

# RVACG Garden Planning Workshop

## Guiding questions:

1. What are your main reasons for gardening? (circle all that apply)
  - a. To grow food for my family
  - b. To stay active
  - c. To meet others in my community
  - d. Pure enjoyment
  - e. \_\_\_\_\_
2. What are your favorite parts of gardening/your strengths as a gardener?
  - a. Planting, seeding, getting started
  - b. Visiting often, upkeep
  - c. Harvesting
  - d. Eating!
  - e. \_\_\_\_\_
3. What are your gardening limitations?
  - a. Mobility
  - b. Space
  - c. Time
  - d. Budget
  - e. \_\_\_\_\_
4. What went well last year? What made you say "I'll grow more of that next year!" ?
  
5. What didn't go well last year? Weather, pests/disease, water/nutrient issues, weeds?
  
6. What are your favorite things to eat?

## **The Very Basics**

What do plants need to grow?

1. Sunlight
2. Water
3. Air
4. Soil/nutrients

What gets in the way?

1. Shade - garden location, other plants shading out
2. Water - too little, too much, or too inconsistent can all be a problem
3. Disease - not enough air flow, diseased crop residue, poor nutrition all contribute
4. Pests - rodents from below, bugs flying in, larvae hatching from last season
5. Nutrient deficiency - poor/depleted soil, low organic matter, same crop year after year in same place, inconsistent watering, competition from weeds

## **Decisions, Decisions**

What to grow?

- What do you like to eat?
  
- What does the farmers market have? What doesn't it have?
  
- Are there varieties you can't find locally?
  
- Are there things best eaten right off the vine?
  
- Are there things you like to can/freeze in bulk?

## How to Grow

### Transplanting vs direct seeding

#### → Transplanting

- ◆ Pros: Get a jump on weeds, can plant right into mulch, harvest a few weeks sooner
- ◆ Cons: buying many starts can get expensive, starting your own seeds takes time and attention
- ◆ On the “must transplant” list around here is anything that requires heat to germinate and/or takes a long time to mature. Peppers and tomatoes are almost never direct-seeded, for example.

#### → Direct seeding

- ◆ Pros: Can be very quick, seeds are much cheaper than starts, no babysitting trays of plants in the spring
- ◆ Cons: slower to mature, uneven germination can leave gaps, may need to thin, need to keep weeded

### Rows vs beds

#### → Rows

- ◆ Pros: One line of plants is easy to hoe/cultivate, set up drip irrigation and supports/trellises; more airflow can reduce disease pressure; easy to harvest/more room to move
- ◆ Cons: inefficient use of space for many crops, more paths to keep clear of weeds, usually tilled every year

#### → Beds

- ◆ Pros: denser planting means more growing space in the same footprint, plants can grow together to shade out weeds, fewer pathways to mulch/weed, can be maintained semi-permanently for less compaction
- ◆ Cons: Most need to be hand weeded, too wide and they can be hard to harvest from, slightly harder to irrigate, can be more work to set up initially

### Flat or raised?

- In drier soils, flat beds (or even slightly depressed beds) can help conserve water
- In heavier soils or soggy spots, raised beds can prevent “wet feet” or roots running into a hard pan
- Raised beds can be as simple as raking dirt in from your pathways to create mounds
- Raised beds, especially when built up with wood or other containers, can make gardening easier for those with limited mobility

### Mulched or bare?

#### → Bare soil:

- ◆ Pros: easier to use a standing hoe, wheel hoe, or other “mechanical” means of cultivating; can direct seed more easily; not as much rodent habitat
- ◆ Cons: bare soil dries out faster, erodes more easily, and is a great place for weeds to flourish

#### → Mulched:

- ◆ Pros: If done well, cuts down on weeds, retains more moisture, reduces erosion, cleaner crops, breaks down for more organic matter in time
- ◆ Cons: Can provide shelter for rodents, can be labor intensive to mulch initially or hand weed if not done thoroughly

## Support needed?

- Support required for: Indeterminate tomatoes, pole beans, peas, climbing flowers
- Support recommended: Determinate tomatoes, cucumbers, some cut flowers
- Can also be grown vertically: Melons, vining squash, gourds

## Water management

- Do I need to water?
  - ◆ Most important to keep watered when seeds are germinating or seedlings are freshly transplanted. Seed ahead of rain in the forecast,
  - ◆ Most plants need 1"/week while they're growing. If it's very hot, they might need more
  - ◆ Some years, rain is consistent enough to require little additional water, but some years are so dry you have to water multiple times per week
- How do I water?
  - ◆ Watering by hand (with a hose): requires no setup and can be directed where it's actually needed, but takes time. Best for small gardens.
  - ◆ Sprinklers: Easy to set up, and can cover a large area at once, but you can't work in the garden while watering, you water indiscriminately, plants get splashed and you can lose water to wind or runoff
  - ◆ Drip irrigation/soaker hoses: Require setup at the beginning of the season and some initial expense, but can be used to water exactly where you need it, reduce wasted water and erosion, reduce disease caused by dirt splash or wet leaves, and you can run irrigation while you weed, prune, and harvest.

## Weed management

- The best weeding method is prevention!
  - ◆ Deprive weed seeds of water and/or light by mulching and targeted watering
  - ◆ If weeds get out of hand, don't let them go to seed to cause future weeds
- Weeds are easiest to kill when they are tiny
  - ◆ "White thread" stage weeds have just germinated and will burn in the sun if disturbed
  - ◆ A sharp razor hoe, wire hoe, or hand tool are best

## Top crop tips

### Easiest crops to direct seed:

- Bush beans, peas
- Sunflowers, zinnias
- Baby greens
- Beets, radishes

### Crops to plant once and harvest once:

- Garlic
- Root crops
- Heads or lettuce or cabbage

### Crops to plant once (or more) and harvest continuously:

- Tomatoes & peppers
- Cucumbers & Zucchini
- Kale & Chard

### → Baby greens & herbs

### Quick crops:

- Radishes
- Baby greens
- Leaf lettuce
- Zinnias

### Crops (maybe) best left to the professionals:

- Sweet corn (those pesky racoons)
- Carrots (hard to germinate, easily overtaken by weeds)
- Potatoes (heavy pest pressure)
- Onions (long growing season, weed pressure)