

FEBRUARY: Planning Spring Gardens, and more!

Yes, it is Winter, but, its time to plan your spring, cool-weather gardens! In many places around the U.S., it is time to start seedlings inside that you can plant outside after the first frost. Think about what you want to plant that will replace what you buy – this month we also share some information about how to garden with the goal to reduce your grocery budget! Finally this month, we encourage everyone to increase the amount of water you drink daily, perhaps by infusing your water with fruits, herbs, and/or veggies!

It's time to plan your spring (cool-weather) garden!

We know it is hard to think about planting a garden when in some parts of the U.S. the ground is frozen solid! However, it is that time of year – time to plan out the garden design, and time to start some seedlings! The first thing to consider for your cool-weather garden is just what can be planted after the last frost (and what may be able to tolerate a frost or two)? You likely are thinking, “beans, tomatoes and peppers,” but these would not work in your spring garden. Instead, think about:

Cruciferous Veggies: Cabbages, broccoli, cauliflower and kales germinate quickly, in about a week. They can be planted in a **protected** garden bed about a month *before* you last frost date (to find your frost date, click here <http://bit.ly/frostdate>). Also, consider a row cover or cloche (pictured on the right) for the plants to keep them warm, but remember to remove the cover it temperatures rise so you don't burn your plants!

The Onion Family: Another group of cool-weather edibles includes onions, shallots and leaks and more! These typically take a long time to mature, and like cruciferous veggies, onion sets can be put into the garden about a month before your last frost date.

Salad Greens: The last group of yummy cool-weather edibles includes the numerous varieties of lettuce and mesclun mixes that thrive in spring gardens. Think about starting spicy mustard and colorful greens indoors about 2 months before the last frost. Plant the seedlings about a month before the last frost, covering them with a cloth on cool nights. Sow seeds directly in the garden soil during this time as well, they will take a little while to grow to harvest size, but the process is fun to watch (then eat!!) If you want to try your hand at an efficient, easy-to-use “salad table,” this is the time of year to get planting, check out <http://bit.ly/saladtable>.



Helpful spring gardening hints:

- ✓ Warm the soil with a plastic cover before you plant the seedlings;
- ✓ Use a cold frame to protect plants from spring winds and late cold spells;
- ✓ Keep a cloth handy for sudden cold days and late frosts;
- ✓ Review the “Create Your Own Park & Recreation-Community Garden!” tip sheet at: <http://bit.ly/CHGtips>

Adapted from: <http://www.burpee.com/gardenadvicecenter/vegetables/general-gardening/start-your-garden-with-cool-season-vegetables/article10826.html>



FEBRUARY: Reducing Grocery Bills with Home Gardening Gardens!



Have you ever thought about growing a garden to reduce the amount of money spent on groceries? The National Gardening Association estimates that you can produce \$600 of fresh produce from a small garden, using only about \$70 in materials (seeds, soil, etc.)! (<http://bit.ly/savemoneygarden>) But, to do so, you have to plan wisely!

Michigan State University recommends the following when considering an edible garden for saving money:

- **Select vegetables that you like.** Very simple – you will eat what you like! So don't waste your time nor money planting veggies you don't like!
- **Select vegetables that can be easily stored or preserved.** In the July Newsletter, we talked about different methods for preserving your harvests (<http://bit.ly/CHGJuly>). So, think about planting vegetables that have a long storage life or that can easily be canned or frozen = stretch your grocery dollar! Potatoes, onions, sweet potatoes, and winter squash can be stored for several months when stored at the appropriate temperature. Other vegetables, like beans, tomatoes, cucumbers, beets and sweet corn, can be preserved by canning or freezing.
- **Select vegetables that are expensive to buy in the grocery store.** To save money, grow more expensive items, like tomatoes and melons, or large quantities of vegetables that you purchase regularly. Consider vegetables like beans, beets, onions, spinach, broccoli, peppers, carrots, summer squash, cucumbers, tomatoes, potatoes, lettuce, peas, and Swiss chard. These vegetables provide the biggest returns on your investment of space and time in the garden.
- **Do some research and start with a plan.** Decide what you want to grow and determine what will be necessary to be successful. Plan your garden, check out some of the gardening tips on our website (<http://bit.ly/CHGtips>). Research and consider ways to reduce your costs of planting and caring for your garden: collect rainwater for irrigation, add compost to improve the soil and reduce need for fertilizers, start with high quality seeds – most are relatively inexpensive, and most can be stored for at least one or two years, reuse containers, flats, stakes, ties, etc. In the end, start small, and have fun!!

Adapted from: http://msue.anr.msu.edu/news/can_a_vegetable_garden_save_you_money

Infuse your Water! All of us likely need to drink more water! Do you want to make water super special?!! Try making your own no-sugar-added fruit-herb-infused water!! You may want to make some of these infused waters the day before you want to enjoy them so they have time to “infuse” well – just make them and store in the refrigerator till you are ready to enjoy (more at: <http://bit.ly/CHGinfusedwater2>).



Strawberry Mint:

- Drop sliced strawberries (slightly mashed) and a handful of torn mint leaves (slightly mashed/muddled) into the water; add as much as you want!

Citrus Mint:

- Drop peeled and sliced grapefruit; peeled and sliced lemons; a sliced cucumber; and a handful of fresh mint leaves, torn and muddled, into the water. Mash the fruit to release more flavor.

Blueberry Orange:

- Drop peeled and mashed mandarin oranges, a handful of mashed blueberries into water.

Citrus Rainbow:

- Drop a variety of peeled and sliced citrus (different oranges, clementine, lemon, lime) into water, and a handful of mint or basil, muddled, if desired!



Adapted from: <http://dailyburn.com/life/recipes/fruit-infused-water-recipes>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-obittig1Os>

