

## Garden Mentors: Plano Community Gardeners Share Tips with Plano Residents

Though it was a bitter cold evening, fifty-five Plano residents came to Davis Library dreaming about a lush, productive organic vegetable garden this spring. Plano Community Garden leaders **Jan Eppard, Barri Montgomery and Greg Holdsworth** were ready to provide them with valuable lessons learned in the last six years. Below are a few basic tips anyone new to gardening can appreciate.

Find a spot that gets 8 to 12 hours of full sun, close to a water source with good drainage. Plan a north-south orientation to avoid shade from the plants and decide what type of bed you want to build. Among the advantages of a raised bed, you will have more control over the soil, better drainage, looser soil and it will warm up more quickly for spring planting.

Think about feeding the soil microbes when choosing soil amendments, such as compost, green sand, molasses, alfalfa, soy and cottonseed meals, composted manure, and shredded dried leaves. Keep the soil covered with a 4 to 6 inch layer of mulch.

Soil temperature determines when seeds can be planted. Consider companion planting when planning your garden. Tomatoes, basil and onions grow well together. Cucumbers and dill are compatible too. Know your plant families and plan a four-year rotation in your garden area to build up nutrients and avoid pest and disease problems.

Water efficiently, deeply and less frequently, early in the day and adjust with the season. Keep water off the leaves and use plenty of compost and mulch to retain the moisture.

Maintaining a healthy garden requires frequent observation, removing pests and diseased plants early. Know the enemy so you are not removing beneficial insects. Think about creating a habitat for amphibians and birds to help ward off pests.

Learn when your produce is ready to pick. Pick tomatoes as they begin to turn red to avoid holes from birds. Harvest promptly and compost the rest of the plant when it is finished producing.

Start small. Plan ahead. Keep it easy and simple. Involve the family. Be patient. Keep records to help you plan next year.

[http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/publications/guides/E-502\\_home\\_vegetable\\_guide.pdf](http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/publications/guides/E-502_home_vegetable_guide.pdf)

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