

The Beginner Garden Starter Guide

Start where you are. Grow what you can. Build a beautiful, useful garden over time — without overwhelm or overspending.

What you will get inside

A simple first-season plan, beginner choices, a budget-friendly roadmap, and a 7-day action plan.

WELCOME

A garden does not have to start big to become something wonderful.

You do not need acres of land, fancy raised beds, or thousands of dollars. A productive garden can begin with a few containers, one raised bed, or a sunny corner of your yard.

- Choose one manageable space.
- Grow foods your household will actually use.
- Learn your sunlight and frost dates before you shop.
- Build in phases as your confidence grows.



Goal: Make a first-season plan that feels simple enough to start — and useful enough to build on.

AT A GLANCE

What every beginner garden needs

These are the core pieces of a practical, productive first garden.



FOCUS ON THESE FIRST

Sunlight, water access, your chosen container or bed type, and your seed or seedling choices are the foundations. Compost, flowers, and harvest planning make the garden even stronger.

STEP 1

Start with your space

Before you buy anything, choose the smallest growing area you are genuinely ready to maintain.



Good beginner spaces

- A balcony with 3–6 containers
- A front-step herb collection
- One 4×8 raised bed
- A small sunny patch in the yard

Space check

☐ I know where the sunniest spot is.

☐ I can access water easily.

☐ I picked a space I can maintain weekly.

STEP 2

Know your sun and climate

Hardiness zone matters, but frost dates are often even more useful for annual vegetables. Use both together.

Sunlight quick guide

- Full sun: 6+ hours. Best for tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, basil, beans.
- Part sun: 4–6 hours. Good for lettuce, herbs, radishes, chard.
- Light shade: 2–4 hours. Think leafy greens and herbs, not heavy fruiting crops.

