

MARCH 2010

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Grow Your Own

Imagine if the vegetables on your plate were from your own garden. An edible garden is a great way to enjoy fresh produce and trim your grocery bill.

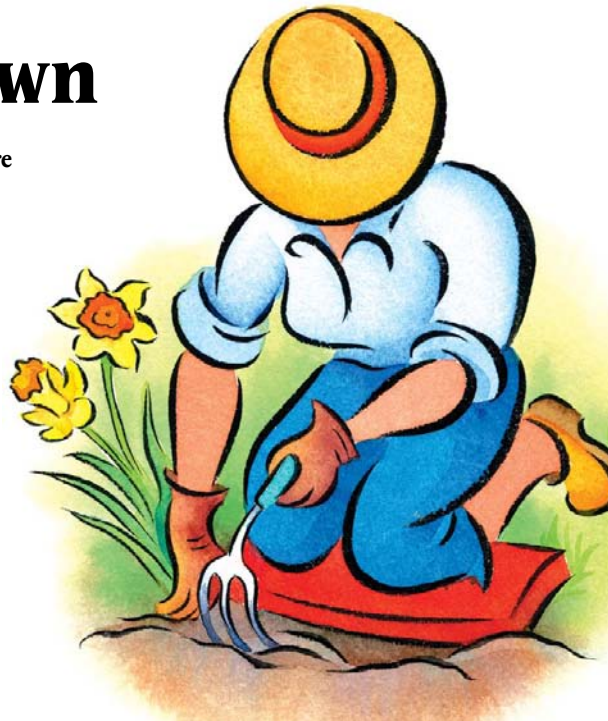
With a little planning, a vegetable garden can sprout with your loving care, whether you use a community pea patch or your back yard. Here are some basics:

Supply: The right tools, including spades, gloves, watering can and hoses, can make gardening easier. You'll also want fertilizer and quality soil, plus a kit to test for soil pH (most vegetables need a 6.0-6.8 pH). Need advice? Consult your local nursery or online resources.

Plan: Decide which crops you'd like to grow. Research when to plant, how much room they need, drainage, and other requirements. Purchase quality seeds or small starter plants. If your green thumb is new, start with easy-care plants, such as beets, onions and peas.

Tip: Other crops that tolerate low temperatures include broccoli, cabbage, lettuce, radishes, spinach, and turnips, according to Canadian Gardening.com. The best bet for pots (container gardening) are salad greens, lettuce, herbs, tomatoes, peppers and Swiss chard.

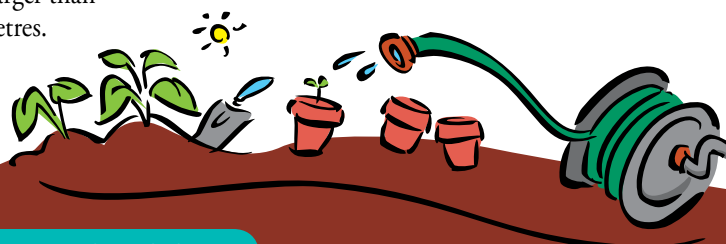
Plant: Start with a plot no larger than 8 by 10 feet or 2.44 by 3.05 metres.



Choose a sunny area – most vegetables need at least 8 hours of direct sunlight daily.

Maintain: Water daily. Wilting is a sign of possible over- or under-watering. Feed your plants regularly, as soil nutrients decompose. Use natural pesticides, netting or other barriers to protect your plants.

A vegetable garden is part of a healthful lifestyle – good for your health, your wallet and the environment.



MARCH GOAL

To coordinate family time, post a large calendar in plain sight for everyone to record activities.

HEALTH notes

■ **What's your attitude toward safety and wellness?** These important elements are essential to good health. When your co-workers see you following safety guidelines, taking the stairs, wearing protective gear and exercising during break times, they're likely to follow suit. Your attitude could be contagious — and that's a good thing!

■ **Gene screen?** One of the latest fads is the do-it-yourself genetics test to assess your risk for certain diseases. But it's unclear which, if any, of these tests actually provide any useful information – more research is needed to know for sure. *Bottom line:* Many of these tests are expensive and unproven. Consult your provider about well-established genetic tests.

