Successful Low Desert Vegetable Gardening: A One-Page, Eleven-Step Guide

“Right Plant, Right Place, Right Time & Manage Soil and Water”

By Laura Ward, Arizona Master Gardener. Information based on research by the University of Arizona.

1. Location. Before creating beds, assess the sunlight conditions. Plants need 6-8 hours of sun daily, which can be difficult in winter. In summer, avoid afternoon sun or heat sinks (block walls, rock, concrete). Assess drainage in the planting area with a drainage test.
2. Soil. When creating a bed or container, amend native soil with up to 1/3 organic material (compost or worm castings); add more between plantings. Our native clay/silt is mineral-rich for planting but lacks the organic material that brings “life” and healthy soil (microbes, worms and other helpers).
3. Analyze Soil. After creating garden beds, obtain a soil test before spending money on amendments and nutrients. A soil test is more cost effective than buying unnecessary amendments.
4. Fertilize. Fertilize plants as they grow, using a product appropriate to the vegetable. Most plants love nitrogen, but carrots not so much. Follow the package directions for amount and frequency.
5. Do not add: alkaline materials, such as fire ash. Avoid adding calcium and lime. We have too much.
6. Plant selection. Many vegetables won’t grow in summer (there are exceptions). Fall, winter and spring are great growing seasons for new AZ gardeners. Know what to plant and when. Learn from research-based experience. Use the free guides “Vegetable Planting Calendar for Maricopa County” and “Ten Steps to a Successful Vegetable Garden.” Free pubs: <https://extension.arizona.edu/pubs> . Visit the demo garden at the extension to see what’s growing. 4341 E Broadway Rd, Phoenix, 85040
7. Get Help. Contact or visit the Maricopa County Master Gardeners Plant Help Desk when you have a plant or pest problem. <https://extension.arizona.edu/ask-maricopa-master-gardener>
8. Join a garden group, in person or online. Try Facebook group “Organic Desert Gardeners of Maricopa County.” This is a very large, active, and helpful group.
9. Water properly. Water 12-14” deep for vegetables, two feet deep for perennial edible shrubs such as rosemary. Verify depth of watering with a soil probe. Never adjust the amount watered, just the frequency (more often in summer, less in winter). Use captured rainwater whenever possible, as tap and well water contains salts and can be high in pH (alkaline).
10. Mulch and protection. Always use mulch to regulate soil temp and conserve water. Use shade cloth and frost cloth as necessary to protect plants from extremes.
11. Don’t buy on impulse. Buy fertilizers and seeds just before use. They are more effective when fresh. Nitrogen gets lost back to the atmosphere over time and seeds become less viable with age.

**Don’t overthink it, just grow something**! Start today with a large container, some native soil, compost and your chosen seed. Seeds are magic in a tiny package!

Contact me at [www.tenthgenerationfarm.com](http://www.tenthgenerationfarm.com) (email, phone on website) if you have questions, and send me pictures of your plants and garden.