

## Choosing Your Soil

For ideal growing conditions, soil should be evaluated for suitability for each plant. Evaluations can get quite complicated and include checking the pH and salinity, but these evaluations require special equipment. An easier method is to dig a small hole and do a visual and tactile assessment of the soil. After digging the hole check for the colour, consistency and crumb of the soil.

Ideally the soil should be a rich brown, with crumb that breaks under only slight pressure. If soil is too compact you won't have good drainage for water and it will prevent earthworms and other vital fauna from circulating freely.

A local garden centre can advise you on the best type of soil to use. Depending on the size of your garden it may be best to get a bulk soil delivery. Call a local garden centre, tell them when you need it and then arrange for a truck to drop off a load of soil that you can put in your planting boxes. Alternatively, for smaller garden boxes, bags of potting mix can be purchased at your local garden centre.

There are many vegetable varieties out there, and they can be sourced from many garden centres in and around Edmonton. Additionally, there are countless techniques to planting your garden. Here are some tips on what works well in Edmonton.

### Selecting your seeds

- Edmonton has a short growing season! Look for seeds where the packaging indicates a time to mature or harvest dates of 90 days or less. Examples of these are tomatoes, beans, peppers and squash.
- If the time to mature or harvest date is 50 days or less, it is possible to repeatedly plant these throughout the year. This is often true for herbs such as parsley, coriander, chives, dill, basil and plants such as lettuce.
- Finally, some crops such as kale are referred to as 'cut-and-come-again' plants because they allow you to remove some leaves and continue to grow. As with any trimming of plants, make sure your shears are very clean to ensure bacteria and other pathogens are not introduced to the cut.

### Sprouting your Seeds

- Seeds can be started using paper towels, 2 plates, some white paper and a pen or pencil.
- Take 3 sheets of paper towel, fold in half and place seeds on the inside. Drip water on each piece of paper towel and fold closed.

- Write down which seeds were placed in the towel and continue with this method for the rest of your seeds.
- Once all seeds are layed on the plate, add the last plate upside down on top of the base plate to create a damp sprouting location.
- Once the seeds are sprouting well, carefully remove them from the paper towel. Be sure to wash your hands before handling the roots as unseen bacteria and fungi on your hands can infect the new plants and prevent them from maturing.
- Plant the seeds in good quality potting soil and water well.
- Allow the new plants to grow indoors until the weather is consistently above freezing at night. In Edmonton this is typically after the May long weekend. Once growing outside, water regularly, monitor for pests and remove unwanted weeds as necessary.

## Planting Methods

This is not an exhaustive list, but are suggested starting points for the new gardener.

- **Companion Planting:** planting a variety of seeds in an area to increase vigor and naturally repel pests
- **Square Foot Gardening:** a method for organizing your garden in square foot sections
- **Lasagna Gardening:** a method for layering soil and mulch over an area to snuff out weeds and provide your veggies with a suitable growing environment