

# Maximizing Your Garden Space

by Troy Gale, Community Gardener, Chuck Shoudy Garden

**M**y first reaction to participation in Community Gardens was excitement - thinking of all the vegetables I was going to grow. When I saw my plot, my dreams of tons of produce seemed to fade.

Being an expert weed and rock picker growing up, I called my Mother for advice. How was I going to grow all I wanted in such a little space? She simply replied, "I'll send you a book". What I received changed my views on gardening.

The book was about intensive gardening methods. Intensive gardening is an organic gardening method in which you maximize your gardening area, decrease the weeds, and yield just as many vegetables as traditional methods.

As every gardener knows, the back of a seed packet explains when, where, and how to plant your seeds. The intensive gardening method contradicts the traditional row planting and space requirements between plants.

Intensive gardening relies on block planting, growing "in the air" and set lengths of space between plants. For example, traditional gardening says tomato plants need to be planted 2' from each other and in rows 3' apart. The intensive method saves space by planting tomatoes only 18" apart and supported in cages. Calculate the math: you saved 6" of space around each plant and that 6" is where these methods shine.

Having your tomato plants planted at 18" intervals allows the plants to cover the ground. Decreasing the sunlight to the ground means a decrease of water loss, a decrease in weed growth, and an increase in nighttime ground warmth. The extra 6 inches you gained around your tomato plants is enough to plant rows of lettuce, beets, or radishes.

|                     |                    |                 |
|---------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Asparagus - 12      | Corn - 8           | Peas* - 2       |
| Basil - 3           | Cucumbers* - 4     | Peppers - 14    |
| Beans (Bush) - 4    | Eggplant - 25      | Radishes - 1    |
| Beans - (Pole) - 10 | Kale - 15          | Rhubarb - 12-36 |
| Beets - 2           | Lettuce (head)- 10 | Rutabagas - 6   |
| Broccoli - 15       | Lettuce (leaf) - 5 | Spinach - 6     |
| Brussel Spts - 16   | Melons* - 24       | Squash - 18     |
| Cabbage - 12        | Mustard greens - 4 | Swiss Chard - 4 |
| Carrots - 1         | Okra - 15          | Tomatoes* - 18  |
| Cauliflower - 30    | Onions - 2-3       | Turnips - 6     |

\* Trained in the air and supported



Here is a table of plant spacing. All numbers are in inches.

Training in the air means you train plants to climb in cages or against a fence/trellis. Support your melons by making a cloth sling around the fruit and tie it to the fence.



Here's what I do and don't do:

~ Plant peas with corn. The peas grow up the corn, and the corn utilizes the nitrogen the peas put into the soil.

~ Plant broccoli early for an early harvest, and plant a second crop of broccoli in mid July for a fall crop.

~ When tomatoes are starting to form, water the plants from below otherwise your tomatoes will split and rot.

~ Grow only sugar baby watermelons since other varieties are too heavy for climbing and unproductive in our short growing season.

~ Grow round (Spanish) zucchini instead of regular zucchini; the plants are more compact and yield just as much.

~ Bush cucumbers fit nicely in tomato cages and are heavy producing compact plants. Consistently pick and water your cucumbers and you will have more cucumbers than you'll know what to do with.

~ Do not grow carrots in rows. A 4' by 4' patch of carrots will yield 800 to 1,000 carrots.

~ Cut lettuce as it grows. Tender baby lettuce leaves can be cut to the ground. The plants will grow back.

~ Plant smaller space shallow crops between and around larger spaced crops. I plant beets between my broccoli, radishes and lettuce between eggplant and tomatoes.

If you plant using raised beds, you waste a lot of ground space for your crops. Most vegetables plants, with the exception of large carrots need little depth for their roots. Good drainage and proper soil nutrition is what is really needed.

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**For More Information on Capital District Community Gardens' programs or to make a tax-deductible donation contact:**



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