



# Home Grounds Fact Sheet

## Planting Vegetables and Annuals

Mid-May (after May 15) is the time to plant most vegetable and annual transplants. If you have not purchased your plant materials yet, get a list of recommended vegetable and annual varieties from your local Cooperative Extension office. Whether they come from a garden center or are homegrown, be sure they are correctly hardened off. To do this, expose young plants to outdoor conditions during the day while protecting them from cool evening temperatures. Gradually increase the exposure so plants become acclimated and do not suffer too much from transplant shock.

### Soil Preparation

Soil should not be worked when it is too wet. An easy way to tell is to take some in your hand and make a fist. Open your hand and touch the soil gently. If it stays in the shape of your fist it's too wet. If it falls apart, it's dry enough to work and begin preparation.

It is important to see if any lime must be added to the soil. This can be accomplished through a soil pH test offered by your local Cooperative Extension office and many garden centers. Bring approximately one cup of soil that has been taken from 4 to 6 inches below the soil surface and at different locations within the planting area. This will give a good representative sample. The ideal pH for vegetables and annuals is between 6.2 to 6.8. Your soil pH test results will indicate if lime is needed and at what rate it should be applied. Lime should not be applied to areas near acid-loving plants such as rhododendrons, azaleas and mountain laurel.

Fertilizer is added next. If the area was planted and fertilized the previous year, add two pounds of 5-10-5 or 5-10-10 slow-release fertilizer per 100 square feet. If not, add five pounds per 100 square feet. Organic matter should be incorporated into the soil to add nutrients and increase water holding capacity. This can include compost, leaf mold, dried manure or peat moss. Thoroughly mix the lime, fertilizer and organic matter into the top six to eight inches of soil. Where annuals are being planted around trees and shrubs, take care not to injure the existing roots.

You might consider renting a rototiller to help turn your soil. A pitchfork will work. Rake the soil to level grade or neatly mounded rows for raised beds, being sure to take out any large stones. Your planting site is now ready.

### Planting

Adequate spacing between plants and rows is necessary for good plant growth. Annuals and vegetables planted too closely will not grow as well as those spaced properly.

### Transplanting

Planting depth is critical. Plants should only be placed as deep as they were in their original pot or flat. The soil should meet the soil line of the plant. If they are planted too deeply, they may rot; if planted too shallow, the roots could dry out. Tomatoes are an exception; they can be planted deeper than the original soil line.

If possible, it is best to pick a cloudy or overcast day to plant your annual or vegetable garden. Plants will not experience as much transplant shock. If this is not possible, plan to mist the new transplants occasionally for the next couple of days.

If transplants have been grown in peat pots, remove the upper lip of the pot and make a few tears in the peat moss for roots to get through easily. When using Jiffy-7 expandable peat pots, make a few cuts in the netting surrounding the peat before planting.

For vegetables that require staking, it's best to put the stakes in when the plants are still small. This way the roots can grow around them rather than putting the stakes in when the plants are established and possibly harming the root system.

### Seeding

For direct seeding into the soil, follow packet directions for depth and spacing. Be sure not to plant too many seeds or extensive thinning will be required after sprouting. Also, be sure to mark the location of sown seeds with a waterproof label for easy reference.

### Mulches

A mulch should be put down in your garden to decrease moisture loss and discourage weed growth. There are many materials from which to choose: wood chips, salt hay, sawdust, newspaper, black plastic and new geotextile fabrics. These new mulching fabrics form an effective weed barrier similar to black plastic but allow for greater water and gas exchange. Sawdust and woodchips require adding extra amounts of nitrogen to the soil.