

# Suburban Survival Garden Planning Checklist

A practical worksheet for building a food-producing garden in limited suburban space.

## 1. SITE & SUN AUDIT

- Map the areas where food could be grown: backyard, side yard, patio, deck, driveway edge, balcony, or front yard.
- Track direct sunlight for several days before deciding where to place beds or containers.
- Identify the sunniest locations for fruiting crops such as tomatoes, peppers, beans, squash, and cucumbers.
- Reserve lower-light areas for crops that can tolerate some shade, such as leafy greens and some herbs.
- Note nearby trees, fences, buildings, pets, foot traffic, and other limits on growing space.

## 2. SOIL, BEDS & CONTAINERS

- Choose where to use in-ground beds, raised beds, containers, grow bags, or vertical supports.
- Test existing garden soil before making major amendments.
- Add compost or appropriate organic matter based on soil needs rather than guessing.
- Make sure containers have adequate drainage and enough soil volume for the crop.
- Plan paths and access so plants can be watered, weeded, harvested, and inspected easily.

## 3. CROP PLAN

- Prioritize foods your household already eats.
- Include dependable, high-yield crops suited to your growing conditions.
- Balance quick-producing vegetables with crops that provide more food volume or calories.
- Choose varieties that fit the available space, especially compact or bush types for containers.
- Decide which crops will be started from seed and which will be purchased as seedlings.
- Record approximate planting dates based on local frost dates and growing season.

## 4. WATER PLAN

- Identify your normal water source and how you will reach every bed or container.
- Consider drip irrigation or soaker hoses to reduce watering labor and target the root zone.
- Use mulch where appropriate to slow moisture loss and suppress weeds.
- Plan a backup watering method for short-term utility or power disruptions.
- Avoid relying on unsafe or untreated water sources for edible crops without understanding the risks.

## 5. SUCCESSION & SEASON EXTENSION

- Identify crops that can be planted more than once for repeated harvests.
- Stagger plantings when practical instead of planting the entire crop at one time.
- Use trellises or vertical supports to increase production without expanding the garden footprint.
- Consider simple season-extension methods appropriate for your climate and experience.
- Keep notes on planting dates, harvest timing, successes, and failures.

## 6. PESTS, WEEDS & POLLINATORS

- Inspect plants regularly so pest or disease problems are caught early.
- Use Integrated Pest Management principles before reaching for broad treatments.
- Control weeds while they are small and before they produce seed.
- Avoid unnecessary pesticide use that could harm pollinators or beneficial insects.
- Include flowering plants or herbs where practical to support pollinators.

## 7. HARVEST & PRESERVATION

- Decide how surplus produce will be used before peak harvest arrives.
- Match crops to preservation methods you will realistically use: freezing, dehydrating, canning, fermenting, or cool storage.
- Gather preservation supplies before the garden reaches peak production.
- Label preserved food with the contents and date.
- Rotate preserved garden food into normal meals rather than treating it as untouchable emergency food.

## 8. BUILD & EXPAND

- Start with a garden size you can reliably water, weed, and harvest.
- Track which crops produced the most useful food for the time and space invested.
- Save seeds only when you understand whether the variety and crop are suitable for reliable seed saving.
- Improve soil and composting systems over time.
- Expand beds, containers, irrigation, and preservation capacity based on what actually worked.
- Review the plan at the end of the season and choose three improvements for next year.

### MY THREE NEXT STEPS

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**Preparedness note:** A survival garden works best as one part of a broader food and water plan. Build gradually, learn what grows well where you live, and preserve what your household will actually eat.