

Crop Rotation in the Vegetable Garden

Planning and record keeping are valuable for the vegie garden because they help you to grow healthier vegetables in the best possible conditions. Planning for a succession of different plants in one spot (and keeping notes on what you have done) avoids a build-up pests and diseases and ensures that each crop has the right amount of nutrients and care.

The aim is to rotate your crops over three to four seasons. At the same time, think about creating the right environment for heavy and light feeders and only add nutrients when they will be needed. A light feeding crop should follow a heavy feeding crop. If you follow a heavy feeding crop by another heavy feeding crop, add more food to the bed and make sure that the new crop is from a different family. Legumes every three to four years in each spot will act as soil builders, making deep root tracks for water and capturing and releasing nitrogen. Leaving a bed fallow (mulched and unplanted) once in a while, or planting it with a green manure crop, helps to improve soil health and structure.

Over time one spot could be planted with carrots (light feeders, apiaceae family), be manured and bear tomatoes (heavy feeders, solanaceae family), have a crop of onions (light feeders, alliaceae family) and then be planted with beans (soil builder, legumes, fabaceae family.) Crop rotation is reasonably easy if you plan ahead and keep records but I can assure you that, without them, it is very easy to forget where and when your veggies were planted.

Basic Guide to Vegetable Families

LF = light feeders HF = heavy feeders SB = soil builders

Solanaceae - potatoes, tomatoes, capsicums, chilies and eggplants. **HF**

Brassiaceae - Asian greens, cabbage, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, turnips, mustard, radishes. **HF**

Apiaceae - carrots, coriander, parsley, parsnip, dill & caraway. **LF**

Fabaceae - peas, beans and other legumes. **SB**

Cucurbitaceae - pumpkin, zucchini and cucumbers. **HF**

Amaranthaceae - spinach and silverbeet **HF**

Asteraceae - lettuce & artichokes **HF** Good to plant after legumes.

Chenopodiaceae - beetroot and quinoa **HF**

Poaceae - sweetcorn and maize **HF**

Alliaceae - onions, garlic, chives and leeks **LF**



In addition to bed preparation, heavy feeder vegetables benefit from compost, manure, worm castings or liquid feed over the growing season. Mulch the beds with an organic material that breaks down over a year and enriches the soil. We mulch lightly, enough to conserve water while allowing rain to get through, but not enough to create too good a habitat for snails and slugs.

Crop rotation is easiest to organise when whole or part beds are allocated to one crop. It does, however, lead to pests easily finding your plants by smell or sight because they are in a block. You can plant your veggies in a more interspersed way, including flowering plants to encourage pollination and predation, and still have crop rotation work for you. In one bed you might have a mixture of plants from two heavy feeding families and next season pop in a mixture from two or three light feeding families.

A bit of planning and record keeping will set you up for wonderful vegetable crops over the years. There is nothing like eating fresh, tasty veggies from your own garden.

Happy gardening, Christine and Keith Windle,

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Garden Design Workshop at Garden Gate of Inverleigh Nursery, Sunday 25th September, 9 – 11.30, theory and garden visit. \$25, bookings ring Christine on 0403267286.