



WARM WEATHER VEGETABLE GARDENING

STARNOTE 205
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Growing warm weather favorites

Vegetables have been grown successfully in hot, dry climates for many years. In Southern Nevada and Southern Utah, many tasty crops can be produced with a little preparation and planning. Soil preparation is very important in producing bountiful crops. Consistent fertilizing and watering practices are also needed. Here are a few handy tips for the home gardener:

- Don't try to garden in caliche! If you have an impermeable layer near the surface, build raised beds and fill them with a mixture of native soil and bagged organic material like *Paydirt™ Planting Mix*.
- When locating your vegetable bed, choose a spot with good air circulation. Avoid excessively windy areas or reflective heat sources like south or west facing walls.
- Use the right fertilizers for what you're trying to grow. Leaf crops need lots of nitrogen; fruit crops like peppers and tomatoes need less nitrogen and more phosphorus and potassium. Dr. Q's Vegetable and Tomato Food is excellent, as well as our Earthworm Castings. A Star Nursery sales associate can help you pick the right fertilizer.
- When amending vegetable beds, a mix of no more than one half organic material to one half native soil will suffice. To keep soil fresh and viable, add some new organic material each time you replant your beds. Add *Dr. Q's® Gold Dust Starter Fertilizer*, according to package directions, a day or so before planting.
- Surface mulches help prevent weeds, conserve water and cool plant roots. Shredded Cedar Bark repels insects! Use them generously.
- Most pests can be controlled by hand and sprays of water from the hose. The biggest pests in warm weather vegetable gardens besides aphids are caterpillars, cabbage loopers and horn worms. These can be safely controlled with *Bio-Worm Killer®* or an equivalent bacillus thuringensis (BT) product. Be conservative in applying chemicals. Use the right ones, and ALWAYS FOLLOW LABEL DIRECTIONS.
- First frost is usually around mid November in Southern Nevada and Southern Utah; last frost is usually early to mid March. Due to the erratic nature of desert weather, these dates can vary considerably. Be flexible and be prepared to protect your young vegetable plants if necessary. If you want to start your own seedlings instead of purchasing transplants, add a 6 to 10 week lead-time depending on variety. For example, if you want tomatoes, you should start them indoors in mid January to have them ready for a late March planting.

For more detailed information, get a copy of Ortho's® *All About Vegetables* from your favorite Star Nursery location. For cool season vegetables get a copy of StarNote 200, *Cool Weather Vegetable Gardening*. If you're just getting started, the best advice is to start small and build on your successes.

Following is a list of popular warm-season vegetables often grown in our climate. These varieties are frost-tender and need the spring and summer warmth to produce. These are available at Star Nursery stores as early as March. Cool season vegetables, like broccoli and cabbage, can be started as seeds in the garden in August and September. Transplants can be found at Star Nursery locations in October.

PERENNIAL FAVORITES

Artichokes (March to May). Grown from transplants; tough, attractive and tasty. Harvest buds when tight and plump. Flowers are spectacular in dried arrangements. Use hose to wash off aphids.

Asparagus (November to January-roots; March to April-seeds). Seed make strong plants in one season. Plants take 2-3 years to produce in quantity. Prefers rich soil and regular water. Cut stems to ground when plants turn brown in winter.

FAVORITE ANNUAL VEGETABLES

Beans (March to July). Grown from seed or transplants. Salt-sensitive; flush soil regularly. Chinese long beans (asparagus beans—seed only) are the most heat tolerant of common beans.

Corn (March 15, July 15). Grown from seed. These are the two best dates. It can also be planted in between. If planting after late July, use short or mid-season varieties (65 to 80 days). Plant in blocks rather than rows, since row-grown corn pollinates poorly here.

Cucumber (March to August). Grown from seed or transplants. Armenian (burpless) cucumbers are more heat tolerant and less likely to turn bitter. Grow on fence-- tie fruit to support and to prevent curling (use old pantyhose); harvest when no more than a foot long. Plant bush varieties to save space.

Eggplant (March to July). Grown from transplants. Oriental (Japanese) and white eggplants produce better in summer heat than traditional varieties. Plants do well in semi-shade; watch for spider mites.

Lettuce—leaf (All year). Grown from seed or transplants. Leaf lettuce like Black Seeded Simpson can be grown all year. Plant every 2 weeks for a good, regular crop. Best with PM summer shade.

Melons (April to July). Grown from seed or transplants. Give plenty of water as melons develop. Cantaloupes and other musk-type melons don't transplant well and do best if started from seed. Watermelons are good either way. Overhead sprinkling is not recommended.

Okra (April to May). Grown from seed. Pick small pods every day to keep from getting tough and woody.

Peppers (March to July). Begin with transplants or seeds. Make sure soil is warm before planting; use black plastic to warm it up if necessary in early spring. To aid in setting fruit, some gardeners recommend pinching off any fruit already on transplants before planting. Give regular water and good drainage; plant deep.

Radish (All year). Grown from seed. Gets pithy and hot fast, so plant small amounts every two weeks for regular supply.

Spinach, New Zealand (April to August). Grown from seed. Similar to regular spinach, but more heat tolerant. Endures salty soils.

Squash (March to July). Grown from transplants or seeds. It's important to water beneath leaves. That prevents mildew and allows you to use Sevin Dust to control squash bugs. Popular varieties are *Yellow Crookneck*, *Zucchini* and *Spaghetti*.

Tomatoes (Early March to May; August). Grown from transplants. The smaller-fruited varieties like *Sweet 100*, *Red Cherry*, *Patio*, *Yellow Pear* and *Roma* tolerate the heat better. Beefsteaks are generally disappointing. *Heartland* and *Heatwave* are larger-fruited, heat tolerant varieties. Other varieties do not generally set fruit in July and August here. Cut back in late August for a fall crop from summer plants. Plant deep and water thoroughly but infrequently until fruit forms. Some gardeners recommend a fifty-percent shade cloth cool the plant and improve humidity.