

4-H Youth Development
Children, Youth & Family Programs
Michigan State University Extension

Selecting Vegetables for Exhibit

by J. Lee Taylor Extension Specialist in Horticulture

Why Exhibit?

ardening is an excellent source of enjoyment and relaxation, a welcome change from the complexity of modern-day living. How often have you heard people discussing, maybe bragging a bit, about their garden? As you become more knowledgeable, you will be able to discuss gardening with other gardeners and gain valuable information from their experiences.

Furthermore, what about all those fresh vegetables you will have for your family? Once you have become accustomed to eating them, you're sure to continue gardening even if you have to improvise on a small city lot or resort to container gardening (growing in baskets, etc.).

Displaying vegetables at fairs or other horticultural shows, in addition to just having a garden, can be a worthwhile experience. Pride in achievement and competition have traditionally stimulated a desire to produce a top quality product for show.

If you expect to exhibit, begin planning early. Obtain information (entry dates, class requirements, etc.) from your 4-H leader or county fair board. Have them send you a current show schedule and entry blanks. Visit with the superintendent of the vegetable division, leaders, or experienced exhibitors to find out about past shows.

A good time to begin planning what you will grow is early in the winter when seed and plant catalogs come out. These are reliable sources of a wide variety of plant materials and will contain new and recommended varieties. Catalogs contain a wealth of information on kinds and varieties of vegetables as well as much cultural advice. Many worthwhile hours can be spent going through these books. Addresses of seed companies can be obtained from Extension bulletin E760A, *Home Vegetable Variety Recommendations*, or from garden magazines.

Things to Learn

There is much to be learned about vegetable culture, insects and diseases, fertilization practices, watering, mulching, soil tillage, sowing seeds, and transplanting seedlings. Extension bulletin E529, Home Vegetable Garden, is helpful in this respect. Successful backyard gardeners will also want to know when to harvest vegetables and may want to store them. Two publications that would be helpful are E824(11), Drying and Storing Vegetables, and E1696, Home Storage of Fruits and Vegetables.

Once your garden is growing, you would profit from visiting other people's gardens and exchanging ideas with them. If you belong to a club, this might be done as a group. The garden tour is educational for the visitors and an incentive for the host gardener to maintain top cultural practices at all times

Another way of adding to your gardening knowledge and keeping abreast with current developments is to read the gardening section of your newspaper or to subscribe to garden magazines. These sources often give reminders of things you should do at different times of the year as well as presenting new and improved techniques that are worthwhile to try.

As show time approaches, review the recommended procedures for harvesting and grooming your specimens. The skills you gain in learning how to select vegetables will help you derive maximum enjoyment out of eating them.

Each year you exhibit, you can add to your knowledge of gardening. Ribbons and prize money are satisfying rewards for a job well done; but the enjoyment, relaxation, knowledge gained, and harvest of fresh vegetables are the important by-products that make gardening worthwhile.

Exhibit Requirements

Check fair books for rules and regulations pertaining to the classes in which you plan to enter. For example, if a class requires five specimens, and you enter only four, the judge will probably give your entry no award or the lowest possible award. In many counties, 4-H members are eligible to enter open classes and are encouraged to do so if they like the challenge of exhibiting.

The type of container to use is usually listed in the fair book. Sometimes the containers are furnished. Youth divisions often use paper plates and cardboard boxes for exhibiting specimens.

Beginner gardeners usually enter a single kind of vegetable using a 9-inch plate. Junior gardeners often enter three different kinds of vegetables using three 9-inch plates. Senior gardeners may exhibit five to eight or more kinds of vegetables, using a cardboard box 4 inches deep, 10 inches wide, and 16 inches long. This same box can be used by commercial gardeners who display only one kind of vegetable in it.

Be sure your entries are correct and on time. Most rules require exhibitors to fill out and return entry tags for each exhibit several weeks before the show.

Exhibiting Information

To enter classes correctly, it is necessary to know the difference between kinds and varieties of vegetables. For example, *Golden Queen* is a variety of sweet corn and sweet corn is a kind of vegetable. Each vegetable variety should be listed somewhere on the entry tag.

