KPOV – *The Point*

Gardening: Get Good At It

“Saving Money By Starting Vegetable Seeds”

February 16, 2021

Occasionally I’m asked if I start vegetables in my garden to save money at the grocery store? Everyone is looking for ways to cut expenses with today’s economy and the pandemic, and it’s nice to know where your food originated.

I guess the real question is “can growing a garden have the potential to reduce the amount of money spent on groceries?” Short answer is YES but it depends on the costs involved in growing the crops, types and amounts of vegetables grown and yields from the garden.

If you want to read a humorous account of one person’s effort to plant a perfect garden, I suggest “The $64 Tomato” by William Alexander. Costs add up quickly when you include tools, equipment and compost to the cost of the seed packet. The trick to saving money with a vegetable garden is limiting the costs while maximizing yield.

Here are a few basic tips that might help you garden smartly and lower your grocery bill:

First, the location of the vegetable garden is crucial. Nearly all vegetables need full-sun and a well-drained soil. The vegetable garden should also be located near a source of water.

Secondly, Central Oregon’s climate makes some vegetables more challenging to grow. Cool season vegetables like carrots, lettuce and beets can be directly planted in early spring and harvested by mid-summer. Some of the cool season vegetables, like broccoli, actually do better if started indoors earlier and then transplanted out. This is due to our short growing season. Warm season crops do best if started indoors and transplanted out after the danger of frost has passed. Resources are available on our website to help select the best varieties for our area.

With proper planning, it’s possible to grow two or three crops in a given area during the growing season. Using the same space for two or more crops is called succession planting. Other techniques, such as interplanting and companion planting, are other ways to make efficient use of garden space. The more efficiently you use garden space and resources the larger the potential savings.

Next, select vegetables you like and you know you and your family will eat. Planting a vast number of vegetables and not knowing what to do with them is a waste of time and money.

Selecting vegetables that have a long storage life or that can easily be canned or frozen is a great way to stretch your grocery dollar. OSU Extension offers classes in food preservation. Check on their website for availability.

Consider vegetables like beans, spinach, summer squash, lettuce and peas. These vegetables provide the biggest returns on your investment of space and time in the garden.

Another important step is to do some research and start with a plan. Decide what you want to grow and determine what will be necessary to be successful. Plan the garden on paper first. Use local resources to keep your garden growing successfully.

Consider ways to reduce your inputs. Add compost and well-rotted manure to the garden to improve the soil and reduce the use of fertilizers. Practice the principles of Integrated Pest Management to control insects and diseases, reducing your reliance on pesticides. Start with high quality seeds – most can be stored for at least one or two years. Remember that saving money with vegetables usually means keeping the costs as low as possible while still growing productive plants.

Start small. Like many things, gardening takes practice. Plants will require regular watering, maintenance and harvesting. Limit yourself to just a few types of vegetables the first year. When you become more confident in your abilities and resources, you can increase the size of your vegetable garden and grow a wider variety of crops.

Finally, have fun growing your own vegetables. It’s surprising how something as simple as a vegetable garden can impact your life...and hopefully your pocketbook as well!

For answers to all your gardening questions, please visit our website: Gocomga.com and click on the KPOV tab on the orange bar. This has been Gardening: Get Good At It.

Resources:

<https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/em9128> - Growing Vegetables in Central Oregon

<https://extension.oregonstate.edu/deschutes/food-safety-preservation-central-oregon>

<https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/em9027> - Growing Your own

<https://extension.oregonstate.edu/news/save-money-starting-vegetable-seeds-home>