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5 GREAT VEGETABLES TO **GROW & GRILL**

Move over, burgers, for produce that dazzles over the coals.

By P. Allen Smith / Photography by Jane Colclasure, Mark Fonville, Patrick Green and Kelly Quinn

Grilling season is upon us. The grill, synonymous with outdoor entertaining, gathers guests as the epicenter for great fun and great food. Everywhere you look, columns of smoke reach over backyard fences as circles of friends gather to inspect the coals, offer their secret tips and crack open a beer. Yes, grilling season is a good season.

Steaks, hot dogs and burgers tend to come to mind when I bring up grilling, but vegetables prepared with the same care steal the show, too. If you've ever had a grilled portobello or a head of grilled romaine with creamy herb dressing, you know what I'm talking about.

While all vegetables are delicious when prepared in the right dish, not all vegetables are delicious grilled. To pick vegetables for grilling, consider their consistency and their structure.

Sturdy, large veggies like eggplant rounds or squash slices hold up well over heat while small, fragmented veggies like green beans or peas tend not to do well. It's about the size of the produce and how it's held together.

THIS PAGE: Placing pots of herbs, peppers and squash near the grill makes adding homegrown ingredients to your meal easy.



These 5 vegetables are great for grilling:

- ✿ CORN
- ✿ EGGPLANT
- ✿ PEPPERS
- ✿ ROMAINE LETTUCE
- ✿ ZUCCHINI

Robust leafy greens, like a head of lettuce, seem to be made for the grill, as they're compact and almost packaged. Corn, peppers and potatoes are robust and with a solid shape that makes them ideal for the cooking over coals.

The aforementioned vegetables are easy to grow, and patio vegetables are immensely popular for myriad reasons, so if you can incorporate homegrown vegetables, even better. Here are some suggestions to get you started.

Summer is the most obvious grill season with hot temps and gardens overflowing with various produce. The trifecta of grow-to-grill perfection in the summer is peppers, eggplant and zucchini. It's good that there are virtually endless ways to prepare the mass-producing zucchini: in casseroles, breads, cake and, of course, on the grill. Plant this summer veggie a week after the average last frost date in your zone, when the soil temperature has reached 60 degrees, in well-drained, compost-amended soil. Plant 3 feet apart directly in the soil, as these don't transplant well. Water at the base of the plant frequently, as it prefers consistently moist soil. Lemon juice and garlic are a wonderful marinade for zucchini, but Cajun



THIS PAGE:
Grilled bell peppers
Eggplant 'Black Beauty'

OPPOSITE PAGE:
Zucchini 'Sungreen'

seasoning or a mix of olives, parsley and lemon zest are worthy marinades, as well.

Wait a week after the last frost date to plant peppers. Like most summer veggies, they need full sun, well-drained soil and consistent moisture. Feed with an organic fertilizer after the plants begin to flower and set fruit. Keep in mind, peppers planted in hot climates may not begin to produce until weather cools slightly in late summer. Try a marinade of thyme, garlic, olive oil and vinegar.

Eggplants require plenty of sunshine and warm, well-drained soil. Plants should be set out about three weeks after the last spring frost. Once in the garden, eggplants like cool, moist roots so water at the plant base consistently. Mulch the ground with straw to retain moisture without letting the ground get soggy. Combine red wine vinegar, lemon juice, olive oil, parsley, mint, red pepper flakes and garlic for a marinade with a kick.

Now, I bet you didn't think the vegetable grilling season could extend into spring and fall, but cool-season crops, which grow in fall and spring, should grace the grill aplenty. Personally, I love to grill romaine lettuce. The leaves have a stout center rib that helps this delicate vegetable hold up over the heat. Toss a whole or half head of romaine on the grill and

pair it with a creamy dressing. I use one with dill, nonfat yogurt and tarragon vinegar.

Brussels sprouts, the ubiquitous nightmare of children, are wonderful grilled. I confess that I didn't care much for them as a child. Steamed or roasted, it didn't matter; I avoided them with fervor. However, like most people, my taste buds changed as I grew up and when I had them grilled, I scolded my second-grade self for writing them off. Now I grill them frequently. I've found the grill brings out smokiness and wakes up the flavor. You can't go wrong dressing grilled Brussels sprouts with balsamic vinegar, bacon or dried cranberries.

Plant Brussels sprouts in early spring for spring harvest, or midsummer for a crop that matures in the fall. While their ideal climate is the fog belt of the Pacific Northwest, they will grow in fertile, well-drained soil, with six hours of sun daily. Give them plenty of space by planting them at least 18 inches apart.

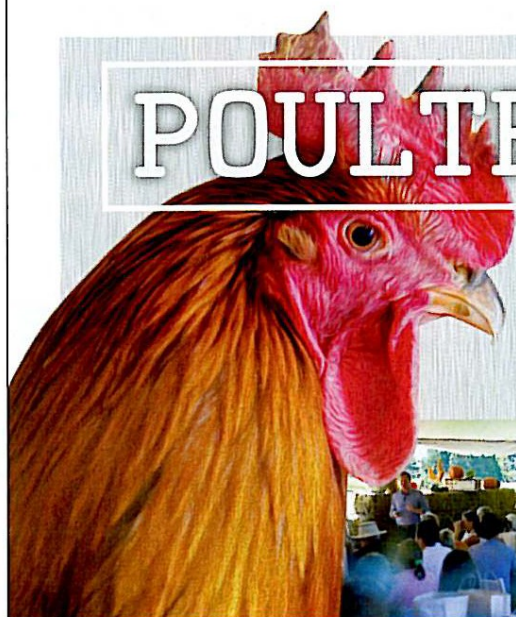
Grab yourself a grill basket to facilitate grilling vegetables. It'll simplify the task immensely. You can also get a basting brush to help spread marinades over the vegetables as they cook, to maximize flavor. Long-handled metal tongs are a must-have. Now that you have all the needed information, I wish you a happy grow-and-grill adventure! ■



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09 | 27 | 2014

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