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Farm to table in any backyard

Dylan Busby
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The Silsbee Bee

The farm-to-table movement does not require acreage, tractors or even a traditional backyard. With thoughtful planning, anyone can grow fresh produce at home, whether in a suburban yard or on a small apartment balcony.

The first step is assessing available space and sunlight. Most vegetables require at least six hours of direct sunlight per day. Backyards offer flexibility for raised beds or in-ground planting, while balconies can support container gardens. Even a few square feet can produce herbs, lettuce, peppers or cherry tomatoes.

For homeowners with yard space, raised beds are a practical starting point. They improve drainage, control soil quality and reduce weed intrusion. Filling beds with a blend of compost, topsoil and organic matter provides the nutrient base plants need to thrive. Simple crops such as tomatoes, cucumbers, squash and green beans are productive and beginner-friendly.

Apartment dwellers can embrace container gardening. Five-gallon buckets, ceramic pots or vertical planters work well for compact varieties. Herbs such as basil, rosemary

and cilantro thrive in containers. Leafy greens like spinach and arugula grow quickly and can be harvested multiple times. Dwarf tomato and pepper plants are specifically bred for small spaces.

Watering and soil management are critical. Containers dry out faster than ground soil, so consistent watering is necessary. Adding mulch helps retain moisture. Organic fertilizers or compost tea can boost plant health without synthetic chemicals.

One advantage of home gardening is control. Growers decide what goes into the soil and onto the plants. Harvesting at peak ripeness also improves flavor and nutritional value compared to store-bought produce transported long distances.

Starting small prevents overwhelm. A few containers or one raised bed can yield enough produce to supplement grocery trips and build confidence. Over time, gardeners can expand into seasonal planting rotations.

Farm to table begins not at a restaurant, but at home. Whether from a backyard plot or a sunny balcony, growing food connects people directly to what they eat and transforms ordinary spaces into productive, sustainable sources of fresh ingredients.



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Garden Lift: Raised Beds Make Homegrown Easier



Leafy greens thrive in a sunlit raised-bed garden, where elevated soil and a simple wooden frame improve drainage and make planting, weeding and harvesting easier.

By Dennis Phillips
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Raised-bed gardening is gaining ground for one simple reason: it works. For people who have tried to grow vegetables in hard clay, thin topsoil, or low spots that stay soggy after a rain, raised beds offer a clean solution. Lift the garden up, control the soil, and make the work easier.

Raised beds are planting areas where the soil sits above the surrounding ground, usually contained by a frame made of wood, stone, or metal. Some are low boxes about a foot tall. Others are built higher for accessibility. Either way, the purpose is the same —

create a dedicated growing space with better soil structure, improved drainage and less compaction than many in-ground gardens.

In much of Texas, native soil can be a challenge. Heavy clay holds water, then turns hard. Sandy ground drains too quickly and struggles to hold nutrients. Rocky ground limits root growth. Raised beds allow gardeners to sidestep those conditions by bringing in a soil mix designed for vegetables and herbs.

They also make gardening feel less like work. A raised bed keeps plants closer to the gardener, reduces bending, and creates clear borders for where to step and where not to. That simple change prevents soil from being packed down and makes it easier

to weed, water and harvest.

Why raised beds work

Drainage is a major advantage. Because the soil is elevated, water moves through it more reliably. Roots are less likely to sit in saturated ground, lowering the risk of rot and disease. After a rain, raised beds usually dry out faster than flat ground, letting gardeners get back to planting and maintenance sooner.

Raised beds also help prevent soil compaction. In traditional gardens, stepping into rows compresses the soil, squeezing out air pockets that roots need. Compacted soil drains poorly, warms slowly and makes

How to build the perfect chicken coop

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With egg prices fluctuating and grocery costs rising, more homeowners are considering backyard chickens as a practical investment. A small flock can produce fresh eggs daily, reducing dependence on store purchases and providing a consistent food source. Over time, the value of homegrown eggs can offset feed and setup costs, especially for families that regularly consume eggs. Beyond savings, chickens offer fertilizer for gardens and, in some cases, meat production. However, realizing those economic benefits begins with building a proper coop.

The perfect chicken coop keeps birds safe, comfortable and productive. A well-designed structure protects against predators and harsh weather while allowing adequate space for roosting and laying.

