

# Introduction to Gardening

## Resources for many issues

- [West Coast Seeds](#)
- [The Spruce](#)
- [The Almanac](#)
- [BC Living - starting a garden](#)
- [West Coast gardens](#)

You can use any resource as long as it is written for your climate zone Vancouver & Richmond is about zone 7-8. Many of the British resources also work with our climate as well, like the [Royal Horticultural Society](#).

## Gardening

We have many vegetables profiled on our website that you can find [here](#) as well as gardener resources that we are always updating [here](#).

The best advice for getting into gardening is just to try it and have patience. Patience is key when gardening as sometimes plants will work one year and not the next. It takes a while to find what works as each garden is unique.

Creating a healthy and balanced garden is much better than having a garden with many issues that need fixing. A healthy garden should have strong and plentiful plants with few pests. Pests are attracted to weak plants and weak plants are a result of them not being planted in the right area. Many plants will survive a variety of conditions but will thrive when planted in the right spot.

### Planting Guides:

West Coast Seeds has some great resources on planting dates and timing for crops. Please find those [here](#). Make sure that you choose the one right for your climate, Richmond is in the coastal region.

You can also use the Farmer's Almanac [here](#) for a planting guide.

## Rabbits

Rabbits are a common sight in Richmond. They're cute but very destructive. The best way to combat them is to pre-plan. Hammer in stakes around the garden on the inside, then attach the wire mesh fencing to the stakes. You want it about 2-3 feet high. Chicken wire mesh is a great choice as it will hold up over time and last longer than plastic mesh.

### Resources:

- [The Spruce](#)

### Fencing Options:

- [Mesh 1](#)
- [Mesh 2](#)
- [Mesh 3](#)

You want to aim for about a ¼" to about 1" square holes to prevent rabbits and squirrels from making their way in.

## Winter Gardening

Planting guide from West Coast Seeds [here](#) and resources [here](#). You can plant garlic until late October or early November.

You can still plant arugula and other leafy greens. Covering them with floating row cover can help them grow faster.

Insulation is key for winter gardening. Keep in mind that winter gardening does not mean gardening in the winter. It means planting crops in the late summer, growing them enough in the 'growing season' to establish and survive the winter in the ground. The garden becomes a refrigerator for you to harvest the vegetables whenever you like. They will not continue to grow once the days get colder and darker.

## Overwinter Gardening

Overwinter gardening means leaving vegetables or plants that you sowed in the previous Spring in the ground through the winter to be harvested the following spring. This is key for onions, garlic, leeks, and other long growing vegetables. You also do this if you want to save seeds from biennial vegetables like carrots, beets, and parsnips as they go to seed in the 2nd year.

The key to successful overwinter gardening is proper insulation. You can use a [floating row cover](#) or mulch.

## Mulch

There are many different kinds of mulch each with pros and cons. Depending on your budget and garden needs. You can choose inorganic mulch like newspaper, cardboard, or lumber wrap. Remember to keep the mulch away from the base of your plants. Mulch can keep too much moisture in and can cause the plant to rot. It can also allow slugs and other pests to nest.

### Pros:

- Retains moisture during summer months
- Insulates against the cold in winter
- Suppresses weeds
- Prevents erosion and nutrient depletion in the soil
- Beneficial insects can nest over the winter
  - Beneficial insects are great for the garden!

### Cons:

- Can keep in too much winter in the fall or spring
- Can allow pests like slugs to overwinter in the garden

## Mulch Options

### Straw

- Holds in heat well
- Decomposes over the winter providing nutrients
- Holds in moisture well for the summer
- Suppresses weeds when piled high about 30 cm

### Leaves

- Cheap and available around the garden
- Decomposes over the winter providing nutrients
- You can shred them so they'll break down faster

### Cardboard or Newspaper:

- Readily available
- Breaks down over a season
- Adds no nutrients, but great for weed suppressing
- Add compost over top to increase nutrients

### Wood chips

- Better for pathways
- High in carbon but low in nitrogen. Microorganisms then take the nitrogen out of the soil

#### Grass clippings

- Around the garden
- Adds a boost of nitrogen
- Make sure the lawn has been untreated and there are no seeds

#### Lumber wrap or black plastic

- Great for keeping the heat in
- Suppresses weeds
- Doesn't decompose, adds no nutrients back into the soil

The main thing to remember about wood chips is that it can take nitrogen out of your soil.

## Organic Amenders - Compost / Manure

You can home compost, buy compost from a store, or vermicompost or manure. Vegetable gardens need organic materials to add nutrients, balance pH, improve water retention, and improve drainage. Overworked soil becomes nutrient-depleted and compaction.

#### Home compost

- Cheap and can make at home
- You know exactly what goes into it
- Can take 6 months to a year to decompose
- Slow-release - will release nutrients over time. Fertilizer is an instant boost of nutrients although when overused can burn plants

#### Store compost

- Mushroom manure is a good choice
- A mix can have sand or other materials that may not be good for your soil
- May have seeds, you can't be 100% you know what's in the compost

#### Vermicompost

- Also called worm composting
- Faster than home composting - takes about 3 months
- Can only feed specific things
- Can have it in the house - when done right doesn't smell

#### Manure

- Depending on the nitrogen: potassium: phosphorus level you need will determine

## Invasive Species

There are many common plants that are actually invasive. It's a good idea to remove invasive plants before they become established and produce seeds. Fall or early Spring is a good time to pull invasive plants as the soil is softer. You can pull the invasive plant and lay cardboard or newspaper over top to suppress them further.

For a comprehensive list, go to [bcinvasives](#) website.

Many common plants are actually invasive:

- Canada Thistle
- Buddleia
- Bachelor's Button
- English Holly
- English Ivy
- Yellow-flag Iris

## Companion Planting

Each vegetable crop has a relationship with the plant near it. Some are positive relationships, but others are negative. Some flowers and herbs attract beneficial insects to help with pests.

You can find tips from West Coast Seeds [here](#) and also permaculture research [here](#).

## Insects

There are many insects that may be pests, but most of the insects you see in the garden are beneficial and necessary for pollination. These include bees, butterflies, beetles, and wasps. Ants can be good, but also can encourage aphids as they eat the sugar aphids release when they suck the sugar out of the plant.

You also want to attract predatory insects as well. As larvae, they will be predatory on pests and as adults, they are pollinators. A list of predatory insects is [here](#) and plants to attract them can be found [here](#).



## Soil

Soil is one of the most important aspects of your garden. You can get it wet and hold it. If it holds its shape, it has too much clay. If it feels gritty, there may be too much sand. You want a balance of sand, silt, and clay. The ideal soil is called loam and has the consistency of chocolate cake.

### Overall Tips:

- Make a note of where the sun is and where the shade is throughout the day and throughout the year
- Place your sun-loving crops in the sunniest spots in your garden - plan your garden around the sun-loving crops
- Fill in the gaps with fast-growing and shade-loving crops like leafy greens
- Add compost, manure, or some sort of amendment either at the start of the season in Spring or at the end, or both depending on how much amending your garden needs. After about 5 years, you'll see a big difference in your garden soil

This is only an introduction. There is a lot more information available and we encourage you to do your own research to find what works for you. Each garden is individual and what works for one garden may not work for another.

If you have any gardening questions, please email [info@urbanbounty.ca](mailto:info@urbanbounty.ca) and we'll do our best to answer your questions.