



On this week's Ours to Protect, show producer, Ethna Quirke chats to Social, Community, Therapeutic Horticultural & Environmental Educationist Dee Sewell.

Dee created Greenside Up in 2009 to help promote the grow-your-own ethos and raise environmental awareness. Dee helps people to garden using organic principles, to consider biodiversity and food waste, and to live more co-sufficient lifestyles with an emphasis on social, community and therapeutic gardening.

How to Start a Garden

The number one tip is to plan big but start small, allowing you to see how much time you have to maintain the garden.

3 Essentials to Help You Get Started in the Vegetable Garden - With all the good intentions in the world, sometimes it's difficult to take the first steps or spend the time to learn more. Here are Dee's three most useful lessons when beginning to work on a vegetable garden.

1. Start Small - Even if you'd like to grow lots of veggies, don't attempt to be fully self-sufficient in the first year. Only clear enough space or build enough beds to get you started. One of the busiest times of the year isn't springtime, with all the sowing and planting, but later during summer and autumn as you start to harvest and have to find time to pick, preserve, pickle or freeze your produce. Starting small will allow you to see how much time you have to grow your own food.

2. It's all about the soil - What we add to the soil now will repay us in produce later. Fertile soil is vital to our existence. Adding well-rotted organic matter to the soil in the form of garden compost or old farmyard manure will help to feed it with vital nutrients as well as help with soil texture and drainage. A general guide for adding organic matter is to add about one, big

bucketful of well-rotted organic matter per square metre to the top of the soil. If you're doing this in the autumn, cover with cardboard, weed membrane or black plastic and leave it be until the springtime. Once you've removed the cover, if you're not following the 'No Dig' method of gardening, lightly fork any remaining organic matter in, before raking the surface of the soil flat.

Avoid walking on garden soil at all costs as over time it will damage the soil structure and compact.

3. Vegetables live in families - Where possible, plant them in their families, they will be easier to feed, care for and protect from pests and disease. Planting vegetables in families will also help you to plan and remember where they have grown before as you move them around from year to year in what's known as crop rotation.

Resources:

- www.greensideup.ie
- www.growobservatory.org
- www.cgireland.org
- www.ourstoprotect.ie