■ **Attention parents:** Lap rides for your toddler on slides can be unsafe. Researchers found that 13.8% of the tibia fractures among children admitted to a New York hospital occurred when the child's leg twisted or became stuck during a trip down a slide on a parent's lap. If your toddler wants to slide, help them up the ladder and hold their hand while guiding them down the slide. Kids are ready to slide by themselves when they can confidently climb ladders and stay seated while they descend.

■ **Vitamin D may build strong hearts, too.** Salt Lake City (U.S.) researchers tested vitamin D levels of 27,686 patients age 50 and older. Those with very low levels (less than 15 ng/ml) were 45% more likely to get heart disease and had a 78% greater chance of having a stroke than participants with normal levels. More than 30 ng/ml of vitamin D is considered normal.



Comforting with Food

It's not uncommon to reach for familiar foods when we feel stressed or upset. But comfort foods are often high in calories and fat.

The good news is, you can have your comfort food – and eat it too – with lighter alternatives. Here are some examples from Charles Stuart Platkin, the Diet Detective:

- ▷ Instead of ¼ slice of 8-in./20 cm **apple pie** (350 cal/14g fat), try 1 **baked apple** (100 cal/0g fat).
- ▷ Instead of 2 oz./57 g of **brownies** (227 cal/9g fat), try ½ cup/125 ml of **fat-free chocolate pudding** (130 cal/0 fat).
- ▷ Instead of a 1.5-oz./43 g **donut** (310 cal/19g fat) try a 1.5-oz./43 g **low fat muffin** (160 cal/2g fat).

More tips:

Think before you eat. Give yourself 15 minutes before you reach for the home made chocolate chip cookies or your favorite potato chips.

Write it down. Keeping a journal of your negative feelings and noting the circumstances when you reach for food (other than hunger) can help you identify your triggers. Writing allows you to express your emotions privately and healthfully.

Avoid temptation. Don't carry change for the vending machine, and ignore those coffee room donuts.

Understand how food comforts you. Some treats, such as chocolate, cause your body to release small amounts of mood-boosting hormones. Over time, you may come to associate a particular food with feeling better.

Exercise. Staying fit will help you handle stressful situations better. And unlike comfort foods, physical activity burns rather than adds calories.

Final thought: Changing habits takes time, so be patient with yourself.

Overcoming Exercise Plateaus

If you're regularly exercising but no longer getting the results you used to – continued weight loss, for example – you may be stuck on an exercise plateau. It can happen if you repeatedly do the same activity. Your body becomes more efficient at performing the routine, and adapts to the repetitive training.

The remedy? Challenge yourself. Exercise scientists recommend changing your routine every 2 weeks. Here are some suggestions:

Change your workout routine every couple of weeks. For example:

Week 1-2: Jog and strength train; focus on your arms.

Week 3-4: Sprint-jog-walk every other day.

Week 5-6: Do water aerobics or swim laps.

Week 7-8: Try your gym's spinning class.

Varying your routine can help you avoid plateaus. And a variety of activities helps keep boredom at bay.

Change your workout intensity. Run or walk up a hill instead of on flat ground or add an incline to a treadmill workout. If you are weight training, choose a variety of exercises and work all the

muscle groups. Another way to change intensity is to add more time to your workouts.

Safety first: Talk to your health care provider before starting a new exercise program if you're sedentary or have a chronic condition, such as heart disease or type 2 diabetes.

It may be hard to stray from a predictable, comfortable routine, but small changes can produce big results – physically and mentally.



Avoid Boomer-itis

Middle age often brings changes and the nagging feeling that our bodies are slowing down and don't handle the demands of exercise the way they used to. Exercise can add years to our lives. Yet as we age, we are also at greater risk for injury.

So if you're a baby boomer, it pays to take extra precautions when you exercise or participate in sports.