Tomatoes are usually counted as one kind of vegetable even though red, yellow or green, and cherry tomatoes are included in the same exhibit. The same is true of snap beans, cucumbers, onions, peppers, lettuce, and all other vegetables except summer and winter squash, which are usually considered as two different kinds of vegetables.

Gourds, herbs, Indian corn, oddities, and ornamentals should not be included in vegetable exhibits except in oddity or ornamental vegetable classes as listed in the rule book.

It is best not to include more than one kind of large vegetable in a box, as it is difficult to arrange an attractive display. "Filler" materials such as leaves, flowers, and artificial items should not be used.

Commercial Garden

The minimum number* of specimens of one kind of vegetable to exhibit on single plates is:

- 3 specimens—leeks (5 per bunch), large pumpkins, large winter squash, large watermelons.
- 5 specimens—broccoli (bunches), cabbage, cantaloupe, cauliflower, celery (plants), eggplant, green onions (bunches), pie pumpkin, mediumsized winter squash, ice box watermelons.
- 12 specimens—beets, carrots, slicing cucumbers, kohlrabi, okra, dry onions, parsnips, peppers, potatoes, radishes, rutabagas, salsify, summer squash, sweet corn, sweet potatoes, tomatoes (except cherry tomatoes), turnips.
- 1 box ($16 \times 10 \times 4$ inches) or peck basket—snap and lima beans, Brussels sprouts, peas, and pickling cucumbers.

Commercial packages may be used to exhibit vegetables if they hold the minimum number of specimens listed above. A quart of cherry tomatoes is recommended.

Waxing vegetables is permissible, but only a very thin coat is needed.

Educational Exhibits

Having educational exhibits is another way to learn about gardening. Common exhibits include:

- Most varieties of a single type of vegetable (for example, beans, squash, tomatoes)
- New varieties of one or more kinds of vegetables
- Unusual vegetables

^{*}This is the minimum number required for most youth exhibits in most classes. Most fair books list exhibit requirements for adult classes

Judging

xhibits are usually judged shortly after being entered while specimens are still fresh. One or more judges may participate. Exhibitors may be required to be present to answer questions in youth divisions or at youth fairs. In Open Class, exhibitors are usually not permitted to be present while judging is going on.

The number of awards or premiums varies as to class, number of entries, type of exhibit, etc. In most Open Classes, there are three to five awards per class, but the judge determines whether all the awards listed are actually presented. This is especially true for classes with only one or two entries or in classes where the exhibit quality is poor. In such cases, the judge may rule that no entries are worth an award. In most youth classes entrants receive blue, red, and white ribbons and varying premiums.

After Judging

Exhibits should remain on display until released by the superintendent. Most vegetables are not edible after being displayed in hot weather for several days. Therefore, only entrants who are required to remove their exhibit, or those who want their produce, container or ribbon(s) back, need pick up their exhibit.

Some youth fairs have stands for selling vegetables during the fair. Vegetables not used in exhibits are often offered for sale at prices similar to those at roadside markets. Some vegetables can be sold directly after judging if the show lasts only one day.

Important Items In Vegetable Judging

Kind and Variety of Vegetable

Each specimen should be correctly labeled as to variety. Often, new and improved varieties are better for exhibiting than some older varieties. Extension bulletin E760A, *Home Vegetable Garden Variety Recommendations*, available at your county Extension office, lists recommended varieties. Most recommended varieties can be obtained only through seed catalogs.

A recommended variety is a variety that has been tested for a particular locality by a competent authority such as a university, county Extension

agent, or All America Selections. Many new varieties are released each year, and it is not possible to test all of them. Therefore, gardeners are encouraged to try new varieties on a small scale and to compare them with old varieties. Since there may be great variations in yield, earliness, uniformity, and other qualities, gardeners should observe varieties carefully when making comparisons.

Freedom from Injury

All vegetables should be free of insects and diseases as well as damage caused by these organisms and weather injuries. Mechanical injuries (such as those caused by weather or rough treatment during harvest) downgrade an exhibit. For example, it is not desirable to show root crops that have been injured while digging or squash with stems torn off. Pack vegetables carefully in cloth or paper when transporting to the fair.

Growth Quality

Growth quality is determined mainly by appearance and includes maturity, marketable size, freedom from roughness, and trueness to type.

