose, rich, level, and well-drained. Do not choose low areas where water stands, or the soil stays wet. Vegetables will not grow in poorly drained areas. Do not plant where weeds do not grow; vegetables will not grow well there either. Vegetables need sunlight to grow well. Do not plant where buildings, trees or shrubs will shade the garden. Most vegetables need at least 6 hours of sunlight daily. Do not plant vegetables under the branches of large trees or near shrubs because they rob vegetables of food and water. Plant the garden near a water supply if possible. In many areas a garden can grow without watering, but it is more likely to be successful if it is irrigated. Water is needed especially during long dry periods or when planting seeds. Few people have the perfect garden location, so look for the best spot possible.

## **Garden Size**

Making the garden too large is one of the most common mistakes of enthusiastic, first-time gardeners. A garden that is too large will be too much work. When determining the size of your garden, consider these factors:

- Available room. For apartment dwellers, the garden may be a planter box. In a suburban or rural area, however, there may be plenty of ground space for a garden.
- Available time. If the only time you have for gardening is after work or school, or on weekends, there may not be enough time to care for a large garden.
- Family size. If gardening is a family activity, a large space can be cared for. A larger family also can use more vegetables.
- Reason for gardening. If the garden is purely a recreational activity, a container or flower bed garden may be big enough. If you want to grow vegetables for canning or freezing, a bigger area is needed.
- Types of vegetables to be grown. Some vegetables take up a lot of room. Most need at least 3 feet of space between rows. If you want to plant ten rows of vegetables, the garden must be 30 feet wide.

## **Deciding what to grow**

What to grow in the garden is as big a decision as where to locate it. Consider the following points in selecting vegetables:

**Space available.** Do not plant watermelons in a small garden. They take up too much room. Other vine crops such as cucumbers and cantaloupes can be grown in small gardens by trellising them on a fence or some other structure.

**Expected production from the crop.** The smaller the garden, the more important it is to get high production from each row. Small, fast-maturing crops such as radishes, turnips and beets yield quickly and do not require much space. Tomatoes, bush beans, squash, and peppers require more space but produce over a long season.

**Cost of vegetables if purchased.** Plant vegetables that are expensive to buy at the grocery store. Broccoli is usually one of the more expensive vegetables that can be grown in most home gardens.

**Food value of vegetables.** All vegetables are good, but some are more nutritious than others. Grow different kinds of vegetables to put more variety in your diet.

**Personal preference.** This is especially important if the garden is purely for recreation or personal enjoyment. Grow vegetables your family likes to eat.



# ***National Garden Month (cont'd)***

## **Location of vegetables in the garden**

Arrange vegetables in a way that makes the most efficient use of space and light. Group tall vegetables such as okra, corn and tomatoes together on the north side of the garden where they won't shade shorter vegetables such as bush beans. Also, group vegetables according to maturity. This makes it easier to replant after removing an early crop such as lettuce or beets.

Plant small, fast-maturing vegetables between larger ones. Plant vine crops near a fence or trellis if possible. Make a drawing on paper to show the location and spacing of vegetables in the garden.

## **Timing of planting**

Vegetables are divided into two general groups—warm season and cool season. Cool-season crops can stand lower temperatures; plant them before the soil warms in the spring. They also can be planted in late summer to harvest after the first frost in the fall. Warm-season crops cannot tolerate frost and will not grow when the soil temperature is cool. Plant them after the last frost in the spring and early enough to mature before frost in the fall.

## **How much to plant**

Some vegetables produce more than others so fewer plants will be needed. The amount to plant depends on family size, expected production, and whether or not you plan to do any freezing or canning. Do not plant too much. Over-planting is wasteful and takes too much work.







# ***Tips for Planning Your Texas Garden***

## ***Location, location, location***

Vegetable crops must have a least 8 hours of direct sun per day and should be planted in areas where the soil drains well. Fall and Spring plantings may be done in the same area as long as drainage and sunlight remain consistent with these factors.

## ***Prep your soil***

Pull out all plant material from your garden area. For new garden areas, be sure to remove all grass. Tilling alone is not sufficient to eliminate grass that may continue to grow and interfere with your garden. The same holds true for raised bed gardening. Be sure to remove all turf before building your frame and filling with soil.

## ***Time to dig***

After removing all grass, shovel the garden area to a depth of 10-12 inches. You may use a rototiller to break up and mix the shoveled areas but rototilling alone will not provide adequate depth.

## ***Improve your soil***

Spread 2 to 3 inches of organic matter and till it into the soil to improve soil quality. Fertilize your soil with either 1-pound ammonium sulfate (21-0-0) per 100 square feet or 2-3 pounds of slow-release fertilizer (19-5-9, 21-7-14, or 25-5-10) per 100 square feet. Fully composted horse or cattle manure may be substituted for commercial fertilizers at a rate of 60-80 pounds per 100 square feet.

