STEPS TO STARTING A

HOME GARDEN

Land and location
- The initial development of a garden site takes time and resources. The recommended minimum commitment is 3-5 years for a home garden. Container gardening is an option for a shorter-term commitment.
- Sun exposure – Is there adequate sun exposure for the site? Select for sunlight. An open, south-facing, gradual slope is best, or at least, look for a shade-free place. All vegetables need a minimum of six hours, preferably eight, of sunshine. Less sunlight will cause the plants to be weak and spindly.
- Wind exposure – Is there wind protection? If not, can protection be provided?
- Will fencing be needed for security at the site?
- Can a vehicle get to the site? If not, will this be an issue? Is the site convenient to get to?

Soil
- What kind of soil is at the site and what types of issues might it have?
  - Soil condition - Get a soil test and follow the recommendations given. Getting a quote of the cost of the soil tests before having it done is important. If you let them know that it is a home garden site, they will recommend what test you should have. Otherwise, if you say “test for everything” expect to be billed accordingly. The labs will instruct you on how to collect and submit the soil sample. Umatilla Master Gardeners have two labs that we recommend locally:
    1. Agri-Check Inc, 323 6th St, Umatilla, (541) 922-4894
    2. KUO Testing Lab, 1300 6th St, Umatilla, (541) 922-6435
  - Compaction issues – Old roads, construction sites and walkways will create soil compaction issues. The soil will need to be loosened up and amended to a depth of 3 feet.
  - Find sources for leaves, straw and other organic materials that you can recycle into the garden site; make sure they are weed free!

Water source
- A garden without water access spells disaster in eastern Oregon climates.
  - Water bill – As a homeowner, the savings from raising your own vegetables may more than justify the cost of water through reductions in food purchases, but it will add to water costs.
  - What kind of watering system will be used?
    - Drip-lines have a low water impact and reduce gallons used. In addition, laying down plastic row covers over the top of the drip-lines will decrease evaporation and cut down on weed growth.
    - Overhead sprinklers are another option, but it uses more water. Watering early in the morning prevents sun damage to wet plants and allows plants to dry before nighttime. Wet plants at night will increase the chance of plants contracting disease.

Type of garden
- Vegetable, herb or flowers or any combination of these are possibilities.
- Are raised beds an option?
- Plants – Will plants be started from seed or purchased from a nursery?
Compost Bins at the site can be used to recycle: old garden debris, non meat food scraps, egg shells, coffee grounds and cardboard, just to name a few.

Management

- Soil temperature - Ideally, soil temperatures should reach 50 degrees before planting warm season crops.
- When to till – the soil should be moist but not so moist that it holds shape when squeezed. Also, it should not be so dry that it crumbles when squeezed. Till only the rows themselves. If the space between rows is tilled, there is a good possibility that the number of weeds will increase because the seeds hidden under the top of the soil will have sun exposure which may germinate them.
- Master Gardeners practice sustainable gardening practices which minimize inputs of labor, water, fertilizers and pesticides. Consult with the local chapter for specific recommendations.

- Weeds – keep them knocked down early to prevent spread and minimize their impact.
- Harvest – Think about the harvest potential and its impacts. Example: If you plant green beans do you have the time to pick them every other day or a volunteer to help pick? If you are planting corn, do you have room to plant multiple rows?
- Vacation – What is the backup plan for garden care if one is off for work or play?
- Winter squash stores easily and is a good crop to grow to extend the fresh produce season well into the winter months.
- In the fall the garden will need to be put to rest. Pull up plants and put in compost bin. If plants are diseased discard them accordingly.
- Pull up and drain watering systems to prevent damage from freezing.
- Mulch the garden with leaves to cut down on weed growth. Mulching also helps keep the ground from freezing as much.

Suggested Plantings:

A few of the many plants grown successfully in Eastern Oregon may include: tomatoes, cucumbers, eggplants, green beans, peppers, summer squash, winter squash, carrots, lettuce and basil.

If you are interested in plants that can possibly survive the winter try leeks, parsley, garlic, chives, thyme and sage.

For a complete list of varieties recommended by OSU and additional information see http://extension.oregonstate.edu/gardening/