

Veggie Gardening Tricks Of The Trade

These are the little things that sometimes help the most – the practices handed down through the years that sometimes seem so new.

1. The good gardener is a good observer of plant growth. They learn the meaning of changes in leaf color. Snap beans are a great indicator of water stress. Leaves turn dark green, almost black when the plant is under water stress. They change color quickly when water is applied. The sunflower is also a good indicator of water stress. Droopy leaves will show up on it first.
2. Each vegetable has its minimum temperature at which it will not grow. The minimum for peas, 40°F; corn, 50°F; peppers and eggplant, 60°F. Optimum for growth is much higher.
3. Short day crops cannot be raised successfully in longer days. Spinach and Chinese cabbage are good examples. If the days lengthen beyond the 12 hours of the vernal equinox, these plants get a signal it's time to flower. Gardeners understand this influence of day length by crops bolting to seed before harvest.
4. A mulch beneath un-staked tomatoes, summer squash and cucumbers lessens the loss of fruit through rot. Tomatoes on damp soil invite bacteria to go to work. Muddy splashes of rain may start rot on lettuce.
5. Reflective panels of plywood covered with foil can mean the difference in crop maturity by directing extra light and heat into a spot of the garden.
6. Water stress can be useful in a vegetable garden, when trying to force a crop into ripening. Tomatoes, as they near harvest size, will ripen their fruits when put under water stress.
7. Grow more in a small garden by going vertical. Train vine crops on trellises, allow pumpkins and squash to run out over unused land.
8. Here is the nutritional value of garden crops for space used, listed from #1: carrots, potatoes, onions, beets, broccoli, cabbage, celery, winter squash, turnips, spinach, snap beans.
9. These vegetables tolerate partial shade: beets, cabbage, carrots, chives, kale, leeks, lettuce, mustard, green onions, parsley, radishes, Swiss chard and turnips.

10. The good gardener using a piece of ground for the first time will get the back history of that soil that is obtainable. The past will tell what the future needs.
11. The good gardener learns to enjoy hand weeding.
12. If the soil will not support a vegetable garden, the best answer is to use raised beds and bring in good soil for them. Raised beds warm up early and are ready for planting weeks before garden soils.
13. The good gardener uses all the available ground. When a crop is removed, they replant onion sets, radishes, leaf lettuce, cabbage plants, etc.
14. These vegetables may be grown in closely-spaced rows: carrots, beets, chives, leaf lettuce, mustard, green onions, radishes, and turnips. It is often easier to broadcast these seeds in wide, short rows.
15. These vegetables you may leave stored in the soil for the winter: carrots, beets, parsnips and salsify.
16. The good gardener practices intercropping – the planting of quick-growing crops inbetween or alongside slow-growing crops. Radishes can be planted alongside almost any vegetable and turnips may be broadcast between cabbages.