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GARDEN-TO-TABLE TIPS FOR GROWING AND COOKING YOUR OWN PRODUCE

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Nearly 50 percent of fresh fruits and 20 percent of fresh vegetables in the United States are imported (source: FoodSafety.gov), meaning they traveled long distances to get to your home. Want to know exactly where your food is coming from – and have the freshest possible flavors within arm's reach? Bring "Farm-to-Table" dining into your everyday life by creating your own garden. Grow, harvest and consume fruits, veggies and herbs at peak ripeness – and use them to create simple, healthy meals. Follow these tips to construct your very own backyard farmers market.

Room to Grow

When starting a garden, it's important to have a plan. First, determine the size and location. Find a spacious area with plenty of sunlight to help the plants take root and flourish – whether that's in your own backyard or a nearby community garden. If you live in a cooler climate, raised garden beds are highly recommended. These allow fruits and vegetables the space needed to expand their roots and hold in water. If you live in a hot, arid climate, create an in-

ground garden, as it holds in moisture better, requiring less irrigation. Once your garden plot is planned, it's time to pick your produce.

Herb gardens are perfect for those with limited agricultural experience or limited space. Herbs – like basil, cilantro, and chives – are easy to grow and maintain. Most herbs can withstand changing climates, meaning you can cook with fresh herbs year-round. They can be added to nearly any meal to increase depths of flavor and allow you to "play" with your food.

Farm with Flavor

Fresh produce will change the way you eat. Having access to a variety of fruits and vegetables lets you expand your menu at home while keeping it healthy. Many items found in simple salads are the easiest to farm. Carrots, tomatoes, radishes, lettuce and other leafy greens are often considered "beginner crops." Berries, like strawberries and blueberries, are also easy to cultivate. If you've ever tasted a ripe, just-picked strawberry, you'll know that it's worth the effort to grow it yourself!



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Mix It Up

Having a high-quality blender, like the [Vitamix A3500](#), is perfect for transforming your harvest into vibrant, inspired meals. Vitamix machines can be used to effortlessly chop, purée or juice any ingredients that may come from your budding garden.

Use your Vitamix to put a new spin on an old family recipe. Next time your kids ask for spaghetti and meatballs, try [Spaghetti with Roasted Vegetable Sauce](#). Made with fresh, garden ingredients, including Roma tomatoes, carrots and fresh basil leaves, this robust sauce will become a staple in your weekly meal rotation. You might even want to try it on top of spaghetti squash or zucchini noodles to take advantage of more nutritious, fresh-grown produce.

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Try something new and create [Sweet Potato Soup with Seared Tomatillos](#) using fresh jalapenos, poblanos and tomatillos from your garden. Or dress up a less-than-exciting salad with a brightly flavored [Strawberry Vinaigrette](#), using fresh strawberries and herbs.

Growing greens (plus reds, yellows, oranges, purples and blues) gives you the peace of mind to know exactly where your meals came from – and the pride that you nurtured something wholesome and worthwhile, from your garden to your kitchen table.