

## PLANT CARE PRACTICES

### As the garden grows

A lot of effort goes into producing a successful garden. There are many things to do between planting time and harvest. Consider each of the following cultural practices.

### Thinning

Many small seeded crops need to be thinned. For crops such as beets, carrots, radishes, turnips, and direct-seeded tomatoes or onions, it is necessary to thin some young plants from the thickly seeded row. An advantage of this process is that you can select the best of several plants and remove the poorer ones. This should be done 1-2 weeks after emergence of the seedlings.

### Weeding and cultivating

Weeds are a natural garden competitor. They compete with vegetable plants for water, nutrients, and space. The use of mulches and cultivation will help control weeds. Don't allow weeds to get a start. Control them when they are small. Mulching can reduce the time spent in cultivating.

Loosening the soil with a tiller or hoe accomplishes several things:

- \* It provides for air penetration.
- \* It promotes better water retention.
- \* It kills weeds which compete for water and nutrients.

Because most vegetables have roots near the soil surface, use care when cultivating around or near plants. A light surface scraping is sufficient around plants. Deeper tilling should be reserved for areas between rows. A tiller, garden tractor, or high wheel cultivator may be used, but most people rely on the gardener's best friend--the hoe.

### Flower removal

Removing some of the flowers that form on certain vegetable plants can increase the size of the fruit that develops. This is a standard practice for gardeners who grow vegetables for exhibit. You may want to try it with tomatoes, squash, melons, and pumpkins. Check with your local Extension agriculture agent for information on how to enter garden vegetables in a county or state fair.

### Pruning

Removing some of the vegetative growth on certain plants will admit more light to the plant, improve plant growth habit, and promote early fruit ripening. With tomatoes grown on stakes, it is a common practice to prune suckers or shoots that develop in the angle between the stem and branch. Remove suckers as they form and before they are 1-2 inches long.

### **Staking and tying**

Most home gardeners have limited garden space. Training plants on stakes or trellises makes more efficient use of that space. Tomatoes are generally staked. Cucumbers and cantaloupe can be trained to a trellis or wire frame. Pole lima beans and pole snap beans also can be trained to a stake or trellis. Drive the stakes soon after plants have been set rather than waiting until they are established.

An effective trellis for home gardens can be made from hoops of concrete reinforcement wire or hog wire. Use hoops about 2 feet in diameter for tomatoes and 1-1½ feet in diameter for cucumbers and cantaloupe. You may need to put a stake or rod alongside the hoop to prevent it from turning over in strong winds.

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