

Bell County Master Gardener
Tip of the Week
By Mary Lew Quesinberry
“Home Vegetable Gardening”

Are you interested in starting a small home vegetable garden? Before you begin, get a soil sample bag from the AgriLife Extension office located at 1605 North Main, Belton. After you have collected your soil sample, return the bag to the extension office and for a \$10 fee you will have a basic understanding of how to prepare your soil for a successful vegetable garden. The extension office will also have a list of the vegetable varieties best suited to Bell County.

You should plan to place your garden in an area that receives eight hours of sun and have a water source close by. Start small using several raised garden beds bordered with cinder block, lumber, or stone. A 4'x8' sized bed is easy to manage and can be tended to from both sides without getting your feet muddy. Amend the soil with organic matter such as compost, fallen leaves, cotton bur hulls, pine bark mulch and composted manure. The soil test will have told you what is lacking in your garden area. The vegetables need 10-12 inches of soil with a 50/50 ratio of organic matter to the soil.

The last freeze date in Bell County is March 16th. Warm season vegetables can be planted after this date. If a late freeze is expected, as sometimes happens in our Central Texas area, the small plants will need protection. Warm season vegetables include tomatoes, peppers, squashes, melons, beans, cucumber, eggplant and okra. The cold season ones will be fine. If you have an existing garden, replenish the organic matter yearly and remember to rotate crops- to discourage disease- don't plant the same crop in the same area year after year.

To learn the basics of vegetable gardening plan to attend a **free vegetable seminar March 29th 6- 8 PM**. The seminar will be held in the classroom at the AgriLife Extension Office. You will get advice on container gardening, square foot gardening, and gardening with raised beds. You will learn how to water, compost, identify diseases, and special tips on growing tomatoes, after you buy your plants at the **Bell County Master Gardeners' spring plant sale is Sat. March 24, 8:00 AM to 1PM**.

Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact ask.bcmga@gmail.com