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Is Your Garden Plus or Minus?

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THE home garden has come to stay. In every well planned home it is as much a part of the equipage as the kitchen or the dining room. It is an outdoor supply room. However, many people think this "supply room" cannot be improved upon. This is a mistake and the person who believes that his or her garden is the acme of perfection will soon be traveling in a garden rut. Too often home vegetable plots are laid out year after year in precisely the same fashion, the same kind of vegetables in the same place. It has become a habit to do it this way. If rotation is good for farm crops why shouldn't it be valuable for vegetable plots? Gardeners need to get out of the old rut and make the vegetable yield plus instead of minus, not only in quantity but also in quality.

The real garden enthusiast begins operations when the new seed catalogs arrive, which is usually in January or February. Why is the frame of mind it is a good thing to make a plan on paper. A carefully considered plan of the backyard garden is a great help in utilizing every square foot of space. It also assists in correcting last season's mistakes, such as planting certain vegetables in the wrong type of soil, wrong planting distances between rows, and many other common blunders. Some of the most successful home gardeners keep a regular garden diary and make a map or plan of their gardens each year.

A second hint for the home gardener is to gain time in the spring. It is not only pleasurable, but also very profitable to be able to pick that first ripe tomato, or break the first ear of sweet corn, or harvest green beans two or more weeks ahead of your neighbor.

How can it be done? Here are a few suggestions: For crops that are usually transplanted, such as tomatoes, early cabbage, cauliflower, peppers and egg plant, secure sturdy hot bed or greenhouse grown plants of extra early varieties. The matter of varieties is very important since nearly all vegetables have both early and late varieties. Early Bonny Best tomatoes are much earlier than Stone or Ponderosa. Jersey Wakefield and Copenhagen Market cabbage are much earlier than Flat Dutch or Holland.

The ideal method of gaining time in the spring is to have your hot bed and cold frame for starting extra early plants. Vegetables like lima beans, string beans, sweet corn, cucumbers and melons, which are usually not transplanted, may be planted in paper or berry boxes or paper bands in a cold frame three to four weeks before the normal outdoor planting season. The saving in time is very much worth while.

For those who cannot afford a regular cold frame, another possibility is open. Individual miniature cold frames or forcing boxes can be cheaply constructed of wood and glass. They are simply glass covered boxes large enough to be placed over a single hill or plant of a tender vegetable during the early stages of growth. The added warmth afforded by this protection will "force" the plants to make quicker growth and will also ward off dangerous insects as the striped cucumber beetle on melons, cucumbers and squash plants.

Make the garden pay dividends in July, August and September as well as in April, May and June.

The following vegetables may be grown in late summer and fall: string beans, beets, carrots, turnips, rutabagas, Chinese cabbage, radishes, lettuce, spinach, kale and kohlrabi. Of these endive, Chinese cabbage and kohlrabi deserve to be better known and more widely used. Their culture is very simple. Endive is grown like head lettuce but should be tied up for branching. The seed is sown about the middle of August. Thin the young plants to twelve inches in the row. Chinese or celery cabbage is started at the same time but should be thinned to about fifteen or eighteen inches between plants. Both endive and Chinese cabbage make excellent salads and greens. Kohlrabi or turnip rooted cabbage is grown more easily than the turnip because it is not so susceptible to the attacks of green lace. It's flavor is very delicate and resembles cauliflower.

Other vegetables of merit and recommended for the average home garden are:
- Cos lettuce or Romaine—a pointed type of head lettuce of excellent quality which is heat resistant. The secret of success with head lettuce in the corn belt is starting the seed in a greenhouse or hot bed and transplanting as early as possible.
- Swiss chard—a member of the beet family, excellent for greens in hot weather and will bear edible leaves all during summer and autumn.
- New Zealand spinach—the best substitute for common spinach in hot weather. Very easy to grow.
- Scarlet Runner Bean—sometimes called Fire Bean. An ornamental climbing vine useful for covering fences, porches and unsightly buildings. The immature pods make excellent string or green beans.
- Celeriac or root celery—much easier to grow than celery and requires no blanching. The enlarged root may be cooked or used raw, for salads, soups and as a cooked side dish.

It is not too late to think of the garden plant food problem. This should not be neglected. Well decomposed stable manure is the best source of plant food, but it is impossible for some gardeners to secure an adequate supply. The best substitute is leaf mold or decayed leaves, which can be supplemented with commercial fertilizers. Most of the so-called "complete" fertilizers are fairly reliable and should be applied at the rate of one pound per five square yards after spading or plowing and before smoothing the surface with rake or harrow. Wood ashes also add fertility to the soil in the form of potassium. Poultry manure is much more concentrated than stable manure and should be applied less freely. Mix with sand or dry soil and scatter over plowed surface and rake into soil.

With the few simple suggestions mentioned above gardening may become less of the old "bag bear," and after all a good garden means a happy gardener.