

DIG IN

GROW YOUR OWN HEALTH FOODS

Growing your own food is a great way to fill your time and tummy. “Eating a nutritious diet can help improve many health conditions,” says Alicia Buterbaugh, a registered dietitian with Kettering Health Network.

She notes that the benefits of healthy eating can include “preventing or delaying the onset of type 2 diabetes, maintaining healthy blood sugar levels for both type 1 and type 2 diabetes, lowering cholesterol, promoting healthy blood pressure, and even preventing some cancers.”

Make it a family affair Modeling healthy eating habits and getting kids involved in growing their own foods is a good way to encourage them to eat healthy foods regularly.

“Gardening is both a physical activity and an opportunity to demonstrate one aspect of healthy eating,” says Alicia. “Kids can be involved in the planning, planting, harvesting, and preparing of items grown in the garden.”

Spring is the perfect time to plant a garden. Whether you have a collection of terra-cotta pots or a plot of land, try your thumb at these easy-to-grow fruits and vegetables.

Tantalizing tomatoes Tomatoes are full of vitamins and nutrients, including lycopene. Lycopene improves your vision and protects your heart health. It’s even been correlated with fewer incidences of certain types of cancer.

Varieties of tomatoes like Beefsteak, Big Boy, and Porterhouse require more space and will produce large tomatoes perfect for sandwiches. Varieties of tomatoes like Early Wonder, Tiny Tim, and Better Bush take up less space, can be grown in containers, and are ideal for snacking or salads. All varieties of tomatoes need six to eight hours of sunlight each day and require consistent moisture.

Blueberry bonanza

Blueberries are easy to grow in a container or in the ground. Rich in antioxidants, vitamin C, vitamin K, and manganese, blueberries can protect against heart disease, help prevent prostate cancer, and even improve memory.

While blueberries are low-maintenance, they do require a bit of patience. It can take a year or more for plants to mature enough to produce a sizeable harvest. Purchasing more mature berry bushes or finding a friend to give you one of theirs are ways to get a jump-start.

If you are using a container for your berries, choose one that is at least two feet wide by two feet deep. Berries need full to partial sun and regular water to thrive.

Flavorful herbs Herbs are neither a fruit nor a vegetable, but by flavoring dishes, they are a key ingredient to helping you enjoy healthy eating. Seasoning dishes with herbs, instead of salt, can improve your blood pressure and heart health. Many herbs, like parsley, have substantial amounts of vitamins A, C, and K—providing the same health benefits as berries.

Grow basil to pair with your tomatoes and fresh mozzarella, cilantro to season guacamole or an omelet, and mint to add a refreshing twist to water or iced tea. Herbs can be planted directly in the ground, but growing them in a container enables you to move them indoors and enjoy them year-round.

▼ FRESH TIPS

For delicious recipes using fresh ingredients, visit healthlibrary.ketteringhealth.org/library to browse by food category or dietary considerations.



Grow the rainbow

Ready to expand your garden with more healthy fruits and vegetables? Try adding these colorful and easy-to-grow varieties to the mix.

Strawberries



Raspberries



Carrots



Corn



Green beans



Eggplant



For more gardening advice and tips, visit the Ohio State Extension website at extension.osu.edu.