

Make the most of your harvest. Look for recipes starring garden-fresh selections in our July issue.

## Ready, set, grow!

THINK GREEN

Want to enjoy healthful, organic food for less? Grow your own groceries—no green thumb required! Gardening is the ultimate in eco-eating (what's more local than your own yard?), and it may even boost your immune system and your mood. Read our groundbreaking guide, then hit the dirt. **By Merritt Watts**

STEP 1

**Plan it.** When you're scoping out a spot for a produce patch, consider three things: the soil quality, the light it gets and the amount of room you have.

**Soil** See worms, weeds and thick grass? They're signs of fertile dirt, says Patti Moreno, host at GardenGirlTV.com. First-time growers should do a soil test to analyze for nutrients, measure pH levels and test for contaminants: Send a sample to a local USDA cooperative extension office or university lab. (Find one at [www.csrees.usda.gov/Extension](http://www.csrees.usda.gov/Extension); \$9 to \$30.) Results will tell you what you need to do to improve your dirt.

**Sun** Four to six hours of direct rays daily is a must, says Gayla Trail, author of *Grow Great Grub* (Clarkson Potter). Gauge your blaze with a sun stick, which measures the amount of light your garden receives throughout the day. Pop it in the ground before you leave for work and you'll know how many hours of sunlight your area collects by sunset. We like the SunStick Starter Pack (\$10; Plumstone.com).

**Space** You need only a 3-foot-square area to put down roots. (No land at all? Seek out a group of growers at [CommunityGarden.org](http://CommunityGarden.org) to nab a spot in your town.) Outline your garden with stakes and string, and remove existing plants. Fill it with 1- to 3-foot-wide raised beds as long as necessary, says Charlie Nardozi, senior horticulturist at the National Gardening Association in South Burlington, Vermont. For each bed, mound 6 inches of dirt and mix in 2 inches of compost. Plant tall crops in the north and shorter ones in the south for the most sun. If your plot is on the teeny side, sow small selections such as root veggies, lettuces, bell peppers and herbs.