

Plant a Snack Garden

Overview: Fill your garden with edible crops that can be harvested, washed and enjoyed straight from the garden with very little to no preparation. Perfect for a quick snack!

Materials:

- Vegetable seeds (see suggestions below)
- Container, raised beds, or in-ground gardens
- Plenty of sunshine and water

Approximate Time to Complete: 6 to 12 weeks

Location: Outdoor

Ages: All ages

Season: Spring, summer and fall

Instructions:

1. Find a location at your home to plant a vegetable garden. You will want a site that receives 6 to 8 hours of direct sunlight, has well-draining soil, protection from pests and a nearby water source. The size of your new snack garden can vary greatly from a few containers on a sunny balcony to an easily accessible corner of land in your yard.

If you are new to gardening or limited by space, consider using [container gardens](#). If you are concerned about your soil quality or want to make maintenance a little bit easier, check out [raised beds](#).

2. With your young gardeners, select the snackable veggies you would like to grow. Here are a few suggestions:

Snap peas are early birds, ready to go in the ground as soon as the soil is dry enough to work in the spring. Peas grow well when the weather is cool, but seeds planted in cold, wet soil sometimes rot before they germinate. To get your peas off to a reliable early start, pre-germinate your pea seeds indoors. A few days before you're ready to plant them outdoors, place the seeds between moist paper towels enclosed in a plastic bag or container and set in a dark spot at room temperature. Check after 24 hours. Once you see tiny roots beginning to emerge from the seeds, they are ready to go in the ground. Handle them carefully so you don't snap off the roots and don't let them dry out. Pre-germination usually takes just 1-3 days. Provide your pea vines with a support around which their tendrils can curl; be sure to set it in place before you plant your seeds. Once the harvest starts, pick the pods frequently – a great jobs for kids! Snap peas are at their most delectable, crunchy best when the pods start to fatten but the before the seeds inside really begin to swell.

Leafy greens like kale & collards are delicious & nutritious! **Kale** is the belle of the vegetable garden ball. Blue-green curled kale is as lovely as a bouquet; lacy-leaved 'Red Russian' provides color and texture; and lacinato, also called Tuscan or dinosaur kale, has long, puckered leaves that are especially tender. Whichever variety you grow, kale is a nutritional superstar. Seeds of cold-hardy kale can be planted as much as a month before the last spring frost date. Begin harvesting individual leaves as soon as they reach usable size. For fresh eating, harvest when the leaves are 2-3" long and still tender. You can also wait until the leaves are larger and steam or stir-fry them. Kale also makes a good fall crop; in fact, it tastes the sweetest when it's picked after it has been touched by frost. Start seeds 10-12 weeks before the fall frost date for a late-



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season harvest. Below you can find an easy recipe for making healthy kale chips.

Carrots are probably the veggie kids love to harvest most. Pulling a bright orange carrot out of the soil is like unearthing buried treasure. For easy snacking, grow short varieties like the 1-2” long, round Parisian market types. After a quick wash, kids can pop them right into their mouths. Seeds can go in the ground as early as 3 weeks before the last spring frost date. Seeds are tiny, so for kid-friendly planting look for pelleted seed, with the individual seeds encased in a natural clay coating so they are easier to handle. Carrot seeds are also slow to germinate, so mix them with some **quick sprouting radish** seeds at planting time. The radish plants will mark where the carrot seeds are planted, and their sprouting will break up the soil crust, making it easier for the carrot seedlings to pop up. Plus when you harvest the radishes, you’ll automatically thin the carrots. And as a bonus, radishes are a snackable veggie, too!

Cherry tomatoes are warmth lovers, so wait a week or two after the last frost date to set plants in the garden. Started transplants are widely available at greenhouses and garden stores, but if you are ambitious you can start your own from seed 6 to 8 weeks before your setting-out date. Just be sure your seedlings get plenty of light so they grow strong and sturdy. Growing plants under fluorescent or LED grow lights is the most practical option for most home gardeners. Give your tomato plants support with stakes or a wire cage. This keeps leaves and ripening tomatoes off the ground and makes for harvesting right at kid level.