- Get your health care provider's okay before *significantly* increasing your exercise intensity or duration, especially if you have back or joint problems.
- Not used to regular physical activity? Start with 10-minute segments of activity and gradually increase your exercise time over several weeks.
- Develop a fitness program with cardio, strength training and stretching.
- With your health care provider's okay, take calcium and vitamin D supplements daily to strengthen bones and lower your risk for fractures. Osteoporosis Canada recommends 1,500 mg of

calcium and at least 800 IUs of vitamin D each day for adults over 50.

Listen to your body. Don't exercise if you have pain or discomfort. Adjust your activities to your needs and abilities.

What About Stretching?

As you grow older, you tend to lose flexibility, in part as a result of inactivity. Stretching improves flexibility and mobility. However, it's best as a cool-down activity, or at least after 10 to 15 minutes of low-intensity aerobic exercise, when your muscles are warm. Short on time? Gently stretch after your shower or after soaking in a hot bath. When stretching, gently hold your position while exhaling. Don't strain or pull a muscle too far. And don't bounce during the stretch. Hold each stretch for 10 to 30 seconds.



Headaches



Nearly everyone gets headaches, the majority of which are classified as “tension”. Researchers now believe tension headaches are caused by changes in brain chemicals. Many factors, including stress and certain foods, can trigger both tension and migraine headaches.

Regardless of your headache type or frequency, you don’t have to live with the discomfort. You can learn to manage the pain and even prevent many headaches from starting in the first place.

ANSWERS

1. The majority of headaches are tension-type.

- True
- False

2. Migraine headaches are often mistaken by headache sufferers for sinus headaches.

- True
- False

3. Which of these is considered a headache trigger?

- a. stress
- b. citrus fruit
- c. lentils
- d. dehydration

4. Underuse of pain relievers can produce rebound headaches.

- True
- False

5. Which of these conditions can cause headache pain?

- a. laughing too hard
- b. teeth grinding (bruxism)
- c. eating too many carbohydrates
- d. none of the above

1. *True.* Tension-type headaches generally cause mild to moderate pain. Many sufferers describe it as a tight band around their head.

2. *True.* Many people who believe they have a sinus headache actually have a tension headache or a migraine, according to the Mayo Clinic. Migraines may be misidentified as sinus headaches because the two can have similar symptoms.

3. *a, b, c and d.* Other triggers include chocolate, ripened cheeses, processed and cured meats, alcohol (especially red wine), nuts, peas and strong chemicals or odours.

4. *False.* Overusing pain relievers can cause rebound headaches. Rebound (medication-overuse) headaches may occur if you use headache pain relievers more than a couple of days a week, possibly as your body is adapting to the medication. Take medicines only as directed. If you are having more frequent or severe headaches, see your health care provider.

5. *b.* If you tend to grind your teeth (bruxism), consult your dentist, who may prescribe a mouth guard. Worn on the upper teeth during sleep, it can reduce the muscle tension that causes headache or jaw pain.

Safe Lifting

Lifting and carrying heavy objects can cause injuries to the back, legs or arms. No matter what you’re hauling, remember to think before you lift:

1. Plan ahead before you lift.

- Clear the path of obstacles.
- If the load is heavy or awkward, get someone’s help or use moving equipment. Coordinate and communicate to avoid confusion.
- When moving an object above your shoulders, use a step stool to avoid straining your arms and back.
- Check for sharp edges or other hazards before you lift.

2. Use proper form when lifting.

- Tuck in your chin and use your abdominal muscles to hold your back as straight as possible. Keep your feet firmly planted.
- Get a good grip on the object and carry it close to your body.
- Do not twist your back. This can cause back strain.
- Take most of the demand off your back by using the “power” of your leg muscles.
- For balance, keep feet shoulder-width apart and take short steps when carrying.
- Raise and lower to the ground by bending your knees.

3. Double-check before lowering the object.

- Make sure the area is clear of hands and feet before setting the object down.
- If you’re placing the object on a bench or shelf, put it on the edge and then push it into the desired position.

Make safe lifting a habit. Your back will thank you!



Q: Dry mouth causes? By: Elizabeth Smoots, MD, FAAFP

A: Almost everyone has experienced a dry mouth when they’re anxious. But frequent dry mouth could mean your salivary glands aren’t producing adequate saliva. This condition is *xerostomia*, and it can lead to trouble tasting and swallowing and an increased risk of tooth decay. Persistent dry mouth should be evaluated by your health care provider.