Write this down

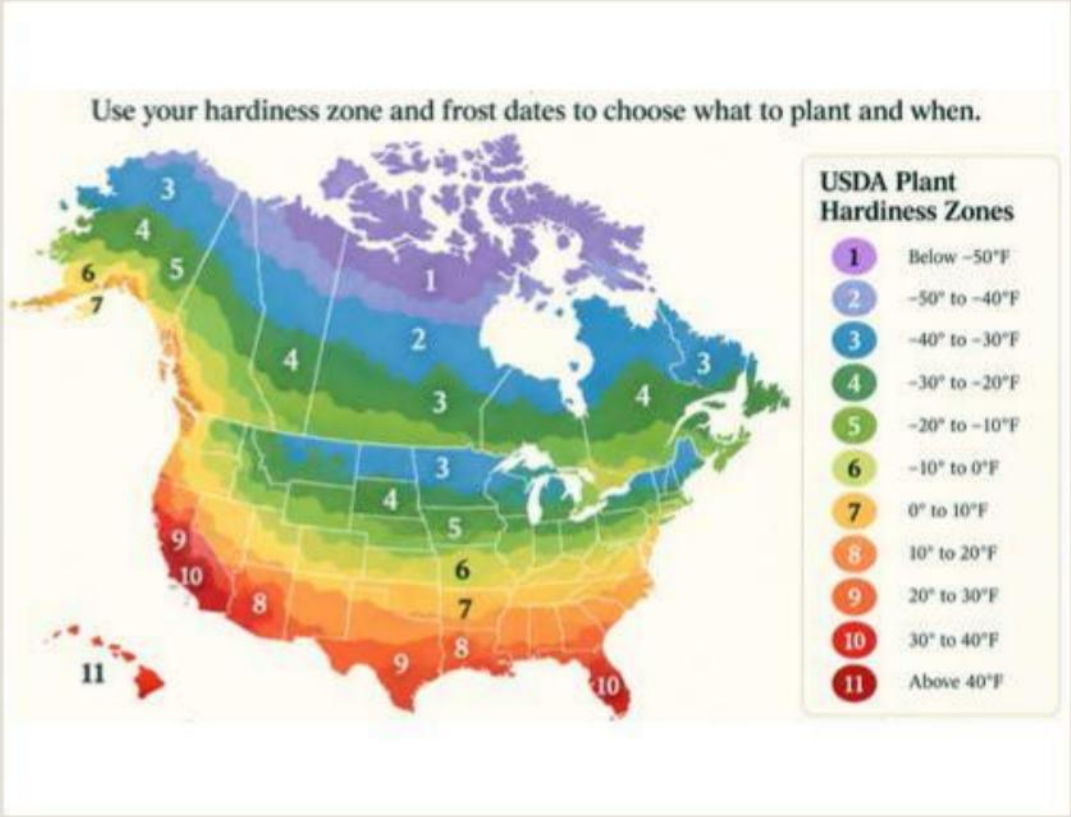
Location

Growing zone

Average last spring frost

Average first fall frost

North America hardiness zones



ZONE + FROST DATES

Use the map as a starting point, then pair it with your average last spring frost and first fall frost. Zones are approximate, so local conditions still matter.

STEP 3

Grow what you actually eat

Start with five crops. Success with five teaches you more than struggling with twenty.



Beginner-friendly possibilities

Lettuce	Radishes	Green beans
Cherry tomatoes	Kale	Swiss chard
Cucumbers	Basil	Parsley
Chives	Strawberries	Peppers

My first five crops:

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

BEGINNER CROP QUICK-GROW GUIDE

COOL-SEASON STARTERS

Three forgiving crops that let beginners get planting early.

Use your local frost dates and the seed packet for variety-specific timing. These are beginner-friendly starting ranges.

1 Lettuce

SOW / PLANT

Direct sow about 2-4 weeks before your average last spring frost. Sow again every 2-3 weeks while weather stays cool.

CONTAINER

At least 6-8 in (15-20 cm) deep. Wide planters work especially well.

HARVEST

Baby leaves in about 25-35 days; full heads often 45-70 days.

SPACE

Leaf lettuce: 4-6 in (10-15 cm). Full heads: 8-12 in (20-30 cm).

SUN

4-6+ hours. A little afternoon shade helps when temperatures rise.

BEGINNER TIP

Harvest outer leaves first for a longer picking window. Lettuce prefers cool weather.

2 Radishes

SOW / PLANT

Direct sow 4-6 weeks before the last frost. Repeat small sowings every 1-2 weeks in spring and again in cool fall weather.

CONTAINER

6-8 in (15-20 cm) deep is usually enough for round spring radishes.

HARVEST

Many spring radishes are ready in 22-35 days.

SPACE

Thin seedlings to 1-2 in (2.5-5 cm) apart. Give larger varieties a little more room.

SUN

4-6+ hours.

BEGINNER TIP

Do not leave them too long in the ground; over-mature roots can become woody or pithy.

3 Kale

SOW / PLANT

Start indoors 4-6 weeks before the last frost, or direct sow 2-4 weeks before it. For fall, plant in summer so leaves mature in cool weather.

CONTAINER

One full-size plant in roughly a 3-5 gal container or a pot about 10-12 in (25-30 cm) deep.

HARVEST

Baby leaves around 25-30 days; mature leaves often 50-70 days.

SPACE

12-18 in (30-45 cm) for full plants; closer spacing is fine for baby leaves.

SUN

6+ hours is ideal, but kale tolerates 4-6 hours.

BEGINNER TIP

Pick lower outer leaves and leave the growing centre intact so the plant keeps producing.

BEGINNER CROP QUICK-GROW GUIDE

WARM-SEASON FAVOURITES

Wait until frost danger has passed and the soil is warm for these heat lovers.

Use your local frost dates and the seed packet for variety-specific timing. These are beginner-friendly starting ranges.

4 Cherry tomatoes

SOW / PLANT

Start seed indoors 6-8 weeks before the last frost, or buy transplants. Move outdoors after frost when nights are reliably mild.