Start with Location

Select a well-drained, level area with a balance of sun and shade. Proper drainage pre-



White hens roam freely in a shaded yard outside a small chicken coop, illustrating the calm, natural environment often associated with backyard poultry keeping. Sunlight filters through tree leaves as the birds forage along the ground near their enclosure.

vents muddy, unsanitary conditions. Position the coop so airflow supports ventilation without exposing birds to constant drafts.

Build with Adequate Space

Each chicken needs approximately 3 to 4 square feet inside the coop and 8 to 10 square feet in the outdoor run. Overcrowding leads to stress and decreased egg production. Planning for slightly more space than currently needed allows flexibility if the flock grows.

Foundation and Structure

Elevate the coop 12 to 24 inches off the ground to improve airflow and deter rodents. Use pressure-treated lumber for the

base and exterior-grade plywood for walls and flooring. Seal exposed wood to protect against moisture.

Prioritize Predator Protection

Backyard flocks face threats from raccoons, snakes and stray dogs. Use hardware cloth instead of standard chicken wire to secure openings. Install sturdy latches on doors and bury fencing at least 12 inches underground around the run to prevent digging predators.

Ventilation and Interior Setup

Proper ventilation prevents moisture buildup and respiratory issues. Install screened vents near the roofline. Inside, provide one nesting box for every three to four

hens. Roost bars should allow 8 to 10 inches of space per bird and be positioned higher than nesting boxes.

Weatherproofing and Run

A sloped roof with metal panels prevents leaks and extends durability. An enclosed run with overhead protection shields chickens from aerial predators and extreme sun exposure.

Building the right coop protects the initial investment and ensures consistent egg production. With thoughtful construction and planning, a backyard chicken setup can deliver both economic value and reliable food for years to come.

Kitchen vs. Bathroom: The great renovation debate



Exposed wood ceiling beams add warmth and character above a newly installed kitchen sink and wide picture window, blending modern finishes with natural textures in this home renovation. The updated design emphasizes light, simplicity, and outdoor views while improving function in the refreshed space.

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When homeowners decide to remodel, the first major question is often this: renovate the kitchen or the bathroom? Both spaces

are essential. Both can increase property value. But the decision ultimately comes down to lifestyle, return on investment and how a family actually uses its home.

Bathrooms are among the most frequently used rooms in a house. Updating fixtures, improving

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► RAISED BEDS From Page 4

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it harder for roots to expand. Raised beds are designed so you work from the sides, keeping the growing surface loose and healthy.

Raised beds can warm earlier in spring as well. Elevated soil tends to dry and heat faster, which can lead to earlier planting and a longer productive season. For gardeners who want tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers established quickly, that earlier start can matter.

Sizing a bed for real life

Raised beds are easy to overbuild. The best ones are simple, sturdy, and sized for how people actually garden.

A key rule is reach. Most gardeners can comfortably reach about 2 feet into a bed from the edge. That is why many raised beds are built no wider than 4 feet. A 4-foot bed can be worked from both sides without stepping into it. If the bed is placed against a fence or wall and can only be reached from one side, 2 to 3 feet is more practical.

Height depends on crop choices and comfort. A bed about 10 to 12 inches tall works well for many vegetables when placed on native soil, because roots can extend down. Taller beds can be easier on the back and knees, and deeper beds help crops with larger root systems. If a bed sits on concrete or compacted ground, extra depth becomes more import-

ant because roots cannot penetrate below the frame.

Length is flexible. A raised bed can be 6 feet long, 12 feet long, or built to fit a space. Access matters more than length. Leave room for paths, hoses and wheelbarrows. Several narrow beds with comfortable paths between them are often easier to manage than one huge bed.

Materials and basic construction

Frames can be built from wood, stone, or metal. Wood remains the most common because it is easy to cut and assemble. Cedar and redwood last longer because they resist rot naturally. Pine is cheaper and widely available, though it may not last as many seasons.

For vegetable gardening, avoid using old railroad ties and questionable reclaimed wood. Some older treated woods were preserved with chemicals that are not appropriate around edible crops. If you do not know what the wood was treated with, choose a safer material.

A simple raised bed can be built as a rectangle with boards secured at the corners. A common backyard design is a 4-by-8-foot frame made from 2-by-12 lumber, creating a bed about a foot tall.

Site preparation is straightforward. Remove grass and weeds where the bed will sit. Some gardeners lay down cardboard or several layers of newspaper to smother weeds before adding soil. In areas where burrowing pests

are common, hardware cloth can be installed under the bed before filling it.

Soil: the part that matters most

What you put in a raised bed determines whether it thrives. The goal is a soil mix that drains well, holds moisture and contains plenty of organic matter.