Maturity—Vegetables should be in prime condition for eating at the time of judging. In case of a late season or early fair, immature specimens are usually accepted. A higher set of standards should be used for judging green tomatoes and other immature vegetables such as winter squash if both mature and immature specimens are exhibited in the same class.

Marketable Size—Vegetables should be a size that will sell well on the open market. Consumer preferences are important when selling produce.

Freedom from Roughness—Vegetables should be free from excessive roughness such as that caused by crowding in the row. Unthinned beets can be very flat sided if crowded.

Trueness to Type—All vegetables should be as true to the variety or type as it is possible to grow and select them. For example, an elongated beet is not typical of the variety *Detroit Dark Red* even though some such beets might develop from seed of that variety.

Condition

The condition of exhibits is very important and includes freshness, cleanliness, and trimming.

Freshness—Vegetables should be harvested and prepared as close to the exhibition date as possible to prevent wilting and shriveling. Specimens should be stored in a cool place (basement, refrigerator, etc.) if they must be harvested the night before the show.

Cleanliness—Signs of soil or other material on vegetables are unsightly. A soft brush and a damp cloth can be used to clean vegetables. Avoid bruising caused by excessive scrubbing.

Trimming—Vegetables should be neatly and properly trimmed as they would be for market. Specific pointers are given in this bulletin. Use a sharp knife or kitchen shears.

Uniformity

Vegetables should be uniform in size, shape, color, maturity, and type.

Size—Choose the size that is desirable on the market. Remember, the biggest is usually not the best; and for many vegetables, unusual size often indicates poor quality. Do not place four large tomatoes and one small tomato on a plate. Instead, select five medium-sized specimens. Also, try to arrange specimens on a plate so that the largest and smallest are not next to each other.

Shape—Select the typical shape for which the variety is known.

Color—This characteristic should be uniform for all specimens of a variety. More intense or deeper colored specimens are usually preferred.

Maturity—Specimens should be of like maturity.

Type—Vegetables should be true to type and uniform in type.

Specific Considerations

Vegetables	Number for Exhibit*	Selection and Preparation Pointers
Beans, snap	12 pods	Select long, straight, well-filled pods of same length and color. Pods should be clean, firm, crisp, and free from strings and blemishes. Seeds should be no larger than half size. Leave stems attached, but trim evenly to no longer than ¼ inch.
Beans, lima	12 pods	Select well-filled, clean, bright, dark green pods. Arrange neatly and leave the stems attached, but trim evenly to no longer than ¼ inch.
Beets	5	Select roots free of side roots, cracks, and blemishes and remove the tops evenly ½ to 1 inch above the crown. Clean the roots by placing them in cold water and then carefully wiping off the soil. Desirable size is approximately 1½ to 3 inches in diameter. Tap roots should not be removed.
Broccoli	1 bunch (approx. 1 pound)	Select a central crown or side shoots that are compact, evenly colored, and without yellow flowers. Leave a few leaves surrounding the head, but trim the leaf tips to 1 inch above the head.
Brussels sprouts	12	Sprouts should be uniform, medium in size, firm, well-shaped, compact, and green in color. Trim stems evenly to ¼ inch.
Cabbage	1	Select a solid, firm, fresh, crisp head. Trim off all but two or three of the outer leaves. Cut the stem ¼ to ½ inch below the lowest leaf.
Carrots	5	Select smooth, straight, firm, brightly colored specimens 1 to 1½ inches in diameter and remove the tops evenly ½ to 1 inch above the crown. Do not remove the tap root and avoid specimens that are greenish or pale yellow in color.
Cauliflower	1	Select a smooth, solid head. Leave a few leaves surrounding the head, but trim the leaves to 1 inch above the head. Trim the stem to ½ inch below the bottom leaf, and cut straight across.
*For Beginner, Junior, and S	Senior Home Garden ex	hibits. For Commercial Garden exhibits, see page 3.