CONTAINER

5 gal is a practical minimum; 7-10+ gal is better for vigorous plants. Add a cage or stake.

HARVEST

Often 55-80 days after transplanting, depending on variety.

SPACE

Compact types: about 18-24 in (45-60 cm). Larger vines often need 24-36 in (60-90 cm).

SUN

6-8+ hours of direct sun.

BEGINNER TIP

Water consistently at the soil line. Irregular watering can lead to cracked fruit and other problems.

5 Peppers

SOW / PLANT

Start indoors about 8-10 weeks before the last frost. Transplant only after frost danger has passed and warm weather has settled in.

CONTAINER

About 3-5 gal per plant, with good drainage.

HARVEST

Commonly 60-90 days after transplanting; green fruit can usually be picked before full colour.

SPACE

12-18 in (30-45 cm) apart for many compact garden peppers.

SUN

6-8+ hours of direct sun.

BEGINNER TIP

Peppers dislike cold soil. Waiting for warmth usually produces better growth than planting early.

6 Cucumbers

SOW / PLANT

Direct sow after the last frost once the soil is warm, or start indoors only 3-4 weeks early because roots dislike disturbance.

CONTAINER

A 5+ gal container with a sturdy trellis works well for compact or vining varieties.

HARVEST

Usually 50-70 days from sowing, depending on variety.

SPACE

About 12 in (30 cm) apart when trellised; bush types may need 24-36 in (60-90 cm).

SUN

6-8+ hours.

BEGINNER TIP

Pick frequently while fruits are young and crisp. Regular harvesting encourages more production.

BEGINNER CROP QUICK-GROW GUIDE

EASY KITCHEN HERBS

Herbs are useful, attractive, and easy to tuck into pots or mixed beds.

Use your local frost dates and the seed packet for variety-specific timing. These are beginner-friendly starting ranges.

7 Basil

SOW / PLANT

Start indoors 4-6 weeks before the last frost, or sow outside after frost once soil and nights are warm.

SPACE

8-12 in (20-30 cm) apart.

CONTAINER

A 1-2 gal pot or a planter at least 8-10 in (20-25 cm) deep.

SUN

6+ hours for best growth.

HARVEST

Begin light harvesting once plants are well established, often within 30-60 days.

BEGINNER TIP

Pinch stem tips just above a pair of leaves. Remove flower buds if you want more leafy growth.

8 Parsley

SOW / PLANT

Start indoors 8-10 weeks before the last frost or direct sow in spring. Seeds can take 2-4 weeks to germinate.

SPACE

6-8 in (15-20 cm) apart.

CONTAINER

At least 8-10 in (20-25 cm) deep because parsley develops a substantial root system.

SUN

4-6+ hours.

HARVEST

Often 70-90 days from seed, with earlier light picking from established plants.

BEGINNER TIP

Cut outer stems near the base and let the centre continue growing. Be patient with slow germination.

9 Chives

SOW / PLANT

Start indoors 6-8 weeks before the last frost, direct sow in early spring, or buy a small transplant for the quickest start.

SPACE

Plant clumps about 6-8 in (15-20 cm) apart.

CONTAINER

A pot about 6-8 in (15-20 cm) deep is usually sufficient.

SUN

4-6+ hours.

HARVEST

Light cutting can begin once clumps are established, often around 60-90 days from seed.

BEGINNER TIP

Cut leaves a couple of inches above the soil. Chives are perennial in many colder climates and return each spring.

BEGINNER CROP QUICK-GROW GUIDE

PRODUCTIVE BED & CONTAINER CROPS

These three give a lot back from a relatively small growing area.

Use your local frost dates and the seed packet for variety-specific timing. These are beginner-friendly starting ranges.

10 Green beans

SOW / PLANT

Direct sow after the last frost when the soil has warmed. Beans generally do not need to be started indoors.

CONTAINER

Use a planter around 8-12 in (20-30 cm) deep; give pole beans strong vertical support.

