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**Growing Vegetables at Home**  
**Kenmore Library (11am – 12.30)**

**What is being covered today?**

1. **Choosing the best growing position**
2. **Deciding on a growing method**
3. **Soil preparation and nutrition**
4. **Growing seasonally**
5. **We will be getting hands on with some seed sowing – I know some of you have your lettuce, beetroot, tomato seeds, prop mix, vermiculite, labels, seaweed ready.**
6. **Talking Tomatoes**
7. **Plant techniques - looking at how planting single stemmed brassica crops like broccoli differs from rosette crops like lettuce**
8. **Discuss preventative action against pests**

**1. Choosing the best growing position**

**Sunlight** is the catalyst for photosynthesis, so **six hours of full, direct sunlight is best**

**Northern side**

Two vegetable gardens – Summer and Winter

**Grow in pots or moveable gardens – wheelbarrow etc**

**2. Decide on a growing method**

**Traditional preparation – (we are lazy, but this is the cheapest method of getting started and give good long-term results)**

- Involves digging/forking over the soil & incorporating compost/decomposed animal manure, gypsum for calcium, rock minerals/rock dust, pelleted or other fertilizer
- Great sense of achievement
- Soil improvement happens quite quickly
- Require less water than raised tin/wooden beds or pots

**No-dig – basically making a big, layered compost heap on the ground and planting into it. The results are only as good as the materials you use.**

1. Wet newspapers
2. Lucerne then grass, then, manure, then compost
3. Repeat above x 3 times
4. Mulch with straw or cane mulch
5. Rest for 2 weeks
6. Plant using compost in holes made into the bed

***Repeat layers minus the newspapers when you replant***

**Raised vegetable gardens – Birdies Raised Garden Kits**

Neat, instant, no bending, but how do you fill them?

**Veggie Pod, Mod Box – have additional features**

**Moveable, accessories like covers to exclude pests, self-watering or wicking so watering is automatic.**

**You can still fail despite the outlay to buy these if you don't know what you are doing. Size restricts what you can grow (tall tomatoes, sweet corn, or any volume of vegetables). Perfect for leafy greens, dwarf tomatoes,**

### **Wicking/self-watering gardens work by capillary action.**

Soil sits on a damp layer and capillary action aided by evaporation draws moisture upwards. Soil only wicks to around 30cm.

**Container gardening** – upsize your containers for best results

### **3. Soil Preparation and Nutrition**

#### **Soil improvement options:**

- Add real homemade compost
- Real, unprocessed animal manure
- Grow a green manure
- Rotate crops – different crops take different proportions of nutrients out of the soil and give rise to different pests and diseases eg nematodes.
- Check soil pH – 6.5 is generally a good level for most crops. pH makes nutrients available to plant roots. See pH chart on the website. Add lime for peas and beans. Always add gypsum.

**You should grow harvestable leafy greens (lettuce, silver beet, spinach) in 4-6 weeks from seedlings!**

If not, add nutrients.

**Every week** - Worm liquid, Compost tea, Commercial liquid fertilizer

**Each 6-8 weeks or in between crops** - Blood and bone meal/sulphate of potash, animal manure, organic fertilizer

**Seaweed is not a fertilizer – use it with fertilizer but not as a substitute**

1. Stimulates seed germination and minimizes plant stress when planting
2. Promotes buds and flowers
3. Strengthens cell walls against pests
4. Increases quality, size, taste & yield because it helps release nutrients already present in the soil
5. Suppresses soil diseases & nematodes
6. Improves root crop quality
7. Promotes nodule formation on legumes like peas and beans

### **4. Growing Seasonally – the biggest mistake people make is planting things at the wrong time of year**

Start small and easy with lettuce and other leafy greens and cherry tomatoes **See planting chart**

### **5. Getting Hands On**

#### **Starting with seeds**

**Lettuce** seeds – do not cover; black or white depending on type

**Beetroot** seeds – clustered corky seed (see also spinach). Soak in water/seaweed prior to sowing. Expect multiple seedlings from one seed. No need to separate upon germination.

**Tomato** seeds – soak overnight in seaweed. Cover lightly. Germination is temperature dependent.

Sow direct into soil prepared to a fine tilth or in pots propagation/sieved potting mix/compost; Cover with Vermiculite. Label and water in with liquid seaweed or Epsom salts

**Know how the plant grows** – Prickles on leaves and stems of eggplants and on cucumber fruit, broccoli

Have realistic expectations:

**Cauliflower** – slow to mature, too late to plant now

**Sweet Corn** – minimum 100 plants as is wind pollinated

### **6. Let's Talk Tomatoes – see tomato notes**

## 7. Plant techniques (Practical)

- looking at how planting single stemmed brassica crops like broccoli differs from rosette crops like lettuce

## 8. Discuss preventative action against pests

**Molasses** – 1 tablespoon in 1 litre of water with a drop of liquid soap. Kills and repels caterpillars.

**Soap** – Mix soap (not detergent) to a strength for clothes washing and spray. Controls aphids, whitefly, thrips, mites.