Vegetables	Number fo Exhibit*	Selection and Preparation Pointers
Celery	1 plant	Select a large plant with many crisp stalks. Remove the small outside stalks or suckers and trim the stem neatly. The leaves may be partially clipped.
Cucumbers, pickling and slicing	5	Select straight, well-shaped, green specimens with a minimum of white or yellow streaks. Cut the stem off. Length: less than 3 inches long for small pickles, between 4 and 5½ inches for dills, and not over 8 inches for slicing. Pick with the stems on and then cut the stems off evenly ¼ to ½ inch from the end of the cucumber.
Eggplant	1	Select a solid, medium-sized specimen which is deep purple or nearly black in color and without bronzing or green or white streaks. Clean with a damp soft cloth. Leave a stem 1 to 1½ inches long, but cut off neatly.
Kohlrabi	5	Select specimens which are solid, crisp, of medium size (2½ to 3½ inches in diameter), well-shaped, and tender (puncturable with thumbnail). The stems should be cut off just below the ball and 4 to 6 leaves should be allowed to remain, but these should be trimmed to ½ inch from the ball.
Leeks	5	Select specimens which are long, thick, firm, and with pure white, well-blanched stems. The tops should be shortened and the roots trimmed evenly.
Muskmelon	1	Select a well-netted specimen which is fairly mature, medium- sized, and of market quality. Stem is removed when picking if specimen is mature.
Okra	5 pods	Select pods that are nearly straight, not twisted or curved. Pods should be harvested before they become woody and fibrous and before the seeds harden. At this stage, the pods snap easily when bent and are easily punctured. Trim stems neatly and evenly.
Onions, dry	5	Select well-shaped bulbs not less than 2 inches in diameter. Bulbs should be free from sprouts, bruises, and doubles. Harvest bulbs 2 to 3 weeks before showing if possible so that they will be well-ripened. Roots should be cut off just below the base of the bulb; only broken and dirty outer scales should be removed and the tops should be cut off evenly ½ to 1 inch above the bulb. Specimens should have bright, clean, dry outer scales.
		Select medium-sized specimens having long, straight, white shanks and remove the wrapper skins just before showing. Do not remove the roots and tops. Tie about 10 in a bunch.
Parsnips	5	Select firm specimens having a long, even taper and no side roots. The skin should be smooth, light creamy colored, and free of discoloration. Tops should be cut off evenly ½ inch above the crown. Soil should be soaked off with water to avoid rubbing the skin and all side rootlets trimmed off. Tap root should be left on.
	12 pods 1 	Select well-filled, firm pods which are not overmature (before the pods begin to shrivel and dry). Pods should be picked carefully and handled as little as possible to avoid removing the bloom. Pick and exhibit them with stems on; trim evenly to no longer than 4 inch.

Vegetables	Number fo Exhibit*	Selection and Preparation Pointers
Peppers	. 5	Select specimens with the same number of lobes (points). Peppers should be of uniform color, firm, and have thick flesh. Clean by wiping with a damp cloth and leave the stems attached. Cut stem level with the shoulder of the specimen.
Potatoes	5	Select medium-sized tubers (6 to 10 oz.) which are well-shaped and uniform. Harvest a few days ahead of showing and clean by brushing lightly or washing.
Pumpkin, pie	1	Select a well-matured specimen about 7 inches in diameter and leave the stem attached. The specimen should be smooth, heavy, well-shaped, firm, and reddish orange in color. Clean by washing.
Radishes	5	Select smooth, firm, medium-sized specimens and remove the tops evenly ½ to 1 inch above the crown. Wash thoroughly. Trim the main root if it is very long.
Rutabagas	3	Select smooth specimens 3½ to 5 inches in diameter and remove the tops neatly and evenly ½ to 1 inch above the crown. Trim the main root if it is very long.
Salsify	5	Select specimens which are as straight and smooth as possible and at least 6 inches long and 1 to 1½ inches in diameter at the top. Specimens should not be soft, flabby, or shriveled. Remove tops neatly and evenly ½ to 1 inch above the crown. Remove rootlets and side roots and trim the main root if it is very long.
Squash, summer	3	Select immature specimens and leave stem attached (but trim neatly). Pick 3 or 4 days after the flower opens and cut off from vine. The rind should be soft (easily punctured with thumbnail). Use soft cloth to remove soil. Specimens of the Crookneck, Straightneck, and Zucchini varieties should be picked when about 5 to 6 inches long for highest quality.
Squash, winter	1	Select a mature specimen and leave the stem attached (but trim neatly). The skin should be very hard (not puncturable with thumbnail).
weet corn		Select well-filled ears with kernels in the milk stage. Husks should be fresh and green and should fit tightly around the ear. Leave the husks on and don't cut any windows in the husks. Cut stalks neatly.
weet potatoes	3	Select well-shaped specimens. Specimens should be dug at least a few days in advance of showing to allow some curing. Clean by brushing lightly or washing. A short stem and about 1 inch of the tap root should be left attached.
omatoes, green, pink, or ripe	5	Select firm specimens that are evenly colored and free of cracks,
omatoes, cherry	12	spots, sunscald, and blemishes. Remove stems on pink and ripe specimens to avoid injury to adjacent specimens. Stems may be eft on green tomatoes. Blossom end scars should be small.
ırnips	5 8 6 t	Select smooth, medium-sized specimens about 1¾ to 2¾ inches in liameter. Rootlets should be removed, but leave 2 to 3 inches of the tap root remaining. Remove the tops neatly and evenly ½ to 1 nch above the crown.
itermelon, ice box type	1 S	elect a specimen that is of market quality and trim the stem to