HARVEST

Many varieties begin producing in about 50-65 days.

SPACE

Bush beans: 3-6 in (8-15 cm). Pole beans: about 4-6 in (10-15 cm) with a trellis or support.

SUN

6-8+ hours.

BEGINNER TIP

Pick pods often, before seeds swell inside. Frequent harvesting keeps plants producing longer.

11 Swiss chard

SOW / PLANT

Direct sow 2-4 weeks before the last frost or transplant young seedlings in spring. It also performs well as a fall crop.

CONTAINER

8-12 in (20-30 cm) deep. One or two plants can keep producing for months.

HARVEST

Baby leaves can be picked early; mature leaves are often ready around 50-60 days.

SPACE

8-12 in (20-30 cm) for full plants; closer spacing works for baby leaves.

SUN

4-6+ hours; it tolerates some shade.

BEGINNER TIP

Harvest the largest outer leaves first. The centre will keep producing new growth.

12 Strawberries

SOW / PLANT

For a first garden, buy plants or crowns rather than starting from seed. Plant in spring once the soil can be worked.

CONTAINER

At least 8-12 in (20-30 cm) deep with excellent drainage. Window boxes and hanging pots can work.

HARVEST

Day-neutral or everbearing plants may fruit the first season; June-bearing types often crop more heavily after establishment.

SPACE

About 12-18 in (30-45 cm) apart, depending on variety and whether runners are allowed to root.

SUN

6-8+ hours for the best fruiting.

BEGINNER TIP

Keep the crown at soil level, not buried. Mulch can help keep berries clean and reduce soil splash.

STEP 4

Choose your garden type

There is no single correct way to garden. Pick the setup that fits your space, budget, and life.



Balcony & container

Lowest commitment and easiest to start.

Small-space backyard

Great when you have a sunny strip or corner.

Raised bed

Neat, productive, and beginner friendly.

Edible cottage garden

Blends beauty, herbs, flowers, and food.

