

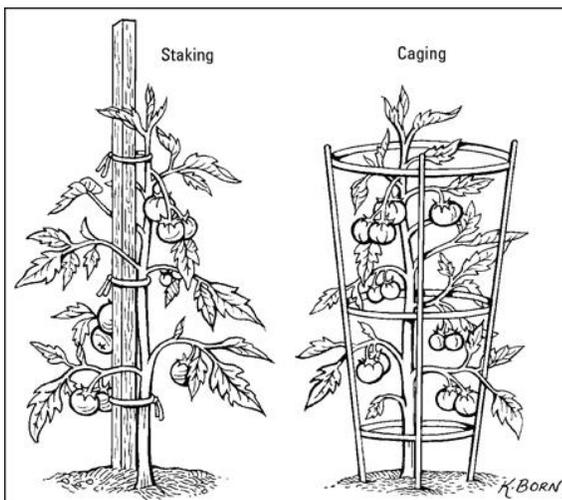
The Garden \$aver

May is prime planting time in Missouri. It is the month when warm season vegetables go into the garden whether by seed or transplants. Think green beans, cantaloupe, corn, cucumbers, melons, peppers, tomatoes, squash, watermelon, zucchini, and more. Summer harvests are just around the corner!

Warm Season Planting Tips

With warmer weather upon us, it is definitely time to get those warm season vegetables planted. The tips below will help you make the most of your summer garden.

- **Give plants plenty of room to grow.** The spacing information on our seed packets and **Garden Planting Calendar** will help plants reach their fullest and produce bigger and better vegetables. Putting plants too close together makes them compete with each other for water, light, and nutrients. It also increases the chance of disease.
- **Give plants some support.** Staking or caging tomatoes will keep fruit off the ground and prevent rotting. Peppers can be treated the same way.
- **Water enough, but not too much.** During the heat of summer, gardens need about 1-2 inches of rain per week. If it doesn't rain, you'll have to water. To encourage good, deep root growth, water deeply and less often, rather than shallowly and frequently. A sprinkler left on for a couple of hours should do the trick. Place a wide mouth jar or can in the area to measure how much water is being applied. Water in the early morning so that leaves will dry quickly and to reduce the chance of forming leaf diseases.



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More on Soil

It is hard to over stress the importance of soil care. As we discussed last month, there are things you can do to take care of your soil. These include **avoiding working the soil when it is wet, using compost, reducing tilling, and doing a soil test.**

What else can be done? Keep these tips in mind as you plant and care for your summer garden:

- **Don't walk where plants grow.** Walking in the garden compacts your soil, making it harder for roots to spread out and grow. If possible, make paths in the garden and keep to them. Some people choose to make 3-4 foot wide rows for planting with 1-2 foot wide spaces in between for walking.
- **Use organic mulch.** This is any type of organic material (the best is straw, old hay, grass clippings, and leaves) that is spread on top of the garden around plants. It will keep more moisture in the soil, reduce weeds, and enrich the soil when it breaks down.
- **Make a compost pile.** By making a pile of organic materials mentioned above, including vegetable peelings from the kitchen and dead plants from the garden, you can make your own compost in about 9-12 months. See our **Making and Using Compost** flier for details.

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Growing Tomatoes

Tomatoes are related to peppers, eggplant, and potatoes – all members of the nightshade family. In most of Missouri, transplants (starts or seedlings) are set out in May for harvests starting in July. For later crops, plant another round of tomatoes in late May or early June.

Plants are spaced 24 to 36 inches apart to give them room to grow and allow for good air flow around the plants. Stake or cage tomatoes to keep the vines and fruits off the ground. Tomatoes can be harvested anytime the fruit starts to turn red. Bring them inside and set them on the kitchen counter to ripen fully. They do not need to sit in a sunny spot to ripen.

Of all of the vegetable garden plants, tomatoes are the most popular. They are relatively easy to grow and

produce throughout the season. However, they may encounter some pest and disease issues throughout the season. For more information, check out these University of Missouri resources:

- **Growing a Perfect Tomato** video at <http://bit.ly/1bQCPTx>.
- **Growing Home Garden Tomatoes** at <http://bit.ly/1J6KFTf>.



Salad Breakthrough

When I started gardening, one of the first crops I grew was lettuce. It was easy to grow and took as little as 45 days from seed to harvest. However, for a couple of years I struggled with how to dry the leaves after washing them to remove the dirt.

I later came across the **Salad Spinner**. This is a very handy tool that spins lettuce or spinach dry without crushing and bruising the leaves. They come in a few different varieties and can be found at most large retailers for under \$30. I found mine for much less at a garage sale.



Below are some tips for cleaning lettuce and spinach, with or without a salad spinner.

- Fill the tub of the salad spinner or a big pot with cold water.
- Remove leaves from the base of the plant and put into the pot. Don't overfill the pot with too many leaves. You'll need room to swish them around.
- Dunk and gently swish the leaves in the water. Try not to crush them.
- Pick the leaves up and let them drain in a colander or the basket of your salad spinner.
- Without a salad spinner, lay the leaves out on a clean dish towel. Gently pat them dry with another clean dish towel.
- With a salad spinner, give them a spin.

Check out Rachel Ray for a Spinach Salad with Apple and Red Onion recipe - <http://bit.ly/1DIAkct>.