

## Use Bottom Row Planting Technique in Your Vegetable Garden



*Photo special to the Democrat: Bottom row planting can help you have more consistent results from your vegetable garden.*

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Somewhere, in the backwoods of west Florida, I was able to pick up a planting technique that I have continually utilized with great success in my Tallahassee vegetable garden. I call it “bottom row planting” for lack of any better name, as I do not recall any other name being assigned to it. This technique is normally used in row crop garden plots, but I see no reason why it cannot be used in raised bed settings. Here are the steps:

- 1) Prepare the garden plot for planting by cultivating it finely.
- 2) Mark off the rows in whatever fashion you choose.
- 3) Use a cultivating tool (hoe, tiller, hand plow...) to dig a furrow in the row from 6-8” deep.
- 4) Plant the seeds at the bottom of this furrow, and cover at the proper depth.
- 5) Tap the soil down with a tooth rake.

Then wait for the seeds to germinate. You will likely have to replant some of the seed. If you do, do so at the bottom of the row.

Once seeds germinate and are from 4-6 inches tall, use a cultivating tool (I prefer a potato rake at this point) to bring soil up to the plants, covering about half with soil. This begins the process of filling in the furrow. For several weeks thereafter, perform the same procedure until it is time to apply fertilizer and lay the crop by (more on this term later). This usually occurs when the plants are 10-12 inches high and/or starting to flower.

Cut another furrow about 3 inches away from the plants. Make it 4-6 inches deep. One can use a hoe or hand plow for this. Any higher level cultivator just is not practical. Apply whatever fertilizer you use (manure, mushroom compost, organic material or chemical fertilizer) in this furrow and then cover with a hoe or hand plow. Do the same on the other side of the row. Now the soil in the row should be some 2-4 inches higher

than ground level and pulled up against the plant. At this point, the crop is “laid by”, which is a old term that simply means the last cultivation has been performed. Apply 3-4 inches of mulch of your choosing between the rows and await the harvest. Inspect daily for insect intrusion and take action when such occurs.

The advantages of this technique are:

- The root system is very deep and can support a more robust plant.
- Deep roots have more access to moisture during dry times.
- As the root base extends up to the top of the row, root growth is high enough to survive wet soil, should heavy rains occur.

In Tallahassee, we seem to either have droughts or floods each and every year. Sometimes it is both in the same year! This technique has been a consistent performer for me since 1982 in the same garden plot. I use it for peas, beans, squash, okra, tomatoes and corn. The only place I do not use it is when the seeds are very small, such as with lettuce and basil. For this I use a raised bed row, but still perform the cultivation and mulching. And after the crop is spent, you can plow the mulch under, which enriches the garden soil for the next crop!

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