

The Garden Plot

By Robin Mittenthal, Eagle Heights Resident and Gardener

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We will probably still have some cold weather, but spring is almost here. If you are a gardener (or would like to be), it is a good time to begin preparing for the gardening season.

The first thing to do is to figure out what you want to grow and how you will start it growing in your garden. This can take several steps:

- 1) Make a list of crops you would like to grow. Sweet corn, watermelons, and winter squash are crops you may like, but they get very large and will keep you from growing much else.
- 2) Divide the crops you want to grow into cool-weather crops and warm-weather crops. Common cool-weather crops include beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, collard greens, garlic, kale, lettuce and spinach and other salad greens, onions, peas, potatoes, radishes, spinach, strawberries, and turnips. Popular warm-season crops include beans, corn, cucumbers, eggplant, okra, peppers, pumpkins, squash, tomatoes, and watermelons.
- 3) Divide each group from step 2 into two more groups: crops that are usually moved, or “transplanted” into the garden from somewhere else, and those that can be grown from seed in the garden. Broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, collard greens, eggplant, kale, peppers, and tomatoes are almost always transplanted by new gardeners. Cucumbers, pumpkins, and watermelons can be transplanted or grown from seed (though I recommend transplanting to new gardeners). The other plants listed above are grown from seed, except for garlic (which is grown from bulbs), onions (which are grown from tiny onions called “sets”), and potatoes (which are grown from other potatoes).

Steps 1-3 should give you two groups of plants that you can plant in the garden in April: some plants (like greens, peas, and radishes) for which you need to buy seeds, and other plants (like cabbage, broccoli, garlic, and potatoes) for which you need to buy plants, garlic bulbs, or potatoes.

Both seeds and plants are or soon will be available at many local garden and hardware stores. Ace Hardware in Hilldale Mall is one of the closest places to get seeds and plants, but the farmers’ market at Hilldale is also very good for plants, and it will open in late April. There are many good garden stores around Madison – see “garden centers” in the yellow pages of your phone book.

You can buy seeds right away, but you should wait to buy plants until one or two days before you are ready to plant them. Buy some organic (non-chemical) fertilizer at the same time you buy seeds and plants.

Your cool-weather plants and seeds can go into the garden as early as April 15. Use a shovel, rake, hoe, or other tool to loosen the soil and make it into a smooth bed without large clumps (pieces) of soil. Add some fertilizer as you prepare the bed, and plant your seeds and plants

using the directions that come with the seeds or plants. Remember that plants like tomatoes, peppers, watermelons, and squash should not be planted until about May 20, and you should wait until June 1 to plant eggplants.

If you have internet access, make sure to check out the “gardening tips” section of the Eagle Heights Gardens web site at <http://www.eagleheightsgardens.org/>. There are a lot of useful resources there, including a manual for beginning gardeners that I completed recently. The manual tells you how to prepare the soil for planting and how to plant many popular crops.

If you have a garden question, e-mail me at mittenth@gmail.com. Happy gardening!

