

## Vegetable Gardens: A High-Return Investment

by Sue Gray, OSU Extension Horticulture Educator

What if someone said that a dollar invested can return twenty-five dollars and that it will bring you health, happiness and a feeling of independence? A garden can deliver all of those promises and is far more in our control than anything coming out of financial institutions.

In these days of uncertainty, consider planting a garden. As the days grow longer, we can be sure that spring will soon be here. In the spring things grow. It's Nature's promise to us that we can count on.

One tomato plant can yield fifteen to thirty pounds of fruit. If we pay \$1.00 for that tomato plant, the tomatoes we harvest are easily worth \$25.00. Homegrown tomatoes are locally sold for \$2.00 per pound or more. Now, multiply that by ten plants and see that there can be a significant return on our investment. With some time and effort and a little patch of soil in a sunny location, we can feel great and feed our families the freshest food available.

The easiest vegetables to grow in the Tulsa area are tomatoes, peppers, green beans, onions and potatoes. What we harvest out of the garden cannot be any fresher or more convenient for us to eat.

The OSU Extension office has a wealth of information on growing backyard vegetables, including our Home Garden Planning Guide. We have lists of varieties that grow best here as well as tips on how to grow each of the major vegetable crops. Stop by the OSU Master Gardener office to pick up brochures on home gardening or visit the Tulsa County OSU Master Gardener website. We have an entire section devoted to vegetables: [www.tulsamastergardeners.org](http://www.tulsamastergardeners.org) Also, a very basic vegetable growing guide is available through the University of Illinois Extension. It tells how to grow, preserve and prepare 34 different garden vegetables that will grow here: <http://www.urbanext.uiuc.edu/veggies/index.html> It's available in English and Spanish. The Ball Blue Book is also available for purchase from the office.

This month, select a location that will receive eight hours of sun per day. Gardens grow best where soil is well-drained, avoiding areas near house foundations and where water might stand after rainfall. We don't need a huge garden area need to provide us with supplemental food. An easy size for beginners is a 100 square foot garden. Start by marking off an area four feet wide and twenty-five feet long. Remove the sod on top and then use a spading fork to loosen the soil. Add a couple of sacks of compost and fork that into soil to loosen it a bit more. Turn a couple of times more before spring planting. Many gardeners prefer to use well-composted cow manure for enriching garden soil, but old grass clippings, chopped leaves and other sources of organic matter are also very helpful.

Onions can be planted in late February, followed by potatoes in mid-March, green beans April 1 and tomatoes and peppers in mid-April.

This spring we'll be teaching free home gardening and food preservation classes all around Tulsa County, many at local libraries and at the Extension Center. Our goal is to encourage Tulsa County residents to grow just a bit of their own food, for health, a sense of independence and well-being. If your goal is to grow more of your own food, we'll be glad to help you make that happen. Also, tune into OSU's "*Oklahoma Gardening*" television show airing weekly on OETA. They are growing an organic vegetable garden, featuring it each week this coming season.



## *Canning 101-Having a safe food supply*

By Charlotte Richert, OSU Extension  
Family and Consumer Sciences Educator

**H**ow do I preserve the food I grow? I saw my grandma can things, but I've never done that and it scares me. I've done hot water bath, but I don't know how to pressure can? Can't I just add vinegar and do a hot water bath? Do I have to process the food if the jar seals?

Many people like to preserve foods for a variety of reasons but most people don't have experience canning or it was a really long time ago. With the increased interest in gardening and eating healthy, canning can provide a low-cost option to stretching your food dollar. It is important to know how to safely preserve the food you eat. On Wednesday, February 18, the OSU Extension Center is offering a hands-on canning workshop from 10:00 am – 3:00 pm. Participants will learn hot water bath and pressure canning methods. Barbara Brown, State Food Safety Specialist is conducting the workshop at 4116 E. 15<sup>th</sup> Street, Tulsa. Cost of the class is \$20.00. The registration form is at [www.oces.tulsacounty.org](http://www.oces.tulsacounty.org).

“Whether you're interested in home food preservation in order to control additives, to be reminded of your grandma's house, or to preserve your ability to

have a green thumb, the same safety precautions and canning equipment applies. Food safety is a primary concern in food preservation. The only methods of canning that are recommended by Oklahoma State University and the USDA are hot water bath and pressure canning. Cold pack and steam canner methods are not recommended because the processing does not kill the bacteria which can cause food spoilage and food born diseases. In addition, safe use of the equipment is necessary. Pressure gauges should be checked every year before using. This is a FREE service provided at the OSU Extension Center in Tulsa. You need to call and make an appointment 746-3703.

Check *jars and lids* for cracks, chips, dents, and rust. Defects prevent proper sealing. Lids are intended to be used one time. When using a water bath canner, wash jars in hot soapy water. When using a pressure canner, sterilize them. Prepare metal lids as the manufacturer directs.

For the complete guide to home canning visit the following web site: [www.oces.tulsacounty.org](http://www.oces.tulsacounty.org); click on Family and Consumer Sciences, then click on Food Safety. Also, the Ball Blue Book is available at our office for \$10.00. It is an excellent guide for successful and safe food preservation.

## *Firewood Tips*

By Bruce Peverley  
OSU Extension Agricultural Educator

**I**n eastern Oklahoma wood burning stoves are often used as the primary source of heat for the home during the winter months. As an alternative to fossil fuels, firewood has a long history as an economical environmentally sound fuel to burn in the home.

When procuring firewood beware that wood from different tree species varies significantly in the amount of heat, ignition quality and the volume of sparks and smoke produced. Firewood from black locust, hickory and pecan trees receives an excellent rating in all around qualities for use as a home heat source. Receiving a very good rating is red and white oak, and white ash. Trees producing firewood considered in the medium quality are sycamore, hackberry, maple, pine, and eastern red cedar.

The standard measure when buying firewood is a cord. The standard cord is a compact stack eight feet long, four feet high and four feet wide. Another

common measurement used in Oklahoma is a rick or face cord. The rick is a non-standardized unit of measure. It refers to a stack of wood eight feet long, four feet high and the width of a single stick-length of firewood. Because the stick-length of firewood is variable, the volume of a rick is variable. Stick length varies because different stoves and fire places accept different size firewood sticks. Depending on fire wood length, a rick will equal one-third to one-half of a standard cord.

The best firewood will be seasoned for a year. Seasoning will allow the moisture content of the wood to decrease to a level that will allow the wood to be ignited and burn well and will reduce creosote build-up in chimneys.

For more in-depth information on firewood, wood burning stoves and their management, and chainsaw use and management, contact the Tulsa County Extension Center.

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