## ***Water***

Water the entire garden area with a sprinkler for at least 2 hours. Allow the area to dry for several days and it will be ready to plant.







## ***Where Does Your Food Come From?***

There is a lot more that goes into food than just eating it. Many of us get food from the grocery store. But how did it get there? This month, spend some time learning about where your food comes from!

### **Visit farmers' markets or community gardens.**

These are great places to learn about your food. Talk to vendors at the farmer's market about where their products are from and how they are grown. Explore a community garden and talk to the gardener about what fruits and vegetables they grow.

**Start your own garden.** A wonderful way to learn about food production is by growing food yourself! Some grocery stores or gardening stores have growing kits that make growing a plant easy. Children can help with this too. Include them in the process of planting seeds, weeding, and watering. Learn about your plant: how much to water it, how much sunlight it should have, and how to know when it is ready to be harvested.

**Ask loved ones for their favorite traditional recipes.** Recipes that are passed down can be special for many different reasons. Ask where the recipe comes from and why it is a favorite dish. Celebrate the history of what makes these family recipes special and look for fun ways to adapt and enjoy them as part of a healthy eating pattern.

## ***Why Eat Vegetables?***

Eating vegetables every day is a great way to feel better and live longer. Vegetables are one of the five main food groups. It is difficult to find another food group that is as perfectly matched to our everyday health as vegetables. Vegetables are **low in calories** and high in fiber. This means that you can eat a large portion of them and feel full (thanks to that fiber.)

As a group, vegetables are **excellent sources of many essential vitamins and minerals**. The body cannot make vitamins, so we must get them from the foods we eat. Eating vegetables every day provides your body with a supply of important vitamins.

In addition to vitamins and minerals, vegetables **have a lot of phytonutrients**. In the science of food, phytonutrients are linked to prevention of certain diseases and decreasing risks of certain cancers.

Vegetables also provide **amazing digestive benefits** that come from their high-fiber content. Getting enough dietary fiber is critical for good health; including fiber in all meals and snacks ensures that food moves through our digestive system in a healthy way. The great news is that vegetables are some of the richest sources of fiber that exist.



# Eat Your Veggies



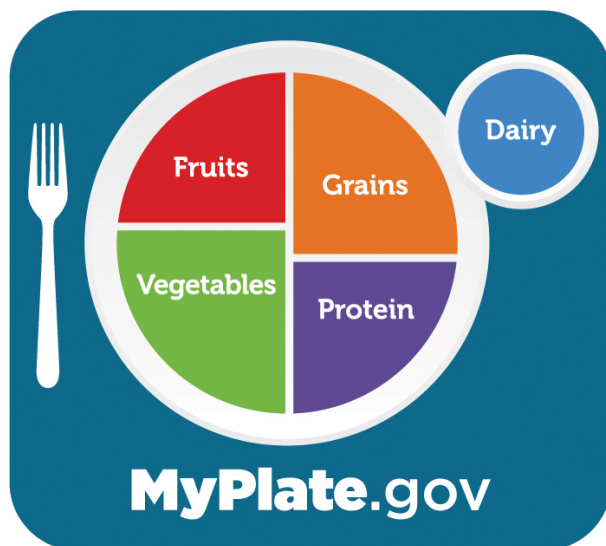
## Vary your Veggies!

Any vegetable or 100% vegetable juice counts as a member of the vegetable group. Vegetables can be raw or cooked: fresh, frozen, canned, or dried; and may be whole, cut-up, or mashed.

The vegetable food group is divided into five groups. Each group of vegetables provides the body with different vitamins, minerals, and phytonutrients. Eating a variety of vegetables from these five groups helps to make sure that your body gets the nutrients it needs.

## Make half your plate vegetables and fruits.

- Include a green salad with dinner every night.
- Add vegetables to scrambled eggs for breakfast.
- Try a main dish salad for lunch or dinner.
- Blend a handful of spinach into a smoothie.
- Shred carrots or zucchini into meatloaf, casseroles and muffins.
- Add chopped vegetables to pasta sauce.
- Grill vegetables and meats for a barbecue meal.





# ***Corn Types & Uses***

From head to toe, corn plays a big role in our everyday lives. Whether it's in your gas tank or on your dinner plate, corn is used for more than 4,200 different purposes!

## **Field Corn**

While driving down the highway and passing thousands of acres of corn, chances are you're seeing field corn! Field, or dent, corn is the most widely grown corn in the U.S. and makes up 99% of corn production. Field corn is harvested after the ear reaches physical maturity. Products such as livestock feed, ethanol, plastics, cornstarch, and many more are made with field corn.

Did you know more than 96% of field corn grown in Texas is used to feed livestock? More than a 1/3 of all corn grown in the U.S. is used to feed farm animals. Corn-fed animals gain weight quickly from corn's high-starch, high-energy content. Corn also improves the yield from dairy cows and reduces the amount of land needed to support their feed requirements.