A reliable approach is a blend of topsoil and compost, with a lighter component to improve texture and drainage. The exact recipe varies, but gardeners should avoid filling a bed with only bagged “topsoil” or only compost. Straight topsoil can compact and drain poorly. Straight compost can settle unevenly or become too rich depending on the source.

Expect soil to settle during the first season. Fresh mixes compress as air pockets close and organic matter breaks down. Most beds drop a few inches. That is normal. Top-dressing with compost brings the level back up and refreshes nutrients.

Soil testing is a smart step, especially for gardeners who want consistent results. Testing helps identify pH and nutrient issues before they become visible problems. It also helps prevent over-fertilizing, which can lead to weak growth and poor production.

Watering and mulching

Raised beds drain well, but they can also dry out faster than in-ground gardens, espe-

▶ RAISED BEDS From Page 7

cially in heat and wind. Consistent watering is often the biggest adjustment for first-time raised-bed gardeners.

A simple method is to check moisture by hand. If the soil is dry a couple inches below the surface, it is time to water. During hot weather, that may mean watering more frequently than gardeners expect.

Mulch makes raised beds more forgiving. A layer of straw, shredded leaves, or other organic mulch reduces evaporation, keeps soil temperature steadier, and slows weed growth. It also improves soil over time as it breaks down.

For gardeners who want efficiency, drip irrigation is an excellent match for raised beds. Drip lines or soaker hoses deliver water directly to the root zone, reducing waste and limiting leaf diseases that come with overhead watering. Timers can automate the process and keep beds on a steady schedule during the hottest months.

Ongoing care that stays manageable

Raised beds are not maintenance-free, but they are organized. The work is contained in a defined space, which makes it easier to stay ahead of weeds and watering.

Weeding tends to be easier because the soil is loose and the area is smaller. Most weed problems are best handled early, before plants get established. A few minutes of pulling weeds each week prevents major clean-up later.

Feeding the soil is part of

long-term success. Raised beds are productive systems, and repeated harvests remove nutrients. Many gardeners add compost each season, either mixed into the top layer or spread as a top-dressing. If plants show pale leaves or slow growth, a targeted fertilizer can help, but compost remains the foundation.

Rotating crops is useful even in small beds. Planting tomatoes in the same spot year after year increases the risk of pests and soil-borne disease. Switching plant families around the bed — leafy greens one season, legumes the next, fruiting crops after that — helps balance nutrient use and disrupts pest cycles.

Common mistakes to avoid

Raised beds are simple, but a few mistakes can undermine them. Beds built too wide invite compaction because gardeners step inside to reach plants. Keep beds narrow enough to reach comfortably.

Beds built too shallow limit crop choices, especially on hard surfaces. Tomatoes, peppers and squash benefit from deeper soil. Soil shortcuts are another issue. Filling with one material because it is cheap often leads to compaction or poor drainage. A blended mix is worth the investment.

Finally, placement matters. Vegetables need sun. A bed placed in heavy shade may look nice but will rarely produce well.

A strong starting point for homegrown food

Raised beds offer a predictable path for gardeners who want to grow more food at

home. They remove common barriers like poor soil, drainage problems and compaction. They also make gardening approachable. A single 4-by-8 bed can produce herbs, salad greens and seasonal vegetables. Two or three beds can support steady harvests through much of the year.

Above-ground gardening is not a gimmick. It is a practical

way to make growing easier, especially where the ground is stubborn. Build the bed to match your reach, fill it with quality soil, keep moisture consistent and refresh the soil each season. The payoff is healthier plants, less frustration and the satisfaction of stepping outside to pick fresh food without having to fight the dirt to get there.

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SILSBEE — Southeast Texas summers can be punishing on lawns and flower beds, but homeowners don't have to choose between curb appeal and constant watering. Texas-friendly landscaping — using hardy, drought-tolerant plants and smarter design — can help yards stay attractive through long stretches of heat while reducing maintenance and water use.

The approach starts with a simple truth: the right plant in the right place matters more than any product on the shelf. In the hottest months, full-sun areas can scorch tender ornamentals,

while low spots may hold water after storms and stress plants that prefer drier feet. Homeowners can save time and money by matching plant choices to those conditions, then grouping plants with similar water needs together.

For sunny beds and open front yards, native and well-adapted plants are often the best performers. Shrubs and perennials that handle heat and humidity can provide color without daily attention. Many Texas landscapes lean on choices such as lantana, salvia, black-eyed Susan, gulf muhly grass, and coreopsis. Once established, these plants typically hold up better than high-water annuals that fade quickly in extreme heat.

