

Spring In



"She turned to the sunlight, and shook her yellow head,
and whispered to her neighbor: 'Winter is dead.'" A.A.

April 2017

Bountiful Beauties

Just as some fruits and vegetables need a cold season to produce the taste we desire, summer veggies need hot temps to deliver their bounty. Many plants straddle the seasons, and with proper care, will provide sustenance all year round. Other fruits and vegetables have their own peculiar habits and we will address these as well.



Warming to Vegetable Gardening?

I'm going to simplify vegetable planting by showing you the 3 different ways to plant fruits and veggies. We'll also discuss when to seed and when to seedling as well as how to protect tender lettuces and greens during the hottest part of the summer.

THE STRADDLERS

Kale, Swiss Chard, Spinach, Lettuce, Arugula, Mustard, Strawberries, Parsley, Thyme, Oregano, Rosemary, Sage, Mint

THE HOTTIES

Basil, Tomato, Peppers, Squash, Melon, Beans, Eggplant, Cucumber, Tarragon

THE SPECIALS

Artichoke, Asparagus, Blueberries, Blackberries/Raspberries

Summer vegetables include members of the night shade family: eggplant, pepper and tomatoes. Many members of this [Solanaceae](#) family are used as food and medicine but the species is rich in alkaloids which can be toxic to people and animals. The chemical compounds in these species have been said to cause everything from acne to arthritis. These alkaloids also put the buzz in our tobacco, the hot in our peppers, and the myth in our [mandrake](#).



*Don't get in over your head!
Know your planting depths.*



Man,
tomato...that's
deep.
Tomatoes want
planted so
deeply that we
remove the
first few
bottom
branches and
all the suckers
and then bury
them. This

gives the tomato a strong foundation to support the weight of all that fruit. Same goes for eggplant and peppers, but it is most important for tomatoes...which have a tendency to be leggy, but not in a good way.

Strawberries are king! That's why they wear the crown. Strawberries like to be planted above the surface. Make sure their crowns are not covered in soil.



Keep an even keel. All other plants want their original soil level to be kept even with their planting level. Make sure your entire garden soil surface is lightly tapped down and even. You don't want water to pool here and there or drain away, taking

TO SEED OR TO SEEDLING

SEEDS ARE CHEAPER THAN SEEDLINGS. SEEDS CAN BE TRACKED AND TRACED TO MAKE SURE THEY'RE ORGANIC, SEEDLINGS CANNOT (UNLESS THEY ARE HOPE GARDENS SEEDLINGS!). SEEDS TAKE LONGER TO GROW WHILE SEEDLINGS PROVIDE INSTANT-ISH GRATIFICATION.

Of course, it can't be that easy. Some plants germinate so easily it's ridiculous...looking at you carrot. Some take stratification and ancient rituals involving soaking them in water or putting them in the freezer. Still, seed starting and seed planting can be fun. And you get a gold star in the great gardening log in the sky. When planting seedlings we are mostly concerned with depth as discussed, and although you have to be careful about how deep you put seeds too, there are other concerns in regards to seed planting. Keep the soil moist while germinating seed. This is crucial. And thin your seedlings with a pair of [snips](#) rather than risking the whole operation by pulling them out. Pulling out one seedling can pull them all out. And a mistake I make all the time (trying to fit as much into my garden as possible): planting seed under shady plants. This might be a good idea with a seedling (plant short lettuce seedlings under tall tomato seedlings) but this is not a good idea for a seed. Seeds need HEAT to germinate so they cannot be in the shade of another plant.

Lettuces & Greens are easy to start from seed and can be sown directly into [prepared ground](#). Cucumber, squash, melon and beans too. Put 2 seeds in per hole and follow directions on the seed packet.

Nightshade plants, artichokes and berries should be grown by seedling. I have mixed success with herbs. Some say cilantro and parsley grow easily by seed; I myself have had luck with basil. But most of the time, I buy these as seedlings.

Asparagus is its own thing. They are grown by crowns. You may see a seedling in a store but do not be persuaded to buy it. Get the [whole asparagus story here](#).



THE HOTTIES

Tomatoes, Peppers, Melon, Squash, Cucumber, Eggplant, Pole Beans...all these veggies need supported. There are all kinds of supports, from handmade to store bought. I have a variety to look at [here](#), but experiment for yourself. Just keep the plants' branches and vines strong and their fruit off the ground. You will have to visit the garden every week to tie the plants to whatever support you choose.

I'D LIKE TO VOLUNTEER

Tomatoes often drop their fruit and vis a vis, their seeds. And wonderful wonderful nature takes these seeds and makes little plants in their wake. We call these volunteers. They can pop up anywhere and are often very hardy!



Fertilize

Tomatoes like a dose of bone meal and epsom salts in their soil. Peppers like epsom salt water sprayed right on their leaves. Everything like a spray or soil soak with liquid kelp and fish meal. Of course, the finest thing you can give your veggies is [compost](#). Don't fertilize vining plants until you see the whites of their eyes...that is to say, their fruit. If you give a watermelon, for example, fertilizer before it sets fruit, it will reward you with a long and lovely vine but no watermelon. So when it comes to hotties, don't start that positive reinforcement until you see some action.

