

Land Conservation Tips for New Gardeners

By Carrie Spencer

Gardening is one of the greatest pastimes you can have. Not only does growing your own food reduce your family's grocery budget, but gardening also works to enrich the soil, and, with the right plan, can even benefit local wildlife.

[Natural Land Institute](#) touches on a few important points that home gardeners can keep in mind as they plan and plant each season.

How to Choose Garden Spot

Choosing the right garden plot is a challenge for many novice gardeners. [Gardening Know How](#) suggests making sure it's convenient and gets plenty of sun. You'll also need to pay close attention to drainage, and your garden should be slightly higher than the surrounding ground or on a small slope so that it does not become waterlogged. You'll also want to pick a location that's protected from deer, and if you don't already have a fenced-in yard, it might be a good idea to find a [fencing contractor near you](#) to install one to keep your new garden safe. Depending on the extent of the installation or repair you need, as well as the fencing material you prefer, you may be looking at an average cost of about \$4,500 with labor at somewhere between \$30 and \$50 per hour.

Keeping the Soil Enriched

A successful garden starts with good soil. There are many soil management practices that will keep vitamins and nutrients in the dirt. You can use fertilizer, such as manure, or plant cover crops, like ryegrass. PennState Extension explains that fall cover crops will smother weeds, which will make next year's garden that much easier to cultivate. (<https://extension.psu.edu/soil-management-in-home-gardens-and-landscapes>)

Feeding the Pollinators

Great soil and proper drainage are crucial to the success of your garden. But many gardeners also fail to consider the role that pollinators, such as bees, hummingbirds, and wasps, play in cultivating a healthy garden. Something you can do to encourage a healthy pollinator population is to plant native wildflowers adjacent to your garden. Not sure what flowers are native to your area? [Visit local](#) flower fields to see what's in bloom during the months you plan to have a garden. To ensure the soil stays healthy, rotate your flowers and vegetables each season.

Watering Best Practices

If you've never gardened before, one of the first things you might ask yourself is how much water your garden actually needs. The answer to that depends on the type of plants you have. Tim Graham of Yard & Garden Guru points out that [cucumbers and tomatoes](#) need more water than foods that grow underground, like potatoes and carrots. You obviously need to be careful not to over or under-water your food crops, but you can also save water by harvesting the rain. You may have to build a rainwater [collection system](#), which can be something as simple as a downspout and a few barrels.

Additional Beginner Gardening Tips

- Start with a small garden. The last thing you want is to get overwhelmed during your first season.
- Plant leafy vegetables, such as lettuce and spinach. If you have kids (or you are impatient) these vegetables grow faster, so you don't have to wait to enjoy the fruits of your labor.
- Know your zone. The USDA's Hardiness Zone Map is [free online](#) and can help make better decisions about when and what to plant.
- Plant what you like to eat. You'll get more out of your garden if you focus on foods that you like.

Your first garden is an experiment but it also serves as an opportunity to take a step toward greater independence. When you grow your own food, you know that you are eating healthier, and, as an added benefit, you give pollinators a chance to do their job and ensure their own populations thrive. Are you ready to get started? Do your research so that you know when you can plant, and then enjoy the harvest.

Want to ensure your land continues to do the most good for environmental conservation? Consider donating it to [Natural Land Institute](#).