Mulch is another quiet workhorse. A two- to three-inch layer of mulch around plants helps soil retain moisture, reduces weeds that compete for water, and protects roots from temperature swings. Homeowners should keep mulch a few inches away from the base of trunks and stems to prevent rot and insect issues.

Watering strategy matters as much as the plant list. Deep, infrequent watering encourages roots to grow downward, helping plants withstand dry spells. Frequent shallow watering

can train roots to stay near the surface, where heat dries soil fastest. Early-morning watering is generally more effective than evening watering because it reduces evaporation while also limiting the window for fungal problems.

Lawns can also be adjusted for heat resilience. Cutting grass too short in summer stresses it and exposes soil to sun, causing faster moisture loss. Raising the mower deck helps shade the ground and supports healthier root systems. Leaving clippings can return nutrients to the soil and reduce fertilizer needs.

Homeowners looking to make bigger changes often start by shrinking turf areas and replacing them with beds, groundcovers, or gravel paths. Turf is typically the thirstiest part of a landscape, and reducing it can immediately lower water demand. Simple additions like shade trees, strategically placed shrubs, and border plantings can also cool the yard and improve soil performance over time.

Texas-friendly landscaping does not mean a yard has to look dry or bare. With smart placement, good soil practices, and plants chosen for local conditions, yards can stay colorful, neat, and manageable even when the heat settles in for months. For Southeast Texas homeowners, the payoff is a landscape that looks good, costs less to maintain, and is built to handle the weather that comes with living here.



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Binoculars & pine trees, an intro into bird watching

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Bird watching is one of the most accessible outdoor hobbies in Southeast Texas, and residents of Hardin County are uniquely positioned to enjoy it. With the diverse ecosystems of Big Thicket National Preserve just minutes away, beginners can encounter an impressive range of species without traveling far from home.

Getting started does not require expensive gear. A reliable pair of 8x42 binoculars is ideal for wooded areas and wetlands common in the Big Thicket. Beyond that, technology has made birding easier than ever. Apps such as Merlin Bird ID allow users to identify birds by answering a few simple

questions or even by recording bird songs. The app listens and suggests likely matches based on sound. Platforms like eBird let birders log sightings, track life lists and contribute to global conservation data.

Spring is often the most exciting season to begin birding in Hardin County. As temperatures warm, migratory species pass through the Big Thicket on their journey north, dramatically increasing the variety of birds visible in a single outing. Trees and shrubs come alive with color and song as warblers, buntings and tanagers return. Many species are also in breeding plumage during spring, displaying their brightest colors and most active behavior, which makes identification easier and more rewarding for beginners.

Hardin County's mix of pine forests,

hardwood bottoms and creeks creates prime habitat for both year-round residents and migratory visitors. In spring, colorful warblers move through the region, including the bright yellow Prothonotary Warbler found in swampy areas. Pileated Woodpeckers can be heard throughout the year, while herons and egrets patrol area waterways.

Local trails within the Big Thicket offer well-marked paths for exploration, and organized bird walks occasionally provide guided experiences for newcomers.

For those looking for a low-cost hobby that blends exercise, education and conservation, bird watching offers a direct connection to the natural richness of Hardin County. With binoculars in hand and apps ready to assist, the next great sighting could be just beyond the tree line.

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▶ RENOVATIONS From Page 6



A homeowner playfully tests the fit of a newly installed bathtub during a bathroom renovation, with plumbing parts and packaging still scattered across the unfinished floor. The lighthearted moment captures the in-progress stage of a remodel before walls, fixtures, and finishes are completed.

lighting and replacing outdated tile can dramatically improve comfort and aesthetics. A modern bathroom renovation typically includes new vanities, plumbing fixtures, flooring and improved ventilation. On average, midrange bathroom remodels can cost anywhere from \$15,000 to \$30,000 depending on size and finishes, while upscale renovations climb higher. Bathrooms also tend to deliver a solid return on investment, particularly when modernizing older homes.

However, kitchens operate on an entirely different level of daily impact.

The kitchen is not just a functional workspace. It is a gathering place. It is where mornings begin and holidays unfold. Families

cook together, children complete homework at the counter and conversations stretch late into the evening. In many homes, the kitchen has replaced the formal living room as the true center of activity.

Because of this, a kitchen renovation often carries emotional weight beyond resale value.

