

# Planning a lower maintenance vegetable garden well worth the time and trouble



**Carla Keast**

## AROUND THE YARD

Vegetable gardens take time. Might as well know that from the start. But homegrown veggies are heavenly, and growing a few doesn't have to take over your entire summer.

The three realities of vegetable gardening include: there will be weeds; regular watering is essential; nobody needs dozens of zucchini.

Weeding is both time-consuming and important. Unlike many other plants, vegetables cannot compete with weeds. The plant might survive the battle but its fruit (what we call the vegetable) will be lost. So plan to spend some time on weeding, and base the size of your vegetable garden on the time you have for weeding it.

Aside from the hoe and your back, there are a number of strategies for dealing with weeds. If you've got a traditional plot with the vegetables planted in rows, a five to eight cm thick layer of organic mulch between the rows suppresses weeds, is good for the soil beneath it, and can be tilled under next spring. Landscape fabric also works, but should be lifted every year.

Square-foot gardening is a popular trend right now, and incorporates a different approach to fending off weeds. The plots are typically raised beds which are

divided into one-by-one foot cells. Each cell is planted with only one kind of plant, such as one tomato, four lettuce, 16 carrots. Because the plants are close to each other, there simply isn't enough space or light for weeds.

Container gardening is another very trendy way to grow vegetables and takes the idea of squeezing out weeds to the extreme.

Regular watering is essential as vegetables require evenly moist soil. Early morning or late afternoon is the best time. Sprinklers are inexpensive, but have to be properly positioned every time, and waste water. Soaker hoses need to be re-laid each spring, but after that, require just the turn of the tap. For very small gardens and pots, a hose with a nozzle attachment or a watering can is going to be the quickest. Pots will require daily watering.

Nobody needs dozens of zucchini so only plant what you'll actually use. One or two tomatoes, cucumbers or zucchini plants may be all you need for a summer's worth of fresh produce.

Spinach and Swiss chard can also provide several harvests from a single plant.

Figure out how you're going to manage the weeding and watering, and how many zucchini are enough, and you'll be well on your way to planning a lower-maintenance vegetable garden.

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