Planning an Organic Vegetable Garden



VIDEO

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TRANSCRIPT:

TERRY ALLEN:
Hi. I'm Terry Allen with SEEDS OF CHANGE™. And today, we're here at the beautiful Lincoln Park Zoo in Chicago talking to Jeannie Nolan.

JEANNE NOLAN:
I'm the founder of The Organic Gardener Ltd. and the director of The Edible Gardens in Lincoln Park Zoo, which I pant and maintain on behalf of Green City Market. I've been growing food for over 20 years, and I'm very excited to help you get started on your gardening journey.

Before you start planting it is well worth your while to take the time to plan your garden. There are five keys to setting up a successful garden. They are:

1. Finding a sunny spot
2. Preparing your soil well
3. Creating paths where you will walk
4. Coming up with an irrigation or watering plan
5. And critter-proofing — some type of fencing to keep out the critters who will eat your food

FIND A SUNNY SPOT
The most important thing when planning your garden is to find a sunny spot. Here at The Edible Gardens in Chicago, we have a full-sun location, we can grow whatever we want. If you are in a situation where you have limited sun from trees that are creating shade in your yard, if you have at least five or six hours of sun you'll still be able to grow a garden, especially with crops like lettuce or spinach. The process of determining the most sunny spot in your yard is simple. Choose a sunny day when you're home and go outside repeatedly every hour or so and make a map, create a chart and survey your area and find the sunniest spot.

PREPARE SOIL WELL
The second key to setting up a successful garden is soil preparation, and this I cannot emphasize enough. When you prepare the soil well, the soil acts as the immune system for your plants. And when your plants grow strong and healthy, they are less susceptible to disease and pests. And when your soil is prepared well, you'll have much less weeds.

CREATE WALKING PATHS
The third key to building a successful garden is paths. It's very important to create well-defined walking paths. The human body is quite heavy, and when we walk on the area where we have prepared the soil for the vegetables, we compact the soil, and we undo all the hard work we have done. It is also a great way to ensure that gardening with children is easy. When they know where to walk, it simplifies working with kids. You can create your paths out of a long list of options. Here we use straw. You can use wood chips. You can use stone. You can work with kids to make their own stepping stones. Create paths.

DEVISE WATERING PLAN
The fourth key to setting up a successful garden is irrigation. Your garden is going to need consistent water. So, you need to take the time to put in place a good plan for getting that water there. You can water your garden any number of ways: through a sprinkler, drip line irrigation or a soaker hose. But the important thing is to have a plan ahead of time. Most of us are very busy. So, if you're going to have one or two hours a week to spend in your garden, it's best to spend that time tending your plants and not standing there hand watering. Irrigation systems that are automated are readily available and easy to set up yourself.

FENCE OUT "CRITTERS"
The fifth and final key to success is fencing, to keep unwanted pets and wild animals out of your garden. There are a lot of critters that can threaten your garden, but some of them like deer, rabbits, dogs, we can keep out with a fence. To keep out rabbits, the typical fence height is three feet — occasionally you might need to go a bit higher than that. It's very important to use a wire mesh, like you see here behind me, with an opening of no larger than one inch by two inch. To keep rabbits out, you also want to bury the fencing somewhere between four inches and a foot deep. For deer, it's a bit of another story, and that's about the height. And that depends on how much deer pressure you have, and how much of a running start the deer can get as they approach your garden. Deer fencing is typically somewhere between five and eight feet tall. If you follow those parameters, you'll have good luck at keeping the unwanted critters out of the garden.

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