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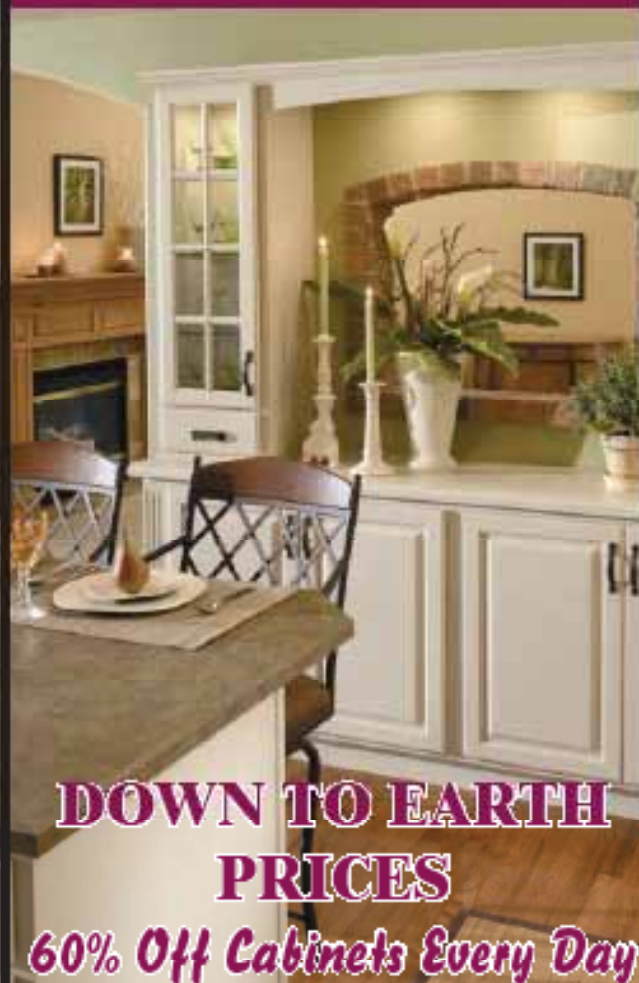
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Just about anything can be used to start seeds for a vegetable garden. The trick is to have your cans and jars ready and organized so when the weather is just right, you won't miss out on prime growing time.

(Photo courtesy University of Maryland Extension)

Plan to grow great food

With so many opportunities for restarts, not many chores are as forgiving as growing a vegetable garden.

Story by Sean Clougherty

One of the mantras floating around motivational office decorations, "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail," has application in the gardening world, too.

Growing vegetables in your backyard is loaded with second chances.

You can plant new plants or seeds if the first set doesn't make it, you can abandon one crop in favor of another if a problem comes in and then there's always next year, right?

But, by getting a few things in

order and on paper before you get your hands dirty, you'll likely reap the rewards as your garden grows.

Even though we are midway through spring, there's still plenty of time to get a plan together, says Talbot County Master Gardener Carol Bean and University of Maryland Extension Horticulturist Heather Buritsch.

"There's lots you can do right now," says Bean, who grows about an acre's worth of vegetables on Pot Pie Farm in Wittman and sells at the St. Michaels Farmers' Market. "It seems like you go through this period in the

spring when I'm just twittling my thumbs and that is the best time to be thinking about it."

In the winter months, Bean keeps the garden spirit going by looking through seed catalogs to find out what will be new this year and start thinking about what to order.

"I pick everything I want out of the seed catalog when I'm snowed in and then I whittle it down," she says.

One thing that helps in her decision making is the the narrative some companies give plant varieties — where they originated, who developed the variety or other curious information.

"They have a story behind them. I think that's what's interesting about them," adds Bean.

Bean also reviews her records from the previous season, thinking about where each crop will go.

How much of each crop you should plant is also a decision that takes some consideration.

It's good to know about how much you will likely get from a plant or a row of plants to best meet your needs.

"People just don't realize just how much zucchini they're going to get from one plant," said Buritsch. "They put out a lot of food."