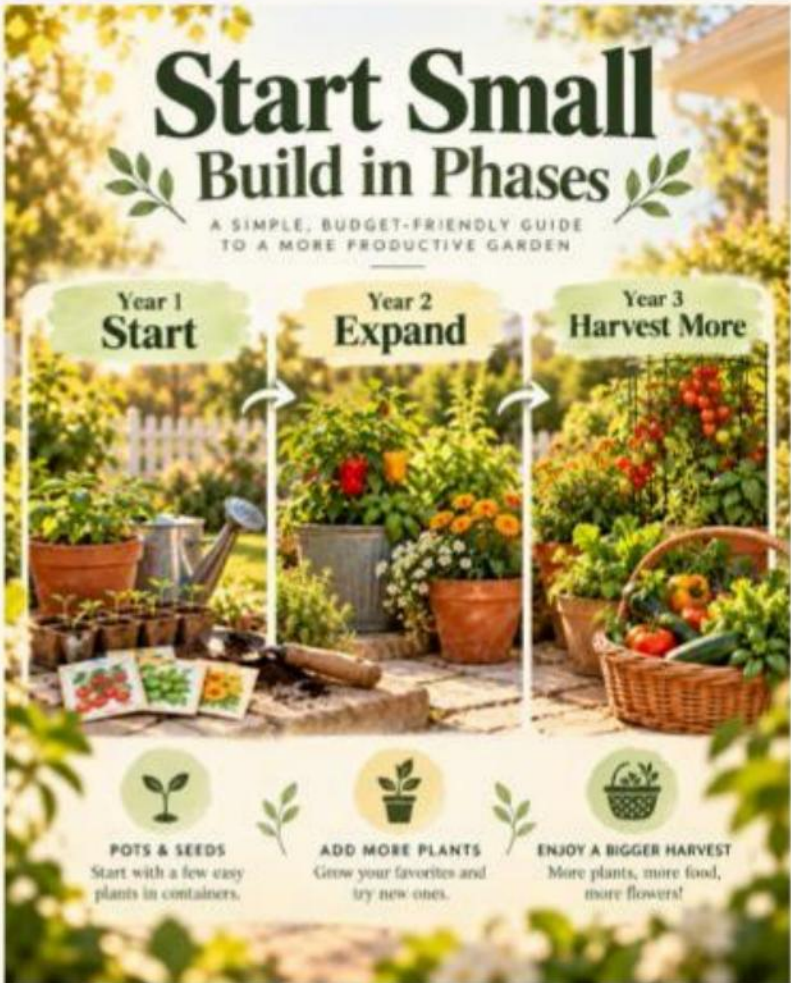
STEP 5

Start with the budget you have

Your first garden is an experiment. You can build the dream garden over several seasons.

A simple starter might include:

- 3–5 containers or one small bed
- Potting mix, soil, or compost
- A few seed packets and seedlings
- Basic watering can or hose access
- One or two simple hand tools



YOUR STARTER BUDGET

- ☐ Under \$100
- ☐ \$100–\$250
- ☐ \$250–\$500
- ☐ \$500+

What is the smallest version of your garden you could start this season?

EXAMPLE

A simple first-year garden plan

Thi

A Simple First-Year Garden Plan

SIX EASY CONTAINERS OR SMALL BEDS
Fresh food, bright blooms, and big rewards — even for beginners.



1



Tomato
One compact plant for a big harvest.

2



Lettuce
Cut-and-come-again for fresh salads.

3



Basil
Fragrant and great for cooking.

4



Radishes
Fast, easy, and fun to grow.

5



Peppers
Colorful and productive all season.

6



Pollinator Flowers
Attracts bees and beneficial insects.

KEEP GOING

Think in seasons, not perfection

A productive garden improves over time. Observe what thrives, what struggles, and what you want more of next season.



How to build over time

- Season 1: Learn your space and grow a few dependable crops.
- Season 2: Add one new bed, trellis, or crop group.
- Season 3: Improve beauty, harvest flow, and soil health.
- Any season: Reduce overwhelm by expanding only when ready.

Progress beats pressure.



YOUR NEXT 7 DAYS

Your 7-day action plan

Use this simple sequence to go from intention to action.

Your 7-Day Garden Action Plan

1

DAY 1

Choose your sunniest spot.



2

DAY 2

Pick your garden type.



3

DAY 3

Know your climate.



4

DAY 4

Choose five crops.



5

DAY 5

Set a starter budget.



6

DAY 6

Make your shopping list.



7

DAY 7

Start building your garden.



— Done beats perfect. —

WHAT TO DO NEXT

Build the garden that fits your life

Keep learning. Keep growing. Add more only when you are ready.



FOLLOW FOR MORE

Instagram

@suburbangardenmastery
Garden inspiration, seasonal tips, and beautiful edible-garden concepts.

READY FOR THE NEXT STEP?

Starter Kit

A more detailed planning toolkit with layouts, worksheets, calendars, budget tools, and first-season planning. CAD \$27.

FULL COURSE

Suburban Garden Mastery

Step-by-step video lessons, visual examples, and practical training from planning through harvest.

Want help visualizing your space?

Explore custom garden planning and visualization. Send photos, dimensions, location or growing zone, budget, and goals — no calls required.

suburbangardenmastery.com

KEEP THIS HANDY

Every space has potential

Whether you have a balcony, a backyard, or something in between, there is a garden waiting to grow.

Save this simple reminder:

- Start small.
- Choose a sunny space.
- Grow what you actually use.
- Build with the budget you have.
- Observe, adjust, and keep going.



Where to connect

Website: suburbangardenmastery.com Instagram:
@suburbangardenmastery Starter Kit: CAD \$27
Custom garden planning: fully digital and
asynchronous

Educational guide only. Verify local bylaws, utilities, structural limits, and site-specific conditions before building.

Thank you for downloading the Beginner Garden Starter Guide.