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 **Arm chair Gardening**

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Though January weather is not always good for outdoor work, you can always do indoor garden work. Planning your 1999 vegetable plot can be done now from the security of your arm chair and will bear fruit later in a better garden.

Here are a few vegetable gardening planning tips from UGA Extension Horticulturist Dr. Wayne McLaurin and others.

Remember it takes about two hours a week to care for a 25 x 50 foot garden - not counting planting and harvesting.

Try new varieties cautiously. Do not plant the entire garden to them - they may not do well. Find one or two good varieties of each vegetable and plant mostly these varieties. Plant small amounts of new vegetable varieties until they are proven successful.

To select good varieties, consult the Extension leaflet "*Home Vegetable Gardening*" or ask other local gardeners what they grow. Also, look for All American Selections. These have been selected as good performes after trails throughout the U.S. They should have the AAS initials in their description.

Plan to plant a few flowers in your vegetable garden. This adds color and attracts bees for pollination and beneficial insects to help eat harmful bugs. Bee pollination is important for vine crops like squash, pumpkin, watermelon and cantaloupe.

Plant perennial vegetables (asparagus, artichoke and rhubarb) along one side of the garden. Plant taller vegetables on the north and west sides of the garden to keep them from shading others.

Plant early season, quick maturing crops (snap beans, radish, potatoes, etc.) together so they can be taken out together. An alternative is to plant short season vegetables in alternating rows with vine crops. As the early season crops are taken out, the vine crops cover the rows and use the newly vacated spots.

Hardy vegetables like cabbage, collard, broccoli, lettuce etc. can be transplanted two or more weeks before last frost. English peas can be seeded in late January. Warm season vegetables like tomato, eggplant, pepper, cantaloupe and watermelon should not be planted until all danger of frost is past, usually late March or early April. In late February you can plant Irish potatoes, onion transplants or sets, English peas, leaf lettuce, and other cold-hardy vegetables. Consult the Extension leaflet "*Vegetable Garden Calendar*" for more information on when to plant, care for and harvest each vegetable.

Do not lime the soil where Irish potatoes are to be planted. This will help to control scab.

When planting, do not plant too much. For instance, two or three tomato plants per person in the family will supply all the fresh tomatoes needed. Plant additional plants for canning or freezing.

Container vegetables will let the garden spread to the doorstep and along sunny walks. When selecting containers, use large enough pots to allow the plant to mature.

For asparagus, try planting the crowns only 6 inches deep, rather than the traditional 12 inches. With this method, you can also begin carefully harvesting spears after the first year instead of waiting.

Arm chair gardening may not be as exciting or stimulating as actually getting out in the yard, but it can be beneficial and rewarding. Plan it before you plant it and solve your problems before they begin. For more information call the Houston County Extension Office at 542-2020 or 987-2028