



FRUIT & VEGETABLE GARDEN TIPS

1. Fruit trees need attention to prevent and maintain pests. Stone fruits, such as peaches, nectarines, plums, or apple trees are susceptible to fruit damaging insects. Applications of insecticides must be timed purposefully to prevent wormy fruit later in the season. Fruit thinning is necessary on all fruit trees to relieve disease pressure and ensure larger fruit. If you are unfamiliar with fruit trees and backyard orchards take the time to research them before making your purchases. In some cases, it is more economical to purchase fruit from a farmer's market.

2. Small fruits are a delight to have in the home garden. The most reliable kinds to plant are blueberries, blackberries, muscadine grapes, figs, and strawberries. Each has its own special culture and may require skill for long-term productivity, so be sure to get to know the crop you intend to grow.

3. Vegetable gardens will be planted across the state in April with warm-season plants going into the ground after the last frost date. For instance, sweet corn is planted earlier than beans. Many gardeners suggest waiting until the soil has warmed thoroughly before planting such heat-loving crops as peppers, lima beans, squash, and pumpkins.

4. Harvesting cool-season vegetables begins soon with crops like sugar snap peas, leafy greens, lettuce, and asparagus. Check your garden routinely and make timely harvests for the highest quality vegetables. There's there nothing finer than to enjoy garden produce on the day that it's been picked!

5. Monitor your garden for early insect appearance. Worms in crucifers are especially troublesome. Check the undersides of leaves for worms. Handpick and destroy them, or in large plantings, choosing the biological products containing Bt will do the trick.

6. Deer are hungry and looking for your spring garden. There are few options available other than keeping them out with a 9'-10' foot high fence. Some gardeners are pleased with commercial deer repellents when applied twice a month. Other alternatives include: radios in the garden, a solar-powered hot wire, scented soap on a stake, battery-powered shockers, pantyhose filled with human hair, noisemakers, and scarecrows.

7. When preparing garden soil for planting, in the absence of a soil test, apply limestone at the rate of five pounds per 100 square feet and superphosphate (0-18-0) at a four-pound rate. The addition of compost or another organic source will help loosen the soil and conserve moisture in dry summer conditions.

8. Container gardening is more enjoyable thanks to the availability of commercial potting soils prepared with polymers or wetting agents. The additions of surfactants make watering easier, as peat moss and vermiculite soil amendments readily absorb and hold more water. There are several grades of peat moss. Buy the coarser grades (H3 to H5) that resemble sphagnum moss.

9. Honeybees are conspicuously active in our gardens and backyards in April. They pollinate flowers and repel certain insects. We can protect them by avoiding indiscriminate use of insecticides, especially in the morning hours. The worst offenders are dust formulations. It's always best to choose liquid/spray applications when possible. Be sure to read the product label before applying any insecticide to a plant when it is in bloom.

Tips are provided by Toby Bost, *Our State's* online gardening contributor. He can be reached by emailing gardening@ourstate.com.

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