

## In the garden with Shobha Vanchiswar



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### ***Planning ahead for your first vegetable garden***

Based on several responses I’ve received, many of you are planning on growing vegetables in a more serious way this year. I’m personally thrilled to be in such company. Since some of you are novices at this, I’d like to address a few of your concerns.

First, don’t allow yourself to be intimidated by any form of gardening. Vegetables in particular have been grown since time in memoriam. From what I understand, the human brain has since increased in size, which means we are now even smarter. Consequently, there is absolutely no reason to think you cannot grow vegetables successfully.

### ***Planning and organization are crucial to success***

As I’ve often mentioned, planning carefully and getting organized are the crucial elements in gardening well. Spend some time deciding how much time you have to garden and accordingly, how big a garden you will create. Will you be gardening alone or will you have help? Be realistic. Consider the number of people you hope to feed as well as how open they may or may not be to eating lots of veggies. If you’d like to encourage picky eaters, you want to coax them gently in small doses. Plan on growing more of the favored vegetables and introduce just one or two new ones. Of course, you can most certainly indulge in all that you yourself would like to grow, but don’t assume the rest of the family will be supportive.

Start with a modest-sized garden, but set it up so you can expand if so desired in the future. Enthusiasm can make one over-ambitious; so do not begin by making as big a garden as possible. The upkeep can get frustrating, overwhelming and down right disheartening if things don’t go according to plan. Remember, in spite of all your hard work, nature rules. You must defer to the whims and vagaries of weather and pests. It’s nature’s way of stopping the gardener from getting too full of herself. So until you are fully comfortable with the work and risks involved, don’t take on more than you can chew. Pun intended!

### ***Research your chosen ones to determine space needs and structural needs***

Whichever vegetables you select to grow, find out as much as you can about them and their requirements. The more you learn, the better your chances of success. The amount of each type of plant needs to be estimated. How much space is each going to need? Do they scramble up trellises, sprawl on the ground or grow upright? You get the idea, I'm sure.

Factor in your vacation time. If the vegetables will be ready for picking when you're away, then what would be the point in growing them? Vegetable gardens require regular watering and vigilance, so be sure you have someone to oversee it when you do go away. Peace of mind makes for a good vacation.

Growing vegetables from seed is inexpensive and the selections are vast. You can experiment with all sorts of plants at very little cost. However, this means you must be agreeable to the extra labor of starting seeds indoors, transplanting them, etc. Certain seeds can be direct sown but need to be protected from birds and rodents. There is great satisfaction in growing from seed. But if you'd like to save yourself time and effort, by all means purchase young plants and get the potager going. Whatever works for you is the right decision. Gardening is not a competitive sport unless your ultimate goal is to raise the largest tomato or most grotesque squash.

Finally, accept that there will be some mistakes and failures. That is absolutely okay. In fact, it is inevitable. The beauty is that you needn't accept all the blame on yourself. There is that weather and those pests! And armed with what you've learned from the experience, you get to re-do next year.













