

## Healthful Eating

5 Smart Ways To

# Start Up A Vegetable Garden

Going Green:  
Simple Steps for  
N.C. Families

Grow your own garden. Never been much of a gardener before? Ask the neighbor who always has beautiful vegetables. Check with your county's Cooperative Extension office about their Master Gardener program. Talk with folks at a nearby garden center. They know about local conditions.

### Pick the right site

- ▶ You need three things to start a garden. 1) Sunlight - at least six hours a day for the growing season. 2) Water - the closer to a tap or hose the better. 3) Soil - something between rock-hard clay and soft sand. Soil is something that you can improve over time. A compost pile is one of the best and easiest ways to do this. Recycle kitchen and yard waste into rich organic matter that is good for any garden soil.

### Start small, grow over time

- ▶ The smartest plan is to grow your garden slowly. Over time, you'll learn what works best in your location and what your family likes to eat. You can start with a few containers on a deck or patio. Small theme gardens are fun for everyone. Try a salad garden (lettuce and other greens, herbs, tiny tomatoes and maybe radishes) or a pizza garden (Roma tomatoes, onions, garlic, basil, oregano and peppers).

### Pick the right seeds or plants

- ▶ Some vegetables grow well from seeds (carrots, radishes, beans and peas, for example). Others do best when you buy small plants (tomatoes, peppers and herbs). Most garden varieties will do just fine anywhere. For better luck, you may want to pick seeds for your specific region. You can also try heirloom varieties (like your grandmother used to grow), organic or open-pollinated.

### Feed and water with care

- ▶ During the growing season, your vegetable plants will need the right amount of water and the right balance of nutrients. Getting it right will depend on your soil and the weather. Too much or too little water or fertilizer can be a problem. The instructions on the seed packets or seedlings are a good place to start. You can also chat with a green-thumbed family member, friend, neighbor or Master Gardener.

### Pick the fruits and vegetables of your labors

- ▶ Planting, weeding and watering can be fun family activities. Picking your vegetables is the best part of the season. Fresh veggies can be so tasty that they never make it to the kitchen! Want to grow a winning garden from year to year? Keep a simple garden journal. It can help you remember what you planted, how well it grew, when you picked the vegetables and what your family liked eating the most.