

# VILLAGE VIEW

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How would you like to save between \$500 and \$600 on this year's grocery bill? You would? Well, it's possible, but not without some work on your part, of course.

What's involved is a vegetable garden and, although after the initial preparation, not arduous, it does take time and attention. At also takes planning. You may believe you have no space for a garden, but unless you live in a condominium or a rental apartment, you could probably find space even if it meant digging up part of your lawn.

For best results, the first step is to turn over the soil. That's the hardest part of making a garden; it means digging. And if you're making a garden where there's been no garden before, you'll be wise to double dig, a technique that provides the most productive garden.

For starters, you'll need a good spade, a wheelbarrow and a staked-out garden at least 20 feet square. To double-dig make a trench the width and depth of your spade along one side of the garden, and load the soil from the trench into your wheelbarrow. If it won't all fit into the wheelbarrow, dump it on the opposite edge of your plot. Then repeat the process in the same trench, removing a second layer of soil the depth and width of your spade.

You don't have to do this job all in one day; do a little at a time whenever the ground isn't frozen. Once you've accomplished this task, the worst is over.

Start to widen the trench by a second spade-width, but

this time put the first layer into the first trench, and the second layer on top. If you have some compost on hand, spread a layer between the two diggings. Work across the garden to where you've piled the earth from the initial trench. Fill the last trench with the soil you removed from the first one, and you've got a well-prepared garden.

As you work, of course, you'll remove stumps and roots and any large stones leaving your garden soil soft and friable. If the earth is very sandy, you'll want to mix in some peat moss as well as the compost. And finally you'll be wise to spread some well-rotted manure or fertilizer on the surface and allow the garden to weather several weeks while you await warm weather before planting seed or transplanting nursery-grown seedlings.

Between spells of digging, when you're not soaking aching muscles, read the seed catalogs that are as common this time of year as Christmas catalogs are in September and October. Studying them will help keep your enthusiasm for vegetable gardening at peak. Whenever you feel discouraged, remind yourself of the \$500 or \$600 you'll be saving when you begin to harvest your crops. Potatoes at \$1.49 for ten pounds, tomatoes at \$.69 a pound, cauliflower at \$1.39 a head can make savings add up fast.

Some of the easiest vegetables to grow in the home garden include green beans, butternut squash, peppers, tomatoes, cucumbers, carrots, lettuce, onions, radishes and potatoes. Choose those your family enjoys most because you won't have room in a garden as small as 20 by 20 feet to grow them all.

Green beans grow on two different types of plants: bush and pole. Bush beans are prolific producers; a 20' row should yield about ten pounds of beans. If you sow seed every couple of weeks, you'll have a continuing crop beginning about 50 days from your first planting until frost. A 70-cent package of seeds will give you a 20' row.

Plant butternut squash on the south side of your garden and make sure there's plenty of free space for the vines to spread over the surrounding area. Squash vines will grow toward the sun and take up most of the space in your garden if you fail to heed this advice. Baked, boiled or in pies, squash is delicious. It makes good bread too. For 69 cents you will get ten hills and should harvest at summer's end more than enough to feed the family until after Thanksgiving.

Peppers, green or red, need a warm growing season and cannot tolerate frost. Start seeds indoors six to eight weeks before planting date (figure on planting around the first of June), and by the first week of August six or eight plants will be supplying you with peppers. If your crop is larger than you can readily use, slice or chop them and freeze in small plastic bags.

Tomatoes come in so many varieties it's hard to choose among them, but no vegetable garden worthy of the name is without six or eight tomato plants. Start seeds inside about the same time you pot your pepper plants. Plan to begin harvesting 45 to 70 days after setting out in the garden after all danger of frost is past. Tomatoes are heavy feeders, will need adequate water and require fertilizer to produce good crops. For less than a dollar, you can start 30 plants. Set the ten sturdiest in the garden for bushels of love apples.

One packet of cucumber seed will sow a row 25 feet long and costs 70 to 80 cents. Like squash, cucumbers will spread over a wide area, so give them space to stretch their vines by sowing the seeds on the west side of your garden. Most varieties mature in 60 days or less. Sow after the soil has warmed up. Your seed will germinate faster if you soak it overnight in warm water and plant 1" deep.

Carrots like lots of water and grow best at temperatures between 60 and 70 degrees. Plant early and mark the rows with radish seeds which will sprout quickly. Allow a full 12" for a row of carrots and thin to 2" apart. A 60 cent packet will give you a row 15' long. Start a second planting in August; you can harvest them all winter long if you mulch heavily before the ground freezes.

Leaf lettuce is a cool-weather crop; sow seed as early as possible in the spring. Head lettuce should be started in a cold frame and transplanted to the garden early so it can head up before hot weather. Reseed in late summer for a fall crop.

Onions are another early-into-the-ground vegetable. Sow seed 1/4" deep and thin to 4" apart. For well under a dollar, you can buy enough seed for a 20' row of onions. When onion tops fall down they are ready for harvest. Store in a cool dry place until needed.

To complete the salad bowl, radishes are indispensable. They will usually be the first crop your garden produces, ready in less than a month. Seed them thinly and seed them early in rich soil, four times as deep as the thickness of one seed. If sown too thickly, they'll be spindly.

The easiest way to grow potatoes is to plant sets. Sets are potatoes cut into pieces containing just the right amount of potato for perfect germination. Many sets on the market have been treated against soil-borne diseases and with a growth stimulator. Plant in hills two feet apart. Potatoes can also be grown in a trench filled with leaves. Just drop the sets into a six inch trench in rich soil and mulch with last year's leaves. The plants will produce plenty of spuds for baking, boiling, mashing and frying. Be careful not to injure them when spading up, and avoid allowing the sun to shine on the tubers. Sun scaled produces a mild toxin characterized by a green cast on the potato skin. Keep 'em covered with soil or a heavy blanket of leaves.

If by any chance time hangs heavy on your hands during summer months, or if you're serious about saving money on groceries, grow your own vegetables this summer. Once you've gotten your garden ready, and harvested your produce from June's lettuce to September's butternut squash, you'll continue, year after year. Even octogenarians can handle a small vegetable garden, though they may be past the age for double-digging. Let the younger generations do the spade-work in return for a generous share of the harvest.