Leafy Vegetables

Unless a fair or show lasts only one or two days, leafy vegetables are not recommended for exhibiting since they do not hold up well. If it is necessary to include them in an exhibit, follow the suggestions listed below. Hold the vegetables in plastic bags containing water until just prior to exhibiting. Or, grow the plants in containers and exhibit the containers.

Vegetables	Number for Exhibit*	Selection and Preparation Pointers
Chinese cabbage	1 head	Select a compact head and cut the stem off ¼ inch below the lower leaves and remove the outer discolored leaves.
Collards	1 plant	Cut the plant with a large knife, leaving 4 to 5 wrapper leaves to protect the plant. Remove all dead or damaged leaves.
Endive	1 plant	Select a stout, crisp, tender specimen with a well-blanched heart. The roots should be removed.
Kale	1 plant	Select a specimen with foliage that is heavy, large, dark green, closely set, and well-curled. Cut the plant off at the crown of the root.
Lettuce, head	1 head	Select a medium-sized, firm head which is fresh and crisp. Coarse or damaged outer leaves should be removed. Cut the stem off close to the bottom leaf. Wash if necessary.
Lettuce, leaf	1 plant	Select a reasonably compact plant having crisp, tender, medium green leaves. The entire plant should be cut just above the crown and discolored or injured leaves removed. Clean by washing.
Mustard	1 plant	Cut entire plant just below crown. Remove discolored or injured leaves and wash thoroughly.
New Zealand spinach	1 plant	Cut entire plant just below crown. Remove discolored or injured leaves and wash thoroughly.
Parsley	1 bunch	Leaves should be fresh and tender and may be cleaned by washing. About 10 sprigs make a good bunch. Trim stems evenly and make the bunch 8 to 10 inches in overall length.
Spinach	1 bunch	Leaves should be large, broad, thick, and fresh.
Swiss chard	1 bunch	Leaves should be fully expanded, large, broad, and crisp with bright, tender, fleshy leaf stalks. Clean by washing if necessary. Ten leaves make a good bunch.

Don'ts

- 1. Don't show specimens of vegetables that are injured or dirty.
- 2. Don't show vegetables that are not uniform in size, shape, color, maturity, and type.
- 3. Don't exhibit overmature vegetables.
- **4.** Don't exhibit more than one kind of large vegetable in a box, if possible.
- **5.** Don't exhibit leafy vegetables unless it is absolutely necessary.
- 6. Don't use filler material.
- 7. Don't peel onions. Harvest the bulbs 2 to 3 weeks before showing so that they will be well-ripened and so the dirty outer scales will be dry and easily removed and peeling will not be necessary.
- 8. Don't cut windows in the husks of sweet corn.
- 9. Don't exhibit mature summer squash.
- 10. Don't exhibit the biggest vegetables that you have because unusual size frequently indicates poor quality due to overmaturity.
- 11. Don't include gourds, herbs, peanuts, Indian corn, oddities, and ornamentals in vegetable exhibits.
- 12. Don't exhibit specimens of Turks Turbin, which is a gourd.
- **13.** Don't count different varieties of one vegetable as different kinds of vegetables.
- 14. Don't forget to arrange an attractive display with your vegetables.