Each crop has its own spacing recommendations, and knowing how much space you'll need for each crop will help form your total garden needs.

"People think because you get them in these little cell packs that you're supposed to plant them that close together, too," Buritsch adds.

The UME Home and Gar-



Lettuce is an ideal crop to start with in a vegetable garden. With several different colors, it works well into an edible landscape around buildings.

(Photo courtesy University of Maryland Extension)

den Information Center has great resources available at www.hgic.umd.edu, with recommendations for everything from planting depth to how many feet of row per plant per person.

It also has a hotline, 800-342-2507, staffed by Maryland Master Gardeners where anyone can call with horticultural questions.

"I'm sure I've made every beginner's mistake in the book. That's



Nothing gets more local than food grown in your own backyard, but it doesn't happen without thinking through the growing season and choosing the best places to plant your crops.

(Photo courtesy University of Maryland Extension)

just part of the process,” Bean says. “There’s a lot more than what I can keep in my head and that’s why the Cooperative Extension office is such a great resource.”

Think about pairing crops or planting groups of crops together that will help one another as they grow. Tomatoes and carrots is one pair, Buritsch said, potatoes and snap beans are another.

For beginners, Buritsch also suggests taking time to think about where in your yard is best to plant.

With two young children, she said she usually reserves some space

close to the house for a few plants to get special attention.

“Things that are closer to our deck we’re probably going to tend to more than going all the way to the garden,” she said.

Bean said there are plenty of opportunities to work vegetable plants in with existing landscaping plants and vice versa.

“A garden is alive,” she said. “You want it to be vibrant. It’s about having an environment out here where things want to grow.”

While mulling over all of those details, make sure you get your soil

tested where you plan to plant. Test results will tell you which nutrients are deficient, which are in excess and give a clearer picture of how to get the soil in the right condition.

Buritsch recommends testing for lead especially and other heavy metals that may be in the soil. The HGIC also has a directory of soil test labs in the state.

“Unless there’s a backup at the lab, you’ll usually get results in two weeks,” Buritsch says.

Bean has been utilizing raised beds for much of her vegetables. She mounds up (PAGE 41)



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Shasta daisies prefer full sunlight all day long, but they do need protection from the wind.

Cutting flowers regularly will encourage additional growth of the plant.

Aphids, slugs, earwigs and chrysanthemum eelworms can cause problems for Shasta daisies.



Water them regularly, but do not overwater.

Apply a complete plant food when growth appears in the spring, and a liquid fertilizer in the fall to encourage better blooms.

Shasta daisies should be planted in soils that have been enriched and have good drainage.

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Spring into color

Spice up the garden with vibrant hues, now that the ground freeze is done.

Story by Carol Kinsley

After what seems like an extra-long winter — with piles of dirty snow remaining well into March — who wouldn't be enticed by retailers' colorful displays of packaged summer bulbs to brighten your garden?

Unlike bulbs that are planted in the fall and flower in the spring, such as jonquils and tulips, tender perennial bulbs such as cannas, dahlias, gladiola, gloriosa lilies and tuberose don't need a cold period to reset their biological clock and are not winter hardy in this area.

Some gardeners dig up these bulbs, tubers and corms for storage through the winter; others start with fresh bulbs each spring. Prices are comparable to some annuals.

Hardier bulbs such as lilies, lilies-of-the-valley and alstroemerias can be planted now that the risk of the ground freezing has passed.

Hold off on planting the more tender bulbs — cannas, dahlias and elephant ears — until the soil has warmed to 60 degrees.

You can start bulbs indoors and transplant them when the soil has warmed up.



Caladiums are grown mostly for their impressive foliage, and like begonias, do well in some shade.

(Photo courtesy Classic Caladiums, www.classicalcaladiumsllc.com)

Most bulbs need at least four hours of sunlight a day; others do well in half or even full shade.

Even the sun-lovers will ap-

preciate some shade in the hottest part of the day.

Most bulbs also need a well-drained site, although there are some, such as caladiums and gin-