Reduced saliva can be caused by:

Health conditions. Your mouth can dry out from snoring, breathing with your mouth open, or using

tobacco. Decreased saliva production is associated with injuries to the head or neck and disorders such as diabetes, AIDS and Parkinson’s disease.

Treatment side effects. Several medicines can produce dry mouth. These include medicines used to treat high blood pressure, depression, anxiety, diarrhea, muscle spasm, urinary incontinence (leakage), and Parkinson’s disease. And cancer chemotherapy or radiation can change the amount and thickness of saliva.

Keep those questions and suggestions coming!

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High Five for Fibre

Why do we need fibre? Studies strongly support fibre's role in reducing heart disease risk. In addition to improving blood pressure and cholesterol levels, getting your daily fibre may help you prevent or control diabetes, weight gain, constipation and bowel disorders.

Do children need fibre? High-fibre foods promote better digestion and regularity in growing children. Serving these foods to kids also helps them establish good eating habits that may reduce their risk of certain conditions later in life.

How much fibre do we need? The amount varies with age and gender:

| AGE | FIBRE GRAMS PER DAY |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| Children 1-3 years | 19 |
| Children 4-8 years | 25 |
| Males 9-13 years | 31 |
| Females 9-13 years | 26 |
| Males 14-50 years | 38 |
| Females 14-50 years | 25 |
| Males 50+ | 30 |
| Females 50+ | 21 |

What are some easy ways to add more fibre daily? Your best sources are vegetables, fruit, legumes, and whole-grain products. Try these ideas:

Start with breakfast. Choose from whole-grain cereals, breads and muffins; buy products with at least 4 grams of fibre per serving. Always include fruit – fresh, frozen or canned.



Whole grains are high in fibre. Whole-grain products include rice mixes, cereals, breads, crackers, pasta and even chips.

Children favour basic fruits and vegetables. Serve these daily: carrots, corn, beans, peas, apples, oranges, raisins, bananas and melons. (Try the high-fibre Easy Pita Pizza at right.)

Experiment. Switch to brown rice. Try easy-to-cook barley or bulgur side dishes. Add fibre-rich beans to home made burritos, salads and soups.

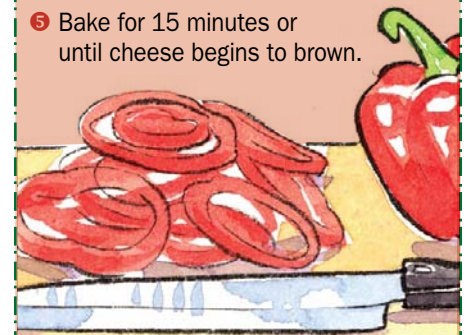
Note: As you increase fibre intake, drink plenty of fluids. Fibre acts as a bulking agent by absorbing some of the fluid in your body. Extra fluids will prevent you from becoming dehydrated. Most importantly, they help that bulk move merrily on its way.

Recipe of the Month

Easy Pita Pizza

- 1 7-in./43 cm round of **100% whole-grain pita bread**, uncut
 - 4 oz./125 ml **low-sodium spaghetti sauce**
 - 1 oz./28 g **part-skim mozzarella cheese**
- Assorted **chopped veggies**

- 1 Preheat oven to 350°F/175°C and put pita bread on cookie sheet or perforated pizza pan.
- 2 Cover pita bread with spaghetti sauce and top with cheese.
- 3 Add as many vegetables as will fit on the pizza. If using chopped fresh spinach, put spinach under cheese so it won't dry out.
- 4 Drizzle with a little olive oil (optional).
- 5 Bake for 15 minutes or until cheese begins to brown.



Nutrition Facts

Makes 1, 1-person pizza.

| Amount Per Serving | Calories | 390 |
|--------------------|--------------|-------|
| | Protein | 22g |
| | Total Fat | 8.1g |
| | Carbohydrate | 60g |
| | Fibre | 11g |
| | Sodium | 530mg |

Recipe courtesy of Cynthia Harriman/Whole Grains Council. ©2009