



MEDIA RELEASE

TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
MARKET DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

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Include Vegetable Plants in Gardens for Economic, Gastronomic, Environmental Benefits

NASHVILLE -- What's more beautiful than lush green plants, flowering profusely all around your home?

"How about lush green plants that flower profusely and then make your food?" says Rob Beets, horticulture and produce marketing specialist with the Tennessee Department of Agriculture. "Vegetable plants have pretty blossoms just like ornamental plants, but they can earn their living. Give them a home in your gardens and they'll repay you with beauty, plus the freshest, most ripe and flavorful food you can get."

Current economic conditions and ongoing environmental concerns are spurring many who've previously only dabbled in growing vegetables, or never gardened at all, to put on their overalls and start digging. New "Recession Gardens," the latest take on the Victory Gardens and Depression Gardens of the nation's past, are making herbs and vegetable plants as popular as petunias in farmers markets and gardens center.

Vera Ann Myers, of Myers Greenhouse near Greenville, says, "We are producing more plants this year because of the demand we had last year. Our customers seem to be putting out almost twice as much into their vegetable gardens, and we've seen several new gardeners this year, already."

"Tomatoes are our biggest seller. Even people without gardens seem to put out tomato plants. We feel because of the economy, people are using this as a way to save some money. Also, our customers want to know where their food is coming from."

David Levy of Willow Oaks Flower Farm, Brownsville, who sells both on his farm and at the Memphis Farmers Market, says, "It seems like it's going to be a big year for anything you can eat!" Levy is ready for gardeners who have only apartment balconies or sun decks for their agricultural enterprises; "We've put some of our vegetable plants in 5 gallon garden pots, and they've been very popular this year."

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PickTNProducts.org

Include Vegetable Plants in Gardens for Benefits

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“Chances are, you can grab all the vegetable plant varieties you need in one stop,” says Beets. “If you’ll be careful to purchase your plants from Tennessee growers, you’ll know the plants haven’t been stressed from too much travel, and that the varieties you choose will grow well here. Plus, if you buy directly from the grower, you can get the absolutely vital information you need to keep plants alive and producing as long as possible.

“Many people try to plant gardens too early. ‘Last freeze’ dates can vary dramatically, but if you’ll wait until around Mother’s Day to plant, you won’t have to run out and cover your plants at night or lose them altogether. Also, lots of vegetables simply don’t ‘take off’ until night time temperatures reach at least 68 degrees, so not only will you have to guard early plantings against the weather, you’re not really getting that ‘head start’ you think you are. If having ripe produce as soon as possible is your goal, the best way to achieve that is to buy good-sized plants grown by local growers in their greenhouses, then wait until risk of frost is past before setting them out.”

Beets also recommends gardeners contact their local county UT Extension for advice on soil quality and preparation, growing tips and a list of resources in case problems arise with diseases and insect pests.

“Growing your own food gives you a healthy, interesting activity in your own backyard,” says Beets. “You’ll know exactly how your food was grown and always have it at its peak flavor. Home vegetable gardening is also encouraged as a stress management method, a plus that’s especially useful, nowadays.

“Vegetable gardens are healthy for your body AND your pocketbook,” says Beets.

For directories of local vegetable plant growers, farmers markets, and garden center with locally grown plants, visit www.PickTnProducts.org. E-mail Beets robert.beets@tn.gov or call at 615-837-5517.

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