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The mission of K-State Research and Extension Family and Consumer Sciences is to link education with life experiences to help people improve their lives, their families and their communities. Family and Consumer Sciences professionals support essential life skills including Community Development, Healthy Lifestyle Choices, Leadership & Volunteer Development, Relationship Development and Resource Management.

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Grow Vegetables and Savings

Spring has nearly sprung! Are you sprouting ideas of starting a garden this year? You can reduce your grocery expenses by growing your own vegetables. It's also easy to spend a small fortune if you don't plan correctly.



If you are new to gardening, consider these tips before getting started. Have fun enjoying your garden's great tastes and the physical activity and savings benefits you reap!

Grow well-suited veggies. In Kansas, good choices when garden space is limited are bush cucumbers, eggplant, green beans, kale, lettuce, onions, peas, peppers, radishes, spinach, summer squash, Swiss chard and tomatoes. On the other hand, cabbage, melons, potatoes, pumpkins, sweet corn and winter squash typically require more growing space. Nearly all vegetables need full sun and well-drained soil.

Grow veggies that are expensive to buy. To save more money, grow more expensive vegetables, such as leafy greens, peppers and tomatoes, or grow large quantities of the vegetables that you purchase most regularly.

Grow veggies that you can store or preserve after the harvest. Onions, sweet and white potatoes, and winter squash can be stored for several months if you can keep them at the appropriate temperature. Other vegetables can be preserved if you dry, can or freeze them, such as corn, cucumbers, green beans and tomatoes.

Start with a written plan. Decide what you want to grow and find out how it should be planted, how to maintain it, and how to harvest and store it. Plan your garden on paper

first. Ask your friends, and call your local extension office, for advice on gardening and food preservation. Especially good resources are online at <http://www.rrc.k-state.edu/preservation> and www.ksre.ksu.edu/bookstore/pubs/S51.pdf

Reduce gardening inputs. Saving money by growing vegetables means keeping your costs as low as possible while still growing productive plants. For the first year, consider container gardening. Or, rent a plot in a community garden to find out if you like to garden before you need to invest in much equipment. Ask for advice about what to do from people who have gardened there for a few years. You could learn how to collect rainwater for irrigation and how to compost to improve the soil.

Start small. Like many activities worth doing, gardening takes practice. Crops require regular watering, weeding, harvesting and preservation/storage. Limit yourself to a few containers or to a small plot and just a few types of vegetables the first year. Expand as you become more experienced.

For additional information, contact the Wildcat Extension District, Crawford County, 620-724-8233, Labette County, 620-784-5337, Montgomery County, 620-331-2690, Pittsburg Office, Expanded Food and Nutrition Education (EFNEP), 620-232-1930. Our website is <http://www.wildcatdistrict.k-state.edu/> or follow us on Facebook: Wildcat Extension District.

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