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 **PLAN BEFORE PLANTING**

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Though January weather is not always good for outdoor work, you can always do indoor garden work. Plan now for a better vegetable garden later. "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" is especially true in the garden. Planning 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.

When planning, remember it takes about two hours a week to care for a 25 x 50 foot garden - not counting planting and harvesting. Extension leaflet *"Small Garden Plans for Georgia"* can help you plan your spot.

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 until you find better ones. 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 after trails over the U.S. as good performers. They should have the AAS initials to designate them as All American Selections.

Plan to plant a few flowers in your vegetable garden. In addition to adding color, this 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 now). Warm season vegetables like tomato, eggplant, pepper, cantaloupe and watermelon should not be planted until all danger of frost is past. 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 preserving.

Container vegetables will let the garden spread to the doorstep and along sunny walks. When selecting containers, use this guide for minimum depths for vegetables. Four inches - lettuce, radish, beet, low-growing herbs; six inches - Swiss chard, turnip, short-rooted carrots; eight inches - eggplant, peppers, bush cucumbers; ten inches - cauliflower, broccoli and twelve inches - tomatoes, long-rooted carrots.

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. For more cultural information, call the Extension Office.

Keep good records. Plan your garden on a sheet of paper. Keep a notebook to record what you do. List varieties, planting dates, harvest dates, fertilizer and pesticide application dates. This will help when planning next year's garden. Also, get a copy of the Extension brochures on home gardening and review them. You may learn a few things that will benefit this years garden.

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. To get a copy of the publications I have mentioned (or others) call or come by the Houston County Extension Office at the Courthouse Annex on Carl Vinson Parkway in Warner Robins 542-2020 or at 733 Carroll Street in Perry 987-2028