

Crop Rotation for the Small Garden

By Carol Hancock, Extension Master Gardener Volunteer

Small backyard vegetable gardens can be susceptible to the same plant diseases and insects that plague bigger farms. The use of chemical controls for these problems might be undesirable or unavailable in the home setting. The age-old practice of crop rotation is one way to prevent or lessen some of these problems, even in a small garden. Crop rotation means changing the crop each year on the same piece of ground.

Home gardeners tend to plant what they like and find easy to grow. This tendency leads to cultivating the same crops on the same areas of land year after year. Growing vegetables from the same botanical family or vegetables that have the same nutritional requirements in one garden area more often than once every three years may lead to a decline in soil fertility and higher incidence of certain insect pests and disease problems. Soil born disease organisms can remain in the soil for long periods of time and some of these tend to attack vegetables from the same botanic families.

Three Reasons to Rotate Vegetable Crops:

1. Reduction of harmful insects and plant diseases by rotating the location of plants from the same families on a piece of ground.
2. Better plant nutrition by rotating location of plants that make the same nutritional demands on the soil on a piece of ground.
3. Improvement of soil structure by rotating plants that have roots at various depths and that are cultivated with different techniques.

Common Vegetable Families:

Although the parts of vegetables that we eat (roots, leaves, stems, etc.) may be different, botanically the plants may belong to the same family.

<u>Sunflower family</u>	<u>lettuces, sunflowers</u>
<u>Goosefoot family</u>	<u>beets, spinach, chard, quinoa</u>
<u>Mustard family</u>	<u>mustard greens, rutabaga, kale, broccoli, cabbage cauliflower, turnip, radish, watercress</u>
<u>Onion family</u>	<u>garlic, shallots, leeks, onions, chives</u>
<u>Gourd family</u>	<u>melons, squashes, gourds</u>
<u>Pea family</u>	<u>peas, beans, jicama, peanuts</u>
<u>Nightshade family</u>	<u>peppers, tomatoes, eggplant, potato</u>
<u>Carrot family</u>	<u>celery, dill, chervil, fennel, carrot, parsnip, parsley</u>
<u>Grass family</u>	<u>corn</u>

Rodale's All-New Encyclopedia of Organic Gardening. Edited by Marshall Bradey and Barbara W. Ellis. Rodale Press. 1997.

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