



The Wellness Family

Gardening for Wellness

Soothing, relaxing and peaceful – gardening is a wonderful way to spend your free time. The benefits are numerous: family time, healthier vegetable options for the family, fresh air and exercise, plus a successful garden can be an achievement for the entire family. Of course, if you're unfamiliar with gardening you may not know where to start.

Inside Out?

One of the first decisions to make regarding your gardening will be based upon whether or not you live in a climate that is conducive to growing your favorite vegetables. Some climates have a mild spring with lots of rain where produce will grow in abundance, but there are other climates where the temperatures spike and dip causing late frosts that can damage seedlings.

Will your garden be in-ground as part of your front or back yard? Will you be growing your vegetables indoors in a modified shed or greenhouse or a room in your home? Will you be using planters or a patch of earth?

If you're not sure what will work best in your community, take a moment to chat with a local nursery owner. Many times they will be able to help you decide what will work best based on what you're wanting to grow.

Topsoil or Potted Plants?

If you decide to go with an in-ground garden then you'll need to assess the topsoil. If your property has a lot of sand or various types of rock or clay then this won't be beneficial. Topsoil is the nutrient-rich dirt that you'll want to use to grow your plants. While you can simply till the ground and start planting seedlings, your topsoil should be nurtured for really healthy and nutritious vegetables.

Healthy topsoil consists of a complex community of living creatures. It has microorganisms, living bacteria and fungi as well as other organic matter that gives it a rich, black color. Most homes do not naturally have healthy topsoil and so there are things that can be done to prepare your garden for your plants.

One option is to consider adding in the missing ingredients. While not the easiest path to rich soil, this will allow you more time in your garden as you till in organic materials, natural fertilizers and compost to improve the quality of your topsoil. The easiest option, however, is simply to buy healthy topsoil in bulk or bags and put it directly on top of the existing poor quality soil.

If you decide to go with indoor potted plants then start with potting soil. This soil is a healthy medium for growing plants, herbs and vegetables that can be purchased at all nurseries and home supply stores.

What to Plant

This can be the most difficult decision when preparing your garden. Some delicious family-favorite vegetables may not grow well in your climate. Before beginning to lay-out your garden, do a little research and figure out what you can and can't grow successfully. Some or all of the following are healthy and nutritious options:



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Garlic – This superfood has natural antibiotic properties, has been suggested to have anti-cancer properties and is rich in potassium, sulfur, zinc, saponins and phosphorus with moderate levels of vitamin A, C and selenium, and grows well in most soil types. Do a little research to find out which type grows best in your climate.

Purple Cauliflower – Its color is caused by anthocyanins, the same heart-healthy compounds found in red wine, and this cruciferous vegetable can be grown almost anywhere.

Spinach – Hands-down one of the most nutrient-rich vegetables, this leafy vegetable should be planted during cooler spring or autumn seasons.

Kale – Right up there with spinach, this rich, green, leafy vegetable is an amazing source of a multitude of nutrients and is easy to grow from seed in early spring or fall when temperatures are cooler.

Whatever you decide to grow, remember to do a little research first to make sure that your garden is going to be rich and bountiful.

Get the Kids Involved

When deciding what to plant in your garden, remember that your children will have more fun helping you choose if there is a theme involved. Some fun themes can include a "Pizza Garden" or a "Salad Garden".

A pizza garden would include tomatoes and seasoning for the sauce as well as Swiss chard, zucchini, eggplant, bell peppers and onions for toppings. This theme can include anything that will grow well in your climate and taste good on top of a healthy pizza.

A salad garden can include anything you would like to include in a salad with your lettuce options being your first choice. Arugula, romaine lettuce and baby spinach are great options (remember that iceberg lettuce is really lacking in nutrients so shouldn't be the base of your salad). Vegetables that will taste great on your salad may include tomatoes, basil, cucumbers, carrots, radishes, beans, beets and broccoli.

Letting your children help you decide what to plant will have them vested in your garden and looking forward to watching it grow.

Starting with Seedlings

There are some gardens in certain climates (or some plants) that just start best in pots. While many vegetables will do well growing from seed, there are some reasons to consider starting with seedlings.

First, if your climate is known for a late spring frost, this may harm your plants before they're strong enough to withstand the cold. Second, there are some vegetables that have proven to grow better when started as seedlings. Third, some seed packets will actually suggest growing the seedlings then transplanting on a specific date. Finally, your kids will enjoy being part of the fun as they watch little baby seedlings begin to push through the soil.

Start your seeds in an organic seed-starting soil mix and be sure to follow the instructions for depth and spacing between seeds. The containers can be placed in a window sill for natural light but the container should be rotated every few days so the plants don't lean.

Water your seedlings regularly but just enough to keep the soil moist, then when the time is right gently transplant your seedlings into your garden.

How to Transplant

This is the tricky part. The most important thing to remember when transplanting is to be gentle. Always loosen the seedling from the pot before removing and try not to damage the roots. It's inevitable that some roots will be damaged but less is best.

Hardening off is a term used for allowing the seedling to get used to its new environment prior to transplanting. This means to take the potted plant outdoors and allow it to acclimate. Starting just a couple of hours a day, this should be done for about 2 weeks prior to transplanting.

When transplanting try to do so on a mildly cold, overcast day. The roots should be exposed to warm, dry air as little as possible to avoid drying out. When the air is cool and moist, the plant won't experience transplant shock. Also, be sure not to leave the roots and soil clumped into the shape of the pot. The soil should be soft and loose around the roots to encourage them to grow into their new space.

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A family garden is simply a wonderful way to spend productive time together. Not only for organic vegetable and fruit growing, but for exercise and fresh air as well. It's probably one of the best things you can do for you and your family on a warm spring day. Be sure to speak with your Family Wellness Chiropractor if you have any questions.



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