



Backyard Gardening: Growing your own fruits and vegetables

Vegetables and Herbs:

Selecting a Site: You want to find an area on your property that receives at least 8-10 hours a day. It is also advantageous to have a water supply relatively close by for irrigation and watering necessities. For in ground gardening, soil testing is highly recommended to increase your soil health and garden yields. You can use your local UGA extension offices for this. The results will let you know what type of fertilizer or other additive needs there might be.

Deciding on what to grow: Pinpoint your property on the map included on our website. It will show you your plant hardiness zone and soil types. Knowing this information is critical in order for you to select the correct vegetation that can grow well on your land. Hardiness zones 6-9 can be found throughout Georgia.

Using the vegetable planting chart found within the first two links below, begin to select items that you are interested in growing. First, make a list of things you would like to grow and then find out if they can grow in your hardiness zone. If so, use the same link and begin to organize when and how they can be planted along with how to properly care for them. The third link can be used as an overall yearly calendar for planning and managing your garden for both spring and fall bounties.

<https://extension.uga.edu/publications/detail.html?number=C963&title=Vegetable%20Gardening%20in%20Georgia>

<https://extension.uga.edu/publications/detail.html?number=B1170&title=Herbs%20in%20Southern%20Gardens>

<https://extension.uga.edu/publications/detail.html?number=C943&title=Vegetable%20Garden%20Calendar>

Fruits: Georgia is known for its peaches and blueberries, but there is a lot more that can grow on your property. Anything from apples to strawberries can be grown here. Just like vegetables, fruit trees and bushes need a lot of sunlight, 6-8 hours at least. Using the link below, you can discover what types of fruits grow well in Georgia, if they are appropriate for your property and site along with how to properly manage them.

<https://extension.uga.edu/publications/detail.html?number=C1027-10&title=Growing%20Fruits>



Mushrooms: There are a few edible mushrooms that naturally grow throughout Georgia. You can actually grow your favorite mushrooms at home or in the garden in the winter months. Mushrooms grow on three types of mediums: wood, soil and manure. Two methods of growing your own mushrooms are using kits found online or using spawn to inoculating your own logs. There are actually a couple of places in Georgia that make their own kits for you to purchase. The most commonly grown ones are shiitake, oyster, and lion's mane. Depending on the mushrooms you decide to grow, you can grow enough to eat within a few weeks using these kits.

Growing mushrooms on logs takes much longer than the kits, but you can grow much more mushrooms for a longer period of time. First you will need to purchase your desired warm weather mushroom spawn (usually a wooden dowel impregnated with the fungus). Once you have those, cut hardwood logs in the winter or early spring that are at least 8 inches in diameter and 2-4 feet long. This will make them easier to move and work with. Using an alternating pattern, drill 3/8th inch diameter holes to the depth of the spawn dowels, 6 inches apart in your logs. Insert the spawn into the holes and use food grade wax to cover them up. Once the log has been inoculated, it will need to stay in a humid and shaded area. It is important to keep the logs Hopefully, you can start harvesting your mushrooms the following winter for up to 7 years.

Biochar: What is biochar? Biochar is a charcoal like by-product material made from the incomplete combustion of plant, agriculture and forest waste (biomass). The technical term for the process is called **pyrolysis** which is the heating and burning of organic material in the absence of oxygen. The lack of oxygen prevents the materials from completely combusting while still allowing them to thermally decompose and remove the volatile components. The resulting biochar has incredible properties that can be used as soil amendments. It increases nutrients, reduces soil acidity, improves soil texture, and increases water holding capacity.

How to make biochar: There are a few methods to creating biochar. The most efficient way is using a kiln. Unfortunately, most landowners do not have those on hand or the materials to make one readily available. There is a kiln option that most people won't necessarily think about: 55 gallon drum. These are often used by landowners to burn debris and other vegetation while cleaning up the yard. After building a pile of biomass inside the container to approximately 2/3 of the way up, light the top of the pile. Once that begins to burn, add more biomass to the pile until the whole drum is full of hot coals. Then put the coals out with water or carefully covering the drum with an air tight lid.

Another option for landowners is using an open burn. Dig a trench into the ground and surround the hole with a firebreak by removing vegetation and exposing the mineral soil. Pile up similar

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sized sticks, twigs, branches, etc and light it from the top down. You may need to move some of the biomass in order for it to begin to burn. Once the bottom of the pile is charred, put the fire out with dirt or water.

It is very important that before you begin either one of these processes that you make sure the weather conditions are safe to burn in. If you have any concerns or questions, contact your local GFC office and inform them of what you are doing. They will let you know if it is advised or not.

Check this link out for more information: <https://gatrees.org/burn-permits-and-notifications/>

It is recommended to wait a couple days to make sure the coals are absolutely out and cold. You can then add it to a compost pile. Once it is mixed with the compost, wait at least 10 days before using the biochar and compost mix in your garden or landscaping. This process is called **charging**. If you skip this step, the biochar will actually soak up the nutrients in the soil and reduce the effectiveness of the soil you're trying to improve.