## **Sweet Corn**

Sweet corn is the full-kernelled product that we all love to eat and see on the shelves of our grocery stores. This corn is harvested before it reaches physical maturity to retain the sweet flavor and juice. Out of all corn produced in the U.S., only 1% is made for human consumption.

## **White and Specialty Corn**

Specialty and white corn are typically grown for specific purposes. White corn contains higher levels of starch, which make it perfect to be used in corn chips, tortillas, and other popular food products. Other types of specialty corn include high-starch corn, high-oil corn, waxy corn, and high-lysine corn – all of which are designed for certain uses.

## **Corn fuels machines**

Domestic ethanol producers are turning corn into environmentally friendly, renewable fuel that people use in cars and other engines. Ethanol is a low carbon-based fuel that is blended with gasoline for use in many different vehicles. This clean-burning, high-octane fuel contributes to the country's energy independence and helps you get from point A to B!

## **More than just fuel**

Did you know corn used for ethanol is also used for livestock? That's right, ethanol production does more than produce a clean-burning fuel – it also produces a co-product called distillers grains, which is commonly fed to animals. Wet or dried distillers grains are packed with nutrients and can then be fed to livestock. It's important to remember that nearly all of the corn used to create ethanol in Texas is actually railed in from other states. Texas livestock producers benefit from these local ethanol plants by having distillers grains in close proximity.



# ***Corn (cont'd)***

## **Shuck Corn Like a Boss for Great Corn on the Cob**

This method will ensure that you will have no more silk strings on your kitchen floor! Enjoy!

1. With a sharp knife, remove the fat end of the corn cob, cut through husk and corn.
  2. Place cut corn in the microwave for 2-4 minutes.
- OR
3. Grill for 20 to 22 minutes until the husk is blackening on the outside.
  4. Remove corn with potholders and squeeze the small end. Shake out the corn.
  5. Voila! A Perfect clean ear of corn, zero silk attached!





# RECIPES

## of the month

### BLUEBERRY AND BROCCOLI SALAD

#### Instructions

1. Clean and prep your area.
2. Wash broccoli and blueberries under cool running water.
3. Chop broccoli and walnuts into small pieces.
4. Dice mozzarella cheese into small pieces.
5. Place chopped broccoli, walnuts, mozzarella cheese and blueberries in a large bowl.
6. In a small bowl mix together, sweetener and vinegar.
7. Toss the dressing into the broccoli salad mixture until well combined.
8. Serve and enjoy!



#### Ingredients:

- 3 cups fresh broccoli chopped
- 3/4 cup blueberries
- 1/2 cup low sodium mozzarella cheese diced
- 1/4 cup walnuts chopped
- 1/4 sucralose sweetener
- 1 Tbsp apple cider vinegar
- 3/4 cup non-fat plain greek yogurt

## SUNSHINE CORN AND BELL PEPPER SALAD



#### Instructions

1. Wash hands and clean preparation area.
2. Combine all dressing ingredients into a bowl and mix. Set aside.
3. In a large bowl combine all other salad ingredients.
4. Pour mixed dressing over other salad ingredients and mix well.
5. Serve immediately.

#### Ingredients:

#### Dressing

- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 1/4 cup diced red onion
- 1/4 cup white wine vinegar
- 1/4 cup cilantro chopped
- 1/4 tsp black pepper
- 1/4 tsp smoked paprika

#### Salad

- Corn off the cob or frozen (defrosted)
- 1 cup cherry tomatoes sliced
- 1 green bell pepper diced
- Zest of 1 lemon (about 3 Tbs)
- Juice of 1 lemon (about 3 Tbsp)
- 1/2 Avocado diced
- 1/3 cup green onion diced

# A NOTE FROM CAROLYN



## Fun Facts About April

It is thought the word "April" comes from the verb "Aspire", which makes sense since April is the season of trees and flowers beginning to bloom. The April birthstone is a diamond and the birth flower is Daisy or Sweet Pea.



April 1st is "April Fools Day", an annual custom consisting of practical jokes and hoaxes.  
April 1st is also "Sourdough Bread Day."  
April 2nd is "World Autism Awareness Day" and "Peanut Butter and Jelly Day"  
April 4th is "National Burrito Day" (yum!)  
April 9th is "National Unicorn Day"  
April 14th is "National Pecan Day"  
April 16th is Eggs Benedict Day  
April 18th is "National Exercise Day"  
April 22nd is "Earth Day"  
April 28th is "Stop Food Waste Day"  
April 30th is "National Oatmeal Cookie Day" and "National Raisin Day" - no wonder they go so well together.



*Carolyn Balzen*



"ONE DAY YOUR LIFE WILL FLASH BEFORE YOUR EYES. MAKE SURE IT'S WORTH WATCHING"  
GERALD WAY