

Vegetable Gardening—Getting started

When you are starting to grow vegetables the area that you want to use might be covered in weeds.

The overgrown area

Don't rush this job. You need to clear the area really well.

- Cut down all the tall growth.
- Cover the ground with a **mulch**. This will keep the light out and so kill the weeds. This could be flattened cardboard kept in place with straw, hay, bricks, grass clippings or black plastic. This will stop the weeds from growing. Pumpkins and other **vigorous** plants can be planted through the mulch.



- You can then clear small areas of the garden at a time. Clear the weeds using a garden fork. Remove all the roots. Then sow a **green manure** or cover with a mulch.
- Until the weeds are under control, grow crops in wide rows. This means you can hoe between them easily to remove weeds.

Planning

To get the best from your garden you need to plan.

Measure the area of your vegetable garden and draw an outline. Mark in any features that you want to keep, like trees and then plan the rest of the area using the following ideas.

Essential soil improvers

If you have space either in the vegetable garden or elsewhere in the school grounds set up a **compost** and a **leafmould** bin:

Compost bins should measure about 1m³. Leafmould bins should measure 1m³ or more. Make a bin by wrapping chicken wire around four posts.

See: Making a compost bin
— HDRA factsheet
Composting
— HDRA factsheet



Permanent Crops

- Why not try to grow fruit and other **perennial** crops, that come back year after year? You will need to plan where these will go.
- Think about how far apart the plants need to be so that you have enough space.
- If you have a fence you can save space by growing redcurrants and gooseberries as espaliers, cordons and fans. (these are different shapes. You will find information on them in vegetable gardening books.)
- Russian comfrey— grow three or more plants if you want to make your own liquid plant food.

Vegetables

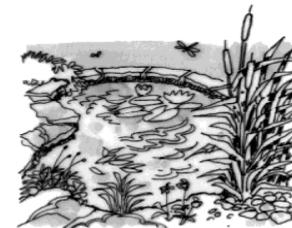
- Divide the vegetable area into four plots that are all the same size so that you can **rotate** the crops.
- Divide up the four plots into small beds about 1 metre wide.
- Remember when planning the crop rotation to include green manures to improve the soil. See Crop rotation - HDRA factsheet.

Vegetable Gardening—A Student's Guide

Welcoming wildlife

Wildlife can help control pests and diseases. Create a few '**habitats**' to welcome creatures into your garden.

- **Perennials** - ground cover, **herbaceous** plants and small shrubs can provide food and shelter for many creatures, but won't take up too much space.
- **Annuals** - these brighten up the vegetable garden and are food for insect eating pests.
- A pond - will attract frogs and other creatures that will help control pests.



Useful techniques

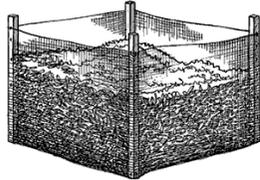
- Plant vegetable seeds and start them off indoors. Plant out when they are bigger. This will help them to stand up to pest and disease attack.
- Protect new plants with plastic bottle **cloches**. (Plastic bottles with the lid taken off and the bottom cut off)
- Mark out straight drills for sowing by standing on a rake handle or using a draw hoe along a straight edge. Water drill before sowing and cover seeds with dry soil.
- Before moving water plants and the planting holes where they are to grow.

- Cover vulnerable plants (those that are likely to be attacked) with fleece or mesh to protect them from pests.
- Grow pest and disease **resistant** varieties of vegetables and fruit.
- Label rows and keep a note of what grew where—it will make planning the area next year easier.
- Remember to grow plants that will not need care over the holidays (particularly summer) unless you have a volunteer to go into school and care for the plants.

Seasonal Hints

Late summer/early autumn

- Sow green manures as you harvest crops and clear the land.
- Collect autumn leaves to make leafmould. Simply put them into a container made of wire or an open black plastic bag and leave them for a year to rot down.
- Plant autumn onion sets and garlic.



Autumn/winter

- Buy in strawy manure; cover with plastic and leave to rot.
- Cover bare soil with year old leafmould, particularly the areas where you are going to plant next years carrots and parsnips.
- Dig a trench and fill with kitchen waste over winter. Grow runner beans here next year.

Spring

- Dig in green manures
- Put garden compost or manure on to the parts of the **crop rotation** that need it, where you are going to grow greedy crops for example potatoes and cabbages.



General hints and tips

- Wooden boards can be laid down between rows to stop the soil getting **compacted**.
- Make large **cloches** from four litre plastic bottles. Remove the lid and cut off the base.

Glossary

Annual—a plant that lasts for a year

Cloche— a cover put over a plant to protect it.

Compost—mixture of garden, kitchen and house hold waste that rots down and can be used in the garden.

Compacted—when the air and water is squashed out of the soil.

Crop Rotation—moving crops around to stop pests and diseases building up.

Green Manure—a plant grown to protect the soil surface when nothing else is growing. Can be dug in later to add nutrients (food) to the soil

Habitat— a place where something lives.

Leafmould—rotted leaves used to improve the soil.

Mulch—a cover on the soil surface.

Perennial—a plant that comes back year after year.

Transplanting—moving seedlings to a new pot or outside.

Vigorous—fast growing and strong.