Artichokes

These guys are actually easy to grow as long as you can give them lots of room - 5 feet around and regular water. Fertilize them with regular veggie fertilizer. They will produce 3-10 globes per plant, the largest ones being first. If you let them go, the artichokes turn into beautiful flowers. They will die back each year and return faithfully.

Berry Bonanza

Blueberries are super easy to grow. From a small shrub you can get a great harvest. They can be put in containers or in-ground, just give them some acid-y soil to grow in. Use an azalea mix or a [high-acid fertilizer](#). Sources say that 2 different varieties is the way to go as they cross-pollinate and that makes them better and there does seem to be some truth to that. The important thing in So Cal is to look for a Southern Highbush. See there's this thing called "[chill hours](#)" and you have to figure out how many chill hours your area receives and how many your plants need. Check this out for yourself as nurseries seem not to notice which is which for which area and you will go home with the wrong plant. But Southern Highbush will do ya in this neck of the woods. Consider [bird netting](#).

Blackberries and Raspberries are a little trickier. They have the same chill hour issue but they have this whole pruning issue that entire books are written about. It's not rocket science but can be confusing. They also must be in the ground as they tend to spread by underground runners. These berries need lots of sun and something to vine on. A trellis or teepee will be wonderful. They don't have special soil requirements but will require a fair amount of water in the hot summer months. You may also want to look for a thornless variety.

Plant beneficial plants like calendula.
These grow great from seed!



Every raspberry bush should have a view of a pool.



Play Midwife to Your Plants

You're more of a fertility doctor, but I like the holistic idea of a midwife better. Some plants need a little hand with fertilization and you get to hold their hand...or uh, their stamen. First, find a healthy female flower. That little fruit tells you this is a mother-to-be.



Then pull back her petals and inside you will see her lady parts, or carpel.



Then find yourself a suitable male. His flower has no fruit attached and should be open to the sun. You can pull back the petals to expose the stamen. Watch out for bees!

You should be able to see pollen right there on the stamen and that's the good stuff you want to impart on the carpel.



Cut this flower off to perform the procedure, but of course, leave the female flower attached to the plant. Gently rub the stamen all over and inside the carpel. You can do this with several of the plant's flowers and with any squash plant. A bee would normally perform this duty, but we all know the trouble we are having with bees! Make sure to plant plenty of flowers around your veggie garden to attract these fuzzy little cupids, and don't use any pesticides. I have installed [mason bee houses](#) around my property too. You can purchase them or make them yourself!



TENDER MERCIES

PROTECT YOUR
SEEDLINGS
FROM THE HARSH
SUMMER HEAT
WITH A DIY
GARDEN COVER

Supplies

2 - PVC pipe 10ft 1/2"
2 - PVC pipe 10ft 1"
8 - Galvanized Tube Straps (semi-circular brackets, comes in 4 packs)
16 - Screws 1/2" #8 wood
47% [Shade Cover](#)
12 [Clip-Its](#)
4 [Snap Clamps](#)
12 ground staples or fabric pins

Cut the 1-in PVC pipe into four 12-in pieces and the 1/2-in PVC pipes into 8-ft pieces.

Attach four 12-in pieces of 1-inch PVC pipe inside the bed: On the long sides, space pipes 4 ft apart, 2 ft from each end; screw on two tube straps to secure each pipe.

Then bend the long pieces to fit into the fixtures. If you have trouble bending them, leave them in the sun for awhile. Cut the shade cover leaving an extra foot on each side. Adhere to ground using the ground staples and clip-its. Use the snap clamps to keep the fabric on the hoops.

Choose seeds and seedlings that are healthy, seasonal and politically-conscious. Plant and harvest carefully. Go slowly. Pay attention. Be grateful and positive. All gardens have issues and there are NO black thumbs. Try and try again.

When putting in your garden, start with your big plants first. The tomatoes, peppers, eggplant and beans. Anything that needs a tall support. (I do still recommend growing peppers in containers. They like to have their roots restricted and they will last year after year in the same container.) Add melon, cucumbers and squash next, either on supports or let them roll off the side of the beds. If you do this, place straw, mulch or bricks under their fruit to keep them off the ground. Each

of these plants needs at least 2 feet around to grow and a container 12" deep. Next, add your larger greens, like kale and chard, and strawberries. Strawberries travel by runners and will find their own light amongst the garden plants. They can take up a kind of permanent residence in your garden. Next add lettuces, spinach, arugula and herbs. Herbs like rosemary, thyme, oregano, sage and tarragon will live permanently in your garden. Dill, cilantro, parsley and basil will

flower and die so use them up before they bolt. Remember mint lives in its own medium-sized container where it cannot take over the whole world. Too small a container and it will choke itself out. All of the above plants need at least a 9" deep container to grow in and want 6-12" around to thrive.

Last, but not least, put in your flowers. Put in some seedling and some seeds. An extensive list of flowers is in the [summer maintenance guide](#) and [here](#).



artichokes are seriously enormous