



Extension News Column

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Re: Pinching Pennies

The days are getting longer and summer is on the horizon. Here in the Interior, many of us are turning our attention to outdoor activities and looking forward to warmer weather. This year, consider including a vegetable garden as part of your summer activities.

Growing your own good food is not only part of a growing national interest in locally grown and organic foods, it's an easy way to ensure an inexpensive supply of your favorite veggies.

Growing your own vegetables can help you eat better. One recent study published in the journal *Hort Technology* found that having a vegetable garden was an effective way for men and women to get an ample supply of healthy vegetables. According to a survey of more than 250 adults aged 50 and older, those who gardened were much more likely to consume vegetables compared with nongardeners.

Current health guidelines recommend that Americans get about 2 cups of fruit and 2 1/2 cups of vegetables each day to help stay healthy and to protect against disease.

Other benefits to gardening include:

More time spent outdoors. Gardening helps increase the amount of time spent outdoors, allowing you to naturally boost vitamin D levels while being physically active. After a long winter cooped up inside, being outside improves your outlook on life.

Guaranteed freshness. Produce grown in your own backyard doesn't need to travel the distances that most store-bought produce does. The average distance most of our produce comes before being tossed in the grocery cart is 1,500 miles. Growing your own vegetables at home is a win in freshness and for the environment.

Saves money. With some seeds, water and attention, growing your own vegetables is an inexpensive way to cut down on food costs during difficult economic times. Consider canning or freezing extra produce to stretch the savings and enjoy the fruit of your work when the summer sun has faded. We can provide you with instructions here at the Cooperative Extension Service.

Connect with others. Gardening is a great way to socialize with neighbors and others. Consider participating in a community garden in your neighborhood.

As you get ready to plant your garden, be sure to get the latest information from our office on what to plant. Taylor Maida, our agriculture and horticulture program assistant, recommends the following publications to help us grow our own vegetables: *Recommended Variety List for Interior Alaska*, *Seed Starting and Transplanting* (there's good information even if you purchase transplants), and *Raised Bed Gardening in Alaska*. All these publications are available from our office or can be downloaded from the web at www.uaf.edu/ces/pubs/catalog/

Taylor is a great resource on gardening. She advises clients on what to grow, how to grow it, bug and pest problems, soils, and even diagnoses plant problems. She will answer your questions over the phone at 474-2423, or drop by our office for further information at 724 27th Ave.

When you get ready to preserve those vegetables at the end of the summer, call me at 474-2426 and I'll be glad to give you advice on how to take care of them.

Gardening can provide you with fresh, wholesome vegetables throughout the summer and can get us up and moving. What more can you ask for?

Roxie Rodgers Dinstel is a professor of extension on the Tanana District Extension Faculty. Questions or column requests can be e-mailed to her at rrdinstel@alaska.edu.