General Exhibit Hints

Most of the following pointers are valid for exhibiting or selling and using fresh vegetables:

Snap beans—Many people do not know when to pick beans; some pick them when they are about twice the thickness of a toothpick. Therefore, yields are very low, picking is slow, and such beans, if exhibited, will shrivel badly. Others wait until the pods get very large and bulge with seeds. These beans are usually too old and past the optimum stage for consumption or exhibiting. Pods are more attractive if the stems are left attached, so use care when pulling pods from the plants as the stem end is easily broken off.

Cabbage—Cabbage heads are more attractive if some outside (wrapper) leaves are left on. This practice also makes it easier to determine whether (1) the imported cabbage worm was controlled or (2) if one could expect to find worms inside the head.

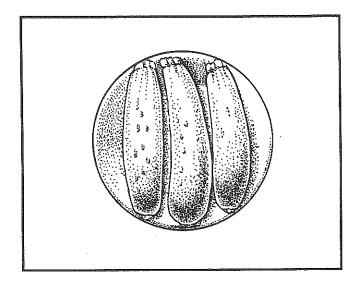
Cucumbers—Pick carefully, leaving the stem on and then cutting it off. Otherwise, a good portion of the cucumber may break off, resulting in an injured and unsightly specimen. In addition, mold and other diseases are more apt to get a start when there are large or numerous injuries.

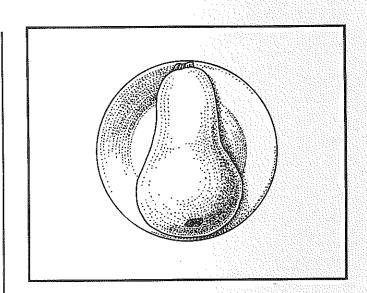
Tomatoes—Ripe tomatoes are normally sold and exhibited with stems removed, since, if they are left on, they can easily puncture other mature tomatoes. There should be no cracks on the mature fruits, and blossom end scars should be small. If the specimens have cracks or large scars, see Extension bulletin E760A, Home Vegetable Garden Variety Recommendations, for a list of recommended varieties to grow another year. Most recommended varieties do not crack.

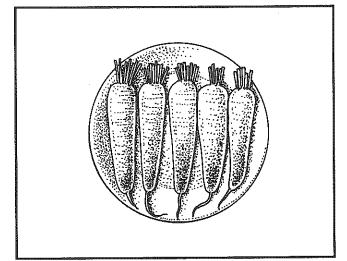
These are just a few of many exhibit hints that may prove helpful in getting an exhibit ready. Brief specifics are given on pages 5-8.

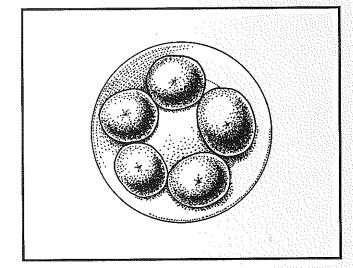
Examples of Good Vegetable Exhibits (Nine-Inch Plates)