Cucumbers also like it warm. Don’t rush your planting -- wait until the soil is nice and warm and all danger of frost is past. Cukes are fast-growing and don’t transplant easily, so sowing the seeds directly in the garden works well. But if you’re shooting for the earliest harvest, you can start seeds indoors in individual peat pots 3-4 weeks before the set-out date, and then transplant young plants carefully, pot and all, into the garden. Unless you are growing bush varieties, give cucumber vines some support to climb up, such as a trellis. Juicy cukes are mostly water, so keeping the soil consistently moist (but not soggy) is vital for producing tasty cukes. For a unique harvest, grow lemon cucumbers. These small, round, pale yellow cukes are especially sweet and flavorful.

3. Water, weed, repeat. For specific information on how to care for your veggies, check out our [Growing Guides](#).

4. Harvest and enjoy! Nothing taste better than fresh veggies from the garden.

Extension: Consider serving the veggies from the garden to your kids with a **homemade dip!** A few recipe ideas are provided below. The **hummus dip** will increase the amount of fiber and protein that your kids get, which will help to keep them full for longer. It also helps to maintain blood sugar levels. Hummus has a high amount of fat but it’s good fat from olive oil and sesame paste, not saturated fat. The sight of the words good and fat in the same sentence may leave you scratching your head. However, the fats in the dips help make the healthful phytonutrients, like carotenoids, more available for absorption in the body.

The recipe for the **yogurt dip** is another healthy choice to enhance the vegetable snacks. The yogurt-based dip is a good source of calcium, which is important for your kids’ growing bones. While your kids are having fun dipping into these tasty snacks, these combos will curb their appetites and deliver important nutrients. Involve your kids in the process of making these basic dips for the veggies that you grow, and you’ll find lots more veggie enthusiasm!

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Hummus Dip

Ingredients:

1 15-oz can chickpeas
Juice from one large lemon
1 garlic clove, minced
2 tbsp. olive oil
½ tsp. salt
½ tsp. cumin
2-3 tbsp. water
¼ tsp. paprika (optional)

Directions:

Drain the can of chickpeas and rinse.
Using a food processor or blender, blend together half of the chickpeas, lemon juice, garlic, olive oil, salt, and cumin for 1 minute at low speed, stopping to scrape down the sides of the bowl.

Continue to blend and scrape for another minute until ingredients are combined.
Add remaining chickpeas and blend until smooth, about 1 minute.

With the food processor or blender on, slowly add the water to further smooth out the hummus to your desired consistency.

Transfer hummus to serving dish and garnish with paprika (if desired).
Store hummus in refrigerator in an airtight container for up to one week.

Yogurt-Based Veggie Dip

Ingredients:

1½ cups plain Greek yogurt
Flavoring options (select 4 or more of the below, as desired):
1 tsp. chopped chives
1 tsp. chopped fresh parsley
1 tsp. chopped dill
½ tsp. minced garlic
1 tsp. finely chopped onion
1/8 tsp. cayenne pepper
1 tsp. chopped cilantro
2 tbsp. finely chopped cucumber
2 tbsp. finely chopped carrot
Salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

Combine yogurt and selected herbs and spices in a large bowl and mix well to combine.
Cover tightly and refrigerate overnight.

Enjoy the next day with fresh veggies.

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Dehydrated Kale Chips

Ingredients:

1 bunch of kale
2 tbsp. olive oil
½ tsp. sea salt

Directions:

Wash kale under cool running water and thoroughly dry with lint-free cloth or paper towels.

Tear dry kale leaves into medium to large pieces, removing the stem.

In a large bowl gently toss with sea salt and olive oil.

Place coated pieces in a single layer on dehydrator trays.

Stack trays onto dehydrator base and dry for 2 hours.

Remove finished kale chips from the dehydrator and serve.

NOTE: If you don't have a dehydrator, you can bake your chips in the oven!

Preheat oven to 325°F and line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Follow instructions as noted above for steps 1-4, spreading the kale on prepared baking sheet. Bake 15-20 minutes turning half way through cooking time.

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