



Planting a garden

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Plan now

Fall is the perfect time to start planning for next year's food garden. Timing is everything, and the spring planting season can sneak up on us. For a Missouri-specific set of planting dates for common vegetables, see: <https://extension.missouri.edu/g6201>. If you're just getting started, here's a primer on how to begin: <https://extension.umd.edu/resource/how-start-vegetable-garden>

Use seeds

Whether sown directly into a bed or used to grow starts, seeds are an economical way to begin a garden. Follow sowing instructions on seed packets.

Start small

Everyone can do it! Plants like herbs and cherry tomatoes can do well in containers on a sunny porch or patio. For information about herbs, visit: <https://extension.missouri.edu/g6470>; for information about tomatoes, see: <https://extension.missouri.edu/g6461>

Build a raised bed

Raised beds – garden beds or planters that sit above ground-level – allow us to control soil and moisture conditions in our gardens, make weed control easier, and avoid disturbing surface tree roots. For specifics about raised bed gardening, visit: <https://extension.missouri.edu/publications/g6985>

Some shade is okay

We enjoy many mature trees in our neighborhood, and their shade doesn't mean we can't grow food. Leafy greens like kale, Swiss chard, spinach, and collards, as well as radishes, beets, cauliflower, broccoli, and cabbage, can tolerate part shade. Plant these cool-season vegetables early before trees leaf out.

Add shrubs (and trees) with edible fruits

Don't have time to care for a garden? Many berries grow well in Missouri: blackberries, raspberries, blueberries, gooseberries, currants, elderberries, and serviceberries are all fairly easy to grow, have a small footprint, and produce delicious crops. Or try apple, cherry, or plum trees, and our native paw-paw, a small tree that thrives in shady conditions: <https://centerforagroforestry.org/pawpaw/>

Consult local gardening resources

MU Extension has extensive information about vegetable gardening, tailored to Missouri. During the growing season, watch for events at MU's Jefferson Farm and Garden. CCUA is also a great resource.

Help your neighbors gardening for food

Support pollinators

Let's make lawn care a mutually sustainable endeavor, with drought-resistant, pollinator-friendly, soil-enhancing choices. Choose natives plants and enjoy the pay-off: beautiful and abundant flowers, hummingbirds, bees, butterflies! Another plus: maintenance is low once natives are established. Visit Grow Native! for landscaping ideas and where to find nurseries with native plants: <https://grownative.org/>. For native plant yard consults with CoMo Wild Yards, contact: <https://www.como.gov/contacts/danielle-fox/>

Be careful to avoid landscaping plants treated with systemic insecticides like neonicotinoids

In the nursery trade, some plants are treated with systemic insecticides. Read labels carefully and ask questions when purchasing plants. These insecticides can injure or kill even insects that use pollen or drink nectar from the treated plant.

Eliminate the use of herbicides that drift to non-target plants

Herbicides commonly applied by lawn services include dicamba and 2,4-D. These herbicides volatilize and drift, affecting plants beyond your own yard. Because they are growth inhibitors, they easily damage flowers, trees, and vegetable gardens. If you use a lawn service that applies herbicides, ask what formulas they use and check ingredient labels. Organic ("OMRI" approved) products do not allow glyphosate, dicamba, or 2,4-D. To protect your own garden, family, and pet health, and that of your neighbors, learn how to avoid these toxins.

Learn more here: <https://www.beyondpesticides.org> and at Environment and Human Health, Inc.: <https://www.ehhi.org/pesticides.php>

Divert food waste and share your compost

Everyone can compost! Backyard composting is a great way to divert food waste from the city landfill, and the City of Columbia offers workshops and resources for composting, visit:

<https://www.como.gov/volunteer/volunteer-programs/composting/>. Even if you don't have a garden to use compost in, offer your compost to your neighbors. Organic material is essential to healthy garden soil.

Leave the leaves and drop off your yard waste

Many beneficial insects, including pollinators like bumblebees and swallowtails, overwinter in fallen leaves. Leave your leaves or rake them into one part of our yard to break down over the winter. If you must remove your leaves, take them to one of the City of Columbia compost sites; Capen Park is the closest to our neighborhood. The yard waste taken to the City's compost sites is mulched, with some mulch made available and free for residents. It is also used to make compost that is available to the public at \$20/cu yard.

Support locally grown food programs

The Columbia Community Garden Coalition (<https://comogardens.org/>) supports a network of more than 20 community gardens across the city. Alongside operating the urban farm at the Agriculture Park, the Columbia Center for Urban Agriculture (<https://www.columbiaurbanag.org/>) helps veterans, new Americans, and others learn to garden. Ask these organizations how you can help!

Ask questions and tour the gardens of your neighbors. Let's work together to build a safer, healthy community!