

# Garden tips:

## Common sense approach for the home-gardener

Your common sense tells you that every item in the seed catalogues can't possibly be bigger, tastier, juicier or otherwise better than everything that came before it. But how do you decide which seeds or plants to order?

One guide to choosing vegetable varieties for Michigan is the list of recommended varieties put out by the Michigan Cooperative Extension Service (CES). The varieties on this list have been tested and found to grow well in Michigan. Most of them have some tolerance or resistance to common garden diseases.

If you're a seasoned gardener, you have your own experience to draw from. You probably have some old favorites. Stick with them. But don't hesitate to try some of the newer varieties on a small scale.

If you're a first-timer, begin with a list of family likes and dislikes. There's no point in growing broccoli if your family wouldn't touch it with the proverbial 10-foot pole.

Use standard tables of typical

yields to figure out how much seed you need to grow various crops in quantities you think you could use, process or store. The CES bulletin on vegetable gardening, available from your county CES office, contains this and much other useful gardening information.

When planning your garden, take into consideration how much time you'll have for gardening, canning and freezing, the availability of storage or freezer space and your skill in home food processing. Canning, especially, is time-consuming.

You can avoid being overwhelmed by mountains of food by planting early, mid-season and late varieties of some crops to spread out the harvest a bit. You can also plant quick-maturing crops several times to get many small harvests rather than one large one.

Some varieties of fruits and vegetables are better for canning and freezing than others. Think about how you'll want to use your produce, and choose varieties suited to that use.

Some varieties mature more

quickly than others. Take this into consideration when choosing seeds and plants. The best variety in the world will be worthless to you if the growing season in your area isn't long enough to allow it to mature.

If garden space is limited, you'll probably want to grow crops that will give you the most yield for the least investment in space. Cucumbers, melons, potatoes and squash tend to straggle over a large area. Peas, dry beans and corn have to be planted in fairly large areas to get enough produce to bother with.

Radishes, leaf lettuce, herbs, onions, tomatoes, pole beans and many other crops may be grown in containers, in little clearings in a flower bed, in borders along a sidewalk or driveway, or in a small, conventional garden plot. If squash is a family favorite, take advantage of compact bush varieties to make the most of the space you have.

When planning vegetables for eating, consider their ornamental value as well. Purple-podded beans, lacy-leaved parsley, flowering cabbage, red, green and yellow peppers, and many other vegetables can be attractive additions to the planted areas around your home.

Miniature and giant varieties are novel, but if you're gardening for food rather than fun, avoid them, especially if space is limited. Miniature vegetables take as much care and often as much space as standard-sized varieties but give less return for your labors. Giant varieties take a lot of care and space and often are not very good eating.

# Spas become reachable

The past few years have seen spas come within reach of far more people than could ever have considered visiting one of the world's most-famous resorts "for the waters."

The National Swimming Pool Institute reports that home spas - miniature swimming pools in which the water can be temperature-controlled and agitated - are now attracting a great deal of attention in various parts of the country.

California, where these new spas first surfaced, is swirling in them, and sprinkling numbers are appearing all the way east to the Atlantic coast.

Home spas sometimes called hydrotherapy spas are widely

recommended and used for the treatment of aches and tension.

They are enthusiastically endorsed by users, many of whom have obtained their own home spas "simply because they are extremely enjoyable," an NSPI spokesman says.

Many of the first families to buy home spas have been those who earlier had a home pool built in their backyard.

Spas, NSPI anticipates, will continue to become more popular as more and more pool builders begin installing them.

Spas large enough for a family can be easily installed and, with proper landscaping, make an attractive addition to the home.

# A word about worms

An absence of earthworms in lawn and garden soil can be an indicator of low soil fertility.

Scientists believe that earthworms flourish in well-drained soils of good fertility, and that, although they have other benefits, they do not increase fertility.

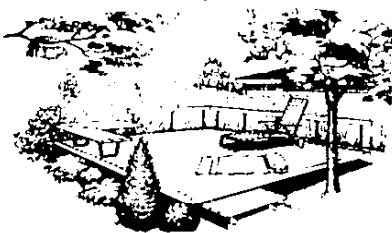
Earthworms do aid in converting organic matter to humus, thus helping improve soil tilth. Their tunnels, or burrows, help aerate compacted soil, and im-

prove water movement, according to The Fertilizer Institute.

But evidence indicates that instead of increasing soil fertility, earthworms serve to decrease nutrient content slightly as they digest nutrients which pass through their systems.

So, if lawn and garden soil is low in earthworm numbers, soil fertility is likely low also—a good indication that additional fertilizers are necessary for desired plant growth.

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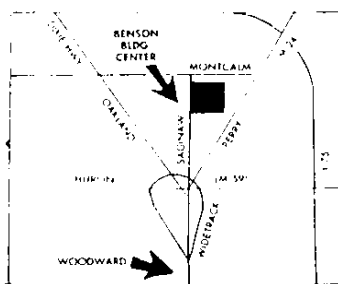


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