Use **liquid seaweed/silica and potash** to strengthen plants against disease

**Wood ash or garden lime** – broad mite, aphids, thrips

**Bags or netting for fruit fly with baits and traps all year** round. Replace contents at the start of every season.

## Growing Tomatoes

**When to Plant** - Warm daytime temperatures and low humidity make late **autumn; winter and early spring** prime tomato growing season in coastal areas of Queensland. If you live where it is cold and frosty you need a nice, warm glasshouse to produce a winter tomato crop.

**Seed** - Tomatoes propagate easily from seed. **Soak the seeds** for twelve hours in liquid seaweed (20mls per litre water), then sow in pots or directly into richly prepared gardens. If you want to save your own seed you need to thoroughly wash the flesh from the seed before sowing fresh or drying and storing it.

**Seedlings** - Planting seedlings advances harvest by 4-5 weeks compared with seed growing. Tomato seedlings are planted '**up to their necks**' or to the first set of healthy, true leaves. Roots develop the part of the stem planted below ground.

**Layers and Cuttings** – Stems of established tomatoes can be pinned to the ground until they form roots and new plants grown from these layered stems. Cuttings can also be grown using the young laterals cut from plants during pruning.

**Types** - Cherry tomatoes are the easiest to grow and typically the fastest bearing. **Sweet Bite** is a highly productive selection. For an attractive medley of coloured fruit consider combining it with one or more of the following: **Thai Pink Egg, Honey Drop Lemon, Corn Dog** (yellow) or **Orange Pixie**. **Double Truss** is a relatively new variety winning favour with gardeners. **Tumbler** selections are ideal for hanging baskets, but while bountiful they have a short harvest period. Plant one every three months for a continuous supply of cherry-sized fruit.

Large fruited varieties include **Tropic, Costoluto** and the Queensland-bred **Scorpio**. These varieties and many heirloom selections are often not available in nurseries and must be grown from seed. More readily available are the large bite-sized fruiting selection called **Megabite** and egg-shaped **Roma** (often sold as **San Marzano**). Both are ideal for eating freshly picked from the garden or for cooking and bottling. New in Spring 2020 is an indeterminate Roma-type called **Gigantic Gladiator**. With fruit growing to over 200gm it is considered a champion in the arena of Roma tomatoes.

Tall growing, indeterminant, disease resistant **Gross Lisse** and the determinant, bushy **Apollo Improved** remain favourites with gardeners. Stick with one or two tried and tested varieties and trial a couple of new types each season.

## **How many plants?**

Four plants should provide a family with more than enough fruit. For a prolonged harvest plant one tomato every 6-8 weeks from early March though until the end of August.

### **Position and Soil Preparation**

Tomatoes love heat and full sun. Never grow tomatoes in the same bed/soil mix in successive years or you risk a build up of damaging root rot nematodes causing crop failure.

For container growing choose a pot or planter trough at least 20l or larger. For best results in pots and gardens, ensure you add good homemade compost, decomposed animal manure, gypsum (for calcium) and organically-based fertilizer. Bulk this out with potting mix (in pots) or landscape mix/garden soil in raised gardens and garden beds. Water new seedlings in with liquid seaweed and/or dilute liquid fertilizer.

Most tomatoes require **staking**, so think about this right from planting stage.

**Pruning** tomatoes is optional. Removing lateral shoots (side shoots that emerge from leaf axils) will make your tomato plants neater and easier to stake, but also encourage taller growth. Begin to apply liquid fertilizer to tomatoes once the first hand of tomatoes has set. Pots need weekly applications. Plants grown in soil and raised gardens require liquid nutrients less frequently – every 2-3 weeks. Liquid **trace elements**, **Epsom salts** (2 tablespoons per litre), liquid **silica and potash** as well as a balanced general product (**Triple Boost or Powerfeed for Vegetables**) can be included in your liquid nutrient regime.

### **Watering**

Water tomatoes **daily**, then increase to **twice a day** as plants mature. **Avoid wetting the foliage** as this encourages leaf disease.

### **Protection from Pests**

Net or bag fruit against **possums**, **caterpillars** (larvae enter fruit at flowering) and **fruit fly**, but pay attention to pollination. Heirloom varieties of tomatoes rely on insect pollination, so must be left uncovered until fruit is set. Newer hybrid tomatoes pollinate with the slightest breeze and will be more successful where exclusion netting is used.

**Distorted new growth** indicates infestation of **broad mite**. Press wood ash or garden lime on both sides of the leaves and repeat as often as necessary until growth returns to normal. Do not allow this material to come in contact with the soil.

**Remove any old deteriorating leaves** on the base of plants as your tomatoes grow. This is generally natural aging of foliage.

**Black sunken areas** on the base of near-mature fruit indicates uneven watering and lack of calcium. You can avoid this blossom end rot disease by adding gypsum prior to planting. Remove affected fruit and add gypsum to established crops that are affected.