A kitchen remodel typically involves cabinetry, countertops, appliances, lighting and sometimes structural adjustments such as removing walls to create open-concept layouts. Costs vary widely. A midrange kitchen renovation commonly falls between \$30,000 and \$60,000, while high-end projects with custom cabinetry and premium appliances can exceed \$100,000. While more expensive than most

bathroom renovations, kitchens also consistently rank among the highest returns in resale value according to industry reports.

Beyond numbers, time spent in the space matters.

Most families spend multiple hours per day in the kitchen. Meals are prepared there three times daily. Guests gather there during parties. Birthday cakes are decorated there. These repeated moments build memories. Renovating a kitchen enhances not just efficiency but also experience. Improved lighting changes the atmosphere. Larger islands create seating and conversation space. Updated appliances reduce frustration and improve functionality.

Bathrooms, by comparison, are typically used in shorter intervals. Their renovation improves privacy,

cleanliness and convenience, but rarely becomes the emotional hub of the home.

That does not mean bathrooms should be neglected. In fact, outdated bathrooms can deter buyers more quickly than an older kitchen. Water damage, poor ventilation and inefficient layouts should be addressed promptly. For homeowners working within tighter budgets, bathroom renovations may offer a manageable entry point into remodeling.

Still, if the question is where impact is most deeply felt, kitchens often win.

A renovated kitchen influences daily routines, social gatherings and family traditions. It can transform how a home feels. The cost may be higher upfront, but the return is experienced every single day.

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Planting by the Calendar: A Southeast Texas Seasonal Guide

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 The Silsbee Bee

SILSBEE — Gardening in Southeast Texas offers a rare advantage: a growing season that stretches across most of the year. But success in this climate depends heavily on timing. Heat, humidity, heavy rains, and mild winters create conditions that reward gardeners who follow a seasonal planting schedule suited to the region.

Unlike northern climates with short, defined seasons, Southeast Texas gardening revolves around two primary growing windows — spring and fall — with summer and winter serving as transition periods. Knowing what to plant and when can turn a backyard plot into a productive home garden supplying vegetables, herbs, and color through much of the year.

Late winter, from January through February, is the preparation phase. Gardeners focus on soil improvement, bed prepara-

tion, and planning while temperatures remain mild. Hardy vegetables such as broccoli, cabbage, kale, and onions can be transplanted outdoors, while herbs like parsley and cilantro establish well in cool conditions. Starting seeds indoors for tomatoes and peppers ensures plants are ready when spring arrives.

Spring planting begins earlier than many expect. By March, soil temperatures support warm-season crops. Tomatoes, peppers, squash, cucumbers, beans, corn, and okra can be planted outdoors. Flower beds also benefit from early planting, with marigolds, zinnias, and sunflowers thriving in warming weather. Waiting too long often means crops face extreme heat during

flow-reducing yields.

