

## PLANNING FOR NEXT SEASON

### What is Crop Planning?

- Deciding WHAT to grow, HOW MUCH to grow, and WHEN to grow it.

#### I. START WITH GOAL SETTING

You may have many goals, but determine long term and short term.

1. WHAT DO I WANT to accomplish next year and why?
  - a) more profit?
  - b) higher yield per bed per year?
  - c) Higher yield for specific crops?
  - d) New varieties?
  - e) Disease or weed suppression?
  - f) More or less diversity?
  - g) Maximum soil building?
  - h) Rest or change?
  - i) Quality of life goals?
  - j) Better records?
2. THINK HOLISTICALLY to determine the soundness of your goals.

Regardless of your ideals for next season, you need to figure out how to accomplish them without compromising the overall health of the land base, your financial resources, or your well-being.

  - a) What will my soil support? (Test each plot or bed)
  - b) How much money do I have available?
  - c) How much time and help do I have?
3. PRIORITIZE your goals into 2 or 3 top aims for the next season, based on your answers to holistic questioning. Write down your goals in a place where you and your team can see them.

#### II. CREATE SYSTEMS TO IMPLEMENT & TRACK YOUR GOALS

1. **Create or Re-evaluate your Crop Rotation:** This is the concept of growing different crops or families of crops in succession throughout the garden, taking care to avoid repetition of crops in the same spaces over a set amount of time. If you don't already have a crop rotation, this is the place to start. The benefits of crop rotation are:
  - gentler use of soil resources: since different crops use nutrients differently, rotating families will keep you from taxing the soil system
  - avoidance of disease and pests: since diseases and pests react to specific microclimate and host plants (i.e. attacks only legumes,

prefers wetter soils, is species-specific), changing the crop or family of crops in each bed each season (or many times within one season) will protect your harvests from repeat offenses.

- Improved soil structure due to encouragement of diverse root structure throughout the garden

\*Establish your rotation based on profit & production goals balanced with crop nutrient requirements. This is usually accomplished by rotating according to plant family and/or nutrient requirements. Plan for at least 4 years before repeated the same crop in the same plot.

\*Integrate cover crops into your rotation whenever and wherever you can. Plan to keep the soil covered at all times.

\*Use different models to inform your own design. (Resource: Kroeck's *Crop Rotation & Cover Cropping* or Magdoff & Es' *Building Soil for Better Crops*)

\* For an overview of vegetable plant families and their characteristics, see this online PDF:

<http://ucanr.edu/sites/placernevadasmallfarms/files/170644.pdf>

Rotation Plan Including Cover Crops										
	Plot 1	Plot 2	Plot 3	Plot 4	Plot 5	Plot 6	Plot 7	Plot 8	Plot 9	Plot 10
Year 1	Solanaceae Compost	Greens and Roots	Early Brassicaceae and Cucurbitaceae Compost	Rye	Liliaceae Compost	Greens and Roots	Peas Oats	Rye	Garlic Compost	Greens and Roots
			Vetch Oats	Greens and Roots			Cucurbitaceae Compost	Greens and Roots		
Year 2	Greens and Roots	Solanaceae Compost	Greens and Roots	Early Brassicaceae and Cucurbitaceae Compost	Rye	Liliaceae Compost	Greens and Roots	Peas Oats	Rye	Garlic Compost
			Vetch Oats	Greens and Roots	Early Brassicaceae and Cucurbitaceae Compost		Greens and Roots			
Year 3	Garlic Compost	Greens and Roots	Solanaceae Compost	Greens and Roots	Early Brassicaceae and Cucurbitaceae Compost	Rye	Liliaceae Compost	Greens and Roots	Peas Oats	Rye
	Rye				Vetch Oats	Rye				
Year 4	And so on... (ten-year rotation)									

2. **Map the garden, or update existing visuals:** Usually a crop rotation will guide the layout of EQUAL plots or growing areas, and you can begin to create a picture of how things will look now, and over time.

- On my farm, I used to keep a picture map of the current season's design. It had each field drawn to scale, with the crop family and cover

crop combo for that season written in. For details about specific beds within the fields and past + future info, I used an excel spreadsheet.

3. **Determine beds per plot, row feet per bed, and devise standardized spacing** to help you figure quantities. (Ex. All crops fit into one of three spacing deviations, or some such design).
4. **Spreadsheets can organize quantity details about each crop, and handle timing.**
  - You can organize one spreadsheet for each plot, or you can devise a master sheet for all crops that simply has a column to denote which plot each crop is assigned to.
  - Yield goals will inform what goes where, or how many rows of each crop you decide to grow. Other factors may contribute to how crops are arranged in relation to one another. (For example, crops that are all harvested at once will likely go all in one row, crops you water with a sprinkler may be organized together based on the span of your watering tool, and crops that will shade others may not be planted directly together.)
  - Once the spreadsheet is completed, you may choose to add bed-specific info to your map, or not.
5. **Begin thinking in weeks, instead of days.**
  - Each week has a number, which you can assign by hand on your calendar (many calendars have week numbers printed on them). Begin using week numbers to assign tasks and goals. This will help you manage time more flexibly, and keep things tidy with a relatively small margin of error.
6. **Start with harvest, and count backward**
  - Use seed catalogs or other resources to obtain information about your crops and specific varieties. Count backward from the desired date of harvest to determine when to plant. Note the difference between crops that will be direct sown, and those that will be transplanted. Use your experience to discern idiosyncrasies of your garden, or of the season at hand that will effect crop maturation.
7. **Build formulas into your spreadsheet to make calculations quick and easy**
8. **Color coding can further assist in organization**, for example, to denote how the crops are managed throughout their lifespan.
9. **To inform future planning, have records for PLANNED and ACTUAL results.** This is always fascinating information to have. If getting back to

your spreadsheet on a regular basis is unrealistic, record “actual” data in a binder or notebook that you keep in the garden shed or greenhouse.

10. **Sort your sheet by week** to discover the week’s activities. **Create lists** of everything to happen that week, and provide them to staff, volunteers, or keep them in your back pocket.