

Vegetable gardening often has a reputation for being a lot of work. Choosing vegetables and herbs that have high yields and need little attention can significantly increase the joy of growing food.

Growing Ease

The ease of growing vegetables and herbs organically depends upon several factors. Select and place plants that...

- **Are perennials.** Plants that regrow each year do not require annual reseeding and replanting.
- **Mature fast.** Look for varieties that grow quickly from seeding to harvest.
- **Are planted according to their desired growing temperature.** Heat-loving plants will struggle to survive chilly evenings. The last frost date in Iowa is around May 15.
- **Are resistant to diseases and pests.** Look for varieties that are bred for disease resistance.
- **Have optimal sun and water.** Most plants will yield more in full sun and with consistent soil moisture. Ensure plants have 6+ hours of direct sunlight each day and water plants if the soil feels dry 1 inch from the surface.
- **Are planted in deep, well-drained soil.** The majority of vegetable and herb roots are in the top 18 inches of soil; the ideal depth of friable, loamy soil is 2 feet. They will not thrive in dense clay and soil preparation may be needed before planting.
- **Are spaced appropriately** so they overlap very little at maturity. Overcrowded plants compete for sun, nutrients and water which can lower yields and invite disease.
- **Receive desired nutrients** by applying compost and compost tea.
- **Do not compete with weeds** by thoroughly clearing or covering the space before planting and applying straw mulch once the plant is large enough to grow above it.
- **Are protected from wind.** Most plants will have higher yields if they are not constantly subjected to strong winds.
- **Are protected from critters.** Plant protectors and fencing may be required to thwart hungry rabbits and deer.

Harvesting and Taste Preferences

The more you enjoy harvesting and eating your vegetables and herbs, the more likely you will be to care for the plants. Select plants so they match your...

- **Harvesting times.** When will you have time to harvest, prepare and store your abundance?
- **Palate.** It won't matter how much a plant yields if you don't like its taste. When possible, try to sample specific varieties before making a selection.

Pampering Need

Careful watering, weeding and mulching for 2-4 weeks is very beneficial for all new plantings. This scale will help you determine how much attention is required after establishment.

1-Very Easy

Many perennials and weeds near this "plant-it-and-forget-it" scale.

2-Easy

Planting annuals from seedlings or seed takes upfront time, but after 2-4 weeks of growth, only occasional watering, weeding and trellising may be needed.

3-Moderate

Supplemental watering is needed 2-4 times each week to create consistent or deep soil moisture.

Harvest Ease

Most vegetables require only a few minutes to harvest.

1-Very Easy

Pods, stalks or greens are within easy reach for a quick harvest.

2-Easy

Greens are close to the ground, destemming takes additional time, or a knife is required.

3-Moderate

Root crops require digging or greens are difficult to harvest.



Perennial **French sorrel** can be harvested from early April through early November.



Perennial **walking onions** can be planted near other vegetables and herbs to save space.



The leaves, flower and root of the prolific and shiny **dandelion** are highly nutritious.

Please feel free to grow carrots, cauliflower, eggplant, bulbing onions, leeks, parsley, shell peas and others with higher maintenance requirements, but plan to give them more attention than plants listed in this publication.

Top Fruit Plants

These plants grow well in the Midwest. Varieties were selected for taste, high yields and disease resistance.