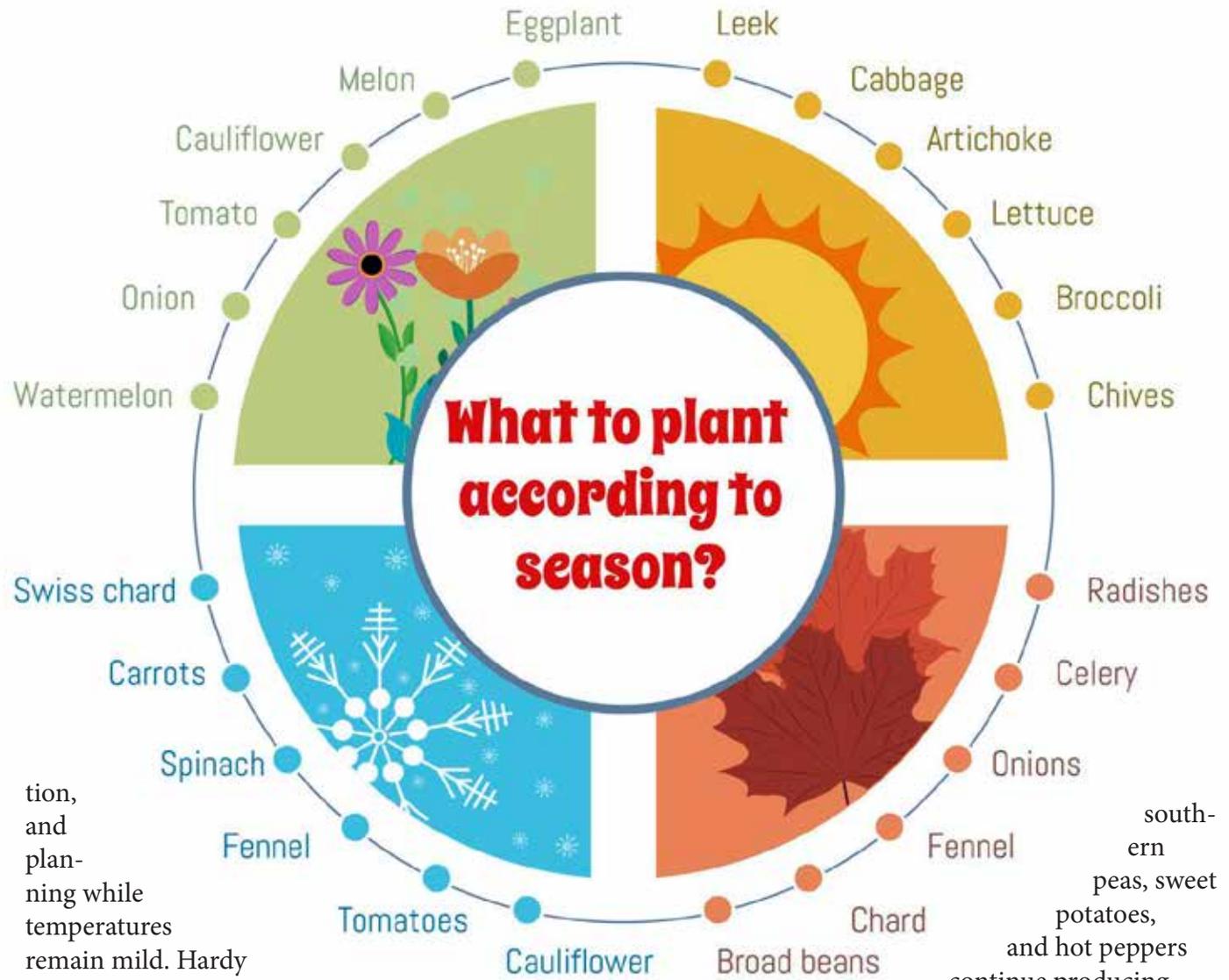
April and May represent the peak planting window before summer intensifies. Gardeners should complete vegetable planting and establish annual flowers during this time. Applying mulch helps conserve moisture and suppress weeds, while consistent watering routines support root development. Plants established before early summer have a far better chance of surviving prolonged heat.

By June, gardens shift from planting to maintenance. Heat-tolerant crops such as okra,

southern peas, sweet potatoes, and hot peppers continue producing, while many spring vegetables decline. Shade strategies, including trellises or shade cloth, can protect sensitive plants. Regular watering and mulching become essential as evaporation increases.

July and August are the most challenging months for planting but serve as preparation for fall gardens. Seeds for fall tomatoes, peppers, and brassicas can be started in protected spaces. Beds should be refreshed with compost and cleared of exhausted plants and weeds, preparing soil for the second major planting season.

Fall gardening often rivals spring in Southeast Texas pro-



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ductivity. September through October offers warm soil and cooler air — ideal for planting tomatoes, beans, squash, lettuce, carrots, and greens. Broccoli, cauliflower, and cabbage transplants establish well in fall, and many gardeners find crops easier to manage due to reduced insect pressure and milder temperatures.

November and December transition gardens into cool-season production. Leafy greens such as spinach, mustard, and collards thrive, while root crops like carrots and

radishes mature steadily. Herbs including cilantro and parsley flourish in cooler air. Frost protection may occasionally be needed, but freezes are typically brief and manageable.

For Southeast Texas residents, gardening rarely stops — it simply shifts with the seasons. Planting at the right time reduces pest pressure, improves yields, and lowers maintenance. With planning and seasonal awareness, backyard gardens can produce food and color nearly every month of the year.

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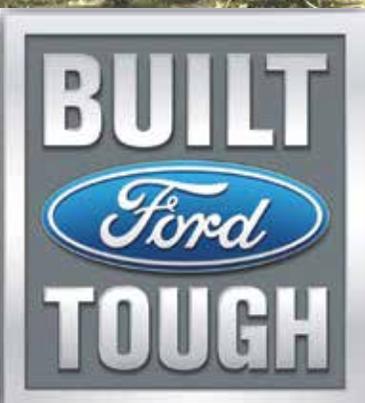
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