Vegetable gardening



A student's guide to creating a vegetable garden.



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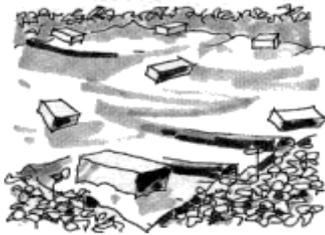
Vegetable Gardening—Getting started

When starting an organic vegetable garden first of all you may have to clear an overgrown area.

The overgrown area

Don't rush this job. The area needs to be cleared really well.

- Use a strimmer to cut down any tall growth.
- Cover the ground with a light excluding mulch. This could be flattened cardboard kept in place with straw, hay, bricks, grass clippings or black plastic. This will stop the weeds from re-growing. Pumpkins and other vigorous crops can be planted through the mulch.



- Taking a small area of the garden at a time, clear the weeds using a garden fork. Remove all the roots. Then plant crops, sow a green manure or mulch.
- Until the weeds are under control, grow crops in wide rows to allow easy hoeing.

Planning

Measure the area of your vegetable garden and draw an outline. Mark in any features that you want to keep and then plan the rest of the area using the following suggestions.

Essential soil improvers

If you have space either in the vegetable garden or elsewhere in the school grounds set up a compost heap and a leafmould bin:

Compost bins should measure about 1m³. Leafmould bins should be 1m³ or more. Make a bin by wrapping chicken wire around four posts.

See Making a compost bin
— HDRA factsheet
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Permanent crops

- Why not try growing fruit and other perennial crops?
- Think about spacing for all these plants so that you know how much space you will need.
- If you have a fence you can save space by growing redcurrants and gooseberries as espaliers, cordons and fans. (You'll find information on these in any vegetable gardening book.)
- Russian comfrey— grow three or more plants if you want to make your own liquid plant food.

Vegetables

- Divide the vegetable area into four plots of equal size for effective crop rotation.
- Subdivide the plots further if you are going to grow on a bed system.
- Remember when planning the crop rotation to include green manures for soil improvement. See Crop rotation - HDRA factsheet.

Welcoming wildlife

Wildlife can help to keep pests and diseases in check. Create a few 'habitats' to welcome creatures on to your plot.

- Perennials - ground cover, herbaceous plants and small shrubs can provide food and shelter, but won't take up too much space.
- Annuals - these brighten up the vegetable garden and feed insect eating pests.
- A pond - will attract frogs and other creatures that will help control pests.



Useful techniques

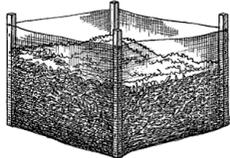
- Start plants off in modules, pots and boxes and then plant out as sturdy transplants (small plants).
- Protect new plants with plastic bottle cloches. (Plastic bottles with the lid and bottom cut off)
- Mark out straight drills for sowing by standing on a rake handle or using a hoe along a straight edge. Water drill before sowing and cover seeds with dry soil.
- Water transplants and planting holes before transplanting.
- Cover vulnerable plants with fleece or mesh to protect them from pests. This is particularly useful on cabbage family plants which seem to suffer the most.
- Grow pest and disease resistant varieties, especially blight resistant potatoes.

- Label rows and keep a note of what grew where—it makes planning much easier for next year.
- Remember to grow plants that will not need care over the holidays (particularly summer) unless you have a volunteer to go into school and care for the plants.

Seasonal Hints

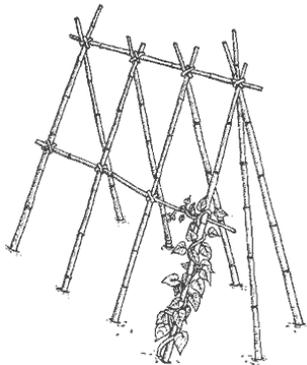
Late summer/early autumn

- Sow green manures as you harvest crops and clear the ground.
- Collect autumn leaves to make leafmould.
- Remember to plant autumn onion sets and garlic.



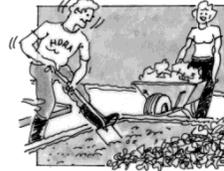
Autumn/winter

- Buy in strawy manure; cover with plastic and leave to rot.
- Cover empty beds with year old leafmould, particularly the area where you are going to plant next years carrots and parsnips.
- Dig a trench and fill with kitchen waste over winter. Grow runner beans here next year.



Spring

- Dig in green manures
- Apply garden compost and manure on areas that need it. This is where you are going to grow greedy crops such as potatoes and cabbages.



General hints and tips

- Wooden boards can be laid between rows of vegetables to avoid soil compaction.
- Make large cloches (covers) from four litre plastic bottles. Remove the lid and cut off the base.
- Make enquires about the availability of municipal compost in your local area. This is compost made by the Local Authority

Further Reading

Green Manures for Organic Soil Improvement
— HDRA Step-by-Step booklet

Grow your own organic vegetables-Getting started
— HDRA Step-by-Step booklet

Beds—Labour-saving, space-saving, more productive gardening
— Pauline Pears, (HDRA/Search Press 1992)

Soil Care and Management
— Jo Readman, HDRA (Search Press 1991)

The Vegetable Garden Displayed
—Joy Larkcom, (RHS 1992)

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