Common Name	Top Varieties	Height	Width	Light	Water	Pampering Need	Harvest Ease	Harvest Time						
								Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct
Arugula	Rocket	6"		Full Sun - Part Shade	Mesic	2-Easy	2-Easy							
Asparagus	Jersey Giant, Jersey Knight	3-5'	3-5'	Full Sun	Mesic	2-Easy	2-Easy							
Basil, Culinary	Genovese	1-3'	6"	Full Sun	Mesic	2-Easy	2-Easy							
Bean, Bush	Contender, Provider, Dragon Tongue	1'	1'	Full Sun	Mesic	2-Easy	1-Very Easy							
Bean, Pole	Blue Lake, Kentucky Wonder	3-7'	Indef.	Full Sun	Mesic	2-Easy	1-Very Easy							
Beet	Bull's Blood, Cylindra, Red Ace	8-12"		Full Sun	Mesic	3-Moderate	3-Moderate							
Broadleaf Sage		18-30"	30-36"	Full Sun	Xeric - Mesic	2-Easy	1-Very Easy							
Broccoli	Arcadia (fall), Packman, Waltham, Calabrese Sprouting	18"	18"	Full Sun - Part Shade	Mesic	2-Easy	1-Very Easy							
Cabbage	Brunswick, Ruby Perfection	18"	18"	Full Sun - Part Shade	Mesic - Hydric	3-Moderate	2-Easy							
Chives, Garlic or Onion		18"	1'	Full Sun - Part Shade	Xeric - Mesic	1-Very Easy	1-Very Easy							
Cilantro		18"		Full Sun - Part Shade	Mesic	3-Moderate	2-Easy							
Collard Greens		1-2'		Full Sun - Part Shade	Mesic - Hydric	2-Easy	1-Very Easy							
Cucumber	Marketmore 76, Mexican Sour Gherkin	3-7'	Indef.	Full Sun	Mesic - Hydric	2-Easy	1-Very Easy							
Dandelion		6-12"		Full Sun - Full Shade	Xeric - Hydric	1-Very Easy	2-Easy							
Dill		2-3'	6"	Full Sun	Mesic	1-Very Easy	1-Very Easy							
Kale	Red Russian	2'	1'	Full Sun - Part Shade	Mesic - Hydric	2-Easy	1-Very Easy							
Lamb's Quarters		1-2'		Full Sun - Part Shade	Xeric - Hydric	1-Very Easy	1-Very Easy							
Lettuce	Black Seeded Simpson, Deer Tongue, Garrison	1'	1'	Full Sun	Mesic	3-Moderate	2-Easy							
Mint		8-24"	Indef.	Full Sun - Part Shade	Mesic - Hydric	1-Very Easy	2-Easy							
Mizuna		6"		Full Sun - Part Shade	Mesic	2-Easy	2-Easy							
Mustard Greens		6"		Full Sun - Part Shade	Mesic	2-Easy	2-Easy							
Nasturtium		1-18"	12-18"	Full Sun	Mesic	1-Very Easy	1-Very Easy							
Onion, Walking		2'	6"	Full Sun	Mesic	1-Very Easy	1-Very Easy							
Oregano		8-10"	1-4'	Full Sun	Xeric - Mesic	1-Very Easy	1-Very Easy							
Parsley		1'		Full Sun - Part Shade	Mesic	3-Moderate	1-Very Easy							
Pea, Snap or Snow	Super Sugar Snap, Sugar Sprint	3-7'	Indef.	Full Sun - Part Shade	Mesic	2-Easy	1-Very Easy							
Plantain, Broadleaf		6-10"		Full Sun - Part Shade	Xeric - Hydric	1-Very Easy	2-Easy							
Potato	Yukon Gold (early), Goldrush (mid), Kennebec (late)	1-2'	18"	Full Sun	Mesic	1-Very Easy	3-Moderate							
Purslane		4-8"		Full Sun - Part Shade	Mesic	1-Very Easy	2-Easy							
Rhubarb	Canada Red, Valentine, Crimson Red, Victoria	3-5'	3-5'	Full Sun - Part Shade	Mesic	1-Very Easy	1-Very Easy							
Sorrel, French		1-3'	10-12"	Full Sun - Part Shade	Xeric - Mesic	1-Very Easy	1-Very Easy							
Spinach	Space, Ytee, Red Kitten	8"		Full Sun - Part Shade	Mesic	3-Moderate	2-Easy							
Squash, Summer	Gold Rush, Black Beauty, Zucchini Rampicante	18"	4'	Full Sun	Mesic	3-Moderate	1-Very Easy							
Squash, Winter	Waltham Butternut, Howden, Blue Hubbard	18"	Indef.	Full Sun	Mesic - Hydric	2-Easy	2-Easy							
Stinging Nettle		1-2'	Indef.	Full Sun - Part Shade	Xeric - Hydric	1-Very Easy	3-Moderate							
Swiss Chard	Fordhook Giant, Bright Lights	1-2'	1'	Full Sun	Mesic	2-Easy	1-Very Easy							
Tatsoi		6"		Full Sun - Part Shade	Mesic	2-Easy	2-Easy							
Thyme, Creeping	Creeping Pink, Caraway	4"	Indef.	Full Sun - Part Shade	Xeric - Mesic	1-Very Easy	2-Easy							
Tomato, Cherry	Black Cherry, Sun Gold, Supersweet 100,	2-10'	3'	Full Sun	Mesic	2-Easy	1-Very Easy							
Tomato, Roma or Beefsteak	Jet Star, Amish Paste	2-10'	3'	Full Sun	Mesic	3-Moderate	1-Very Easy							