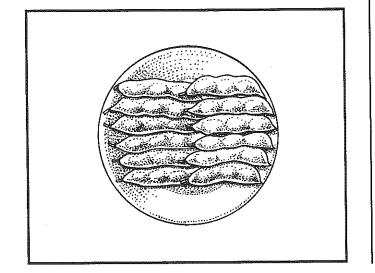
Beginner Home Garden



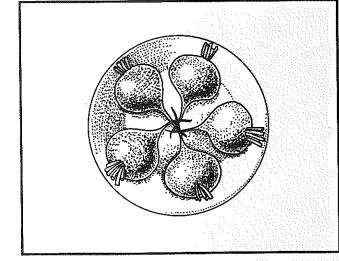




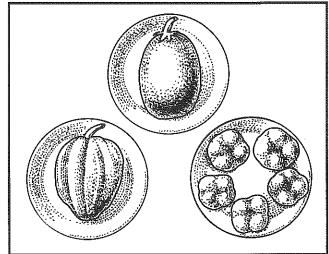


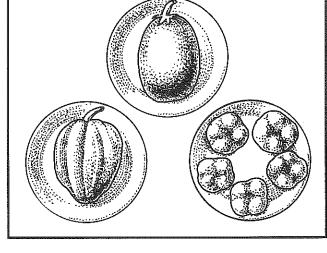


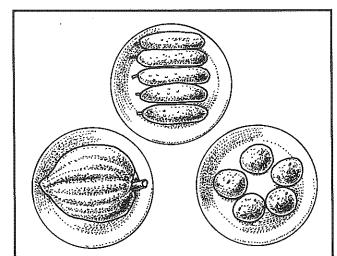
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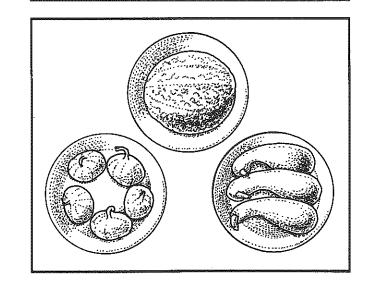


Junior Home Garden

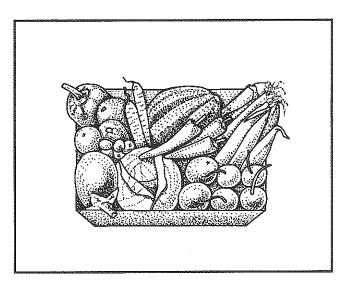




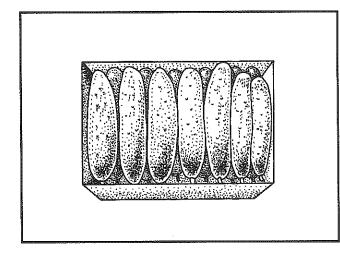


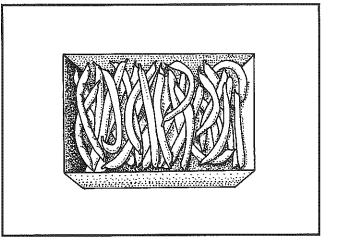


Senior Home Garden



Commercial Garden





11

Horticulture Career Ideas

you really enjoy exercising your green thumb, you might consider a career in horticulture.

Job opportunities range from the get-your-hands-dirty-at-the-greenhouse-bench to the more academic—research, teaching, or horticulture therapy. In addition to helping you to develop a fascinating hobby, a 4-H horticulture project can expose you to many career options.

Career Options

If your project has sparked your interest in a career in horticulture, you might consider some of the following career options:

or teacher might provide a little more variety. level or working as a horticulture Extension agent up that depth of interest, teaching at a university years studying tulips). If you doubt you could keep involves one plant type (e.g., a student could spend required. Advanced research usually means gradan Extension specialist, four years of college are ture but to qualify for a teaching position or work as good preparation for a job in commercial horticuland there are three basic options available. A techuate school—a master's degree or Ph.D. Most usually lasts two years. This program certainly offers classroom training with in-the-field training and ture with a desire to learn more. These and similar nical program in horticulture combines formal professions require training beyond high school, These careers all combine an interest in horticul-Researcher, teacher, horticulture specialist

If you would rather spend time in the garden or greenhouse instead of at a desk studying, you might enjoy a career that doesn't require formal training beyond high school. Propagation and sale of houseplants; greenhouse work or flower arranging; picking, packing and inspecting fruits and vegetables; pruning trees and vines; or gardening and yard work are all options.

If the idea of being your own boss appeals to you, you might consider running your own greenhouse, flower shop, roadside stand, or truck farm. Because these businesses require lots of paperwork and recordkeeping, some business training is a good idea. Someone considering this area should also remember that plants don't grow on a 40-hour-aweek schedule. These occupations require long hours during the busy seasons and on weekends.

For more information about a career in horticulture, contact:

Horticulture Department Michigan State University East Lansing, MI 48824

Office of Academic and Student Affairs Michigan State University East Lansing, MI 48824 Copies of the following materials can b

Copies of the following materials can be obtained at no charge from the MSU Horticulture Department:

Four-year college programs:
Careers in Horticulture
Requirements for a Bachelor of Science Degree in Horticulture at Michigan State University
Suggested Courses to Fulfill College and
University Requirements
Undergraduate Courses in Horticulture
Two-year college programs:
Commercial Floriculture
Fruit/Vegetable Production
Landscape and Nursery Program



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