

## ***Garden Tips for The Culinary Professional***

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It takes a long time to learn to grow food, as you don't really have many chances to learn. In learning to cook, you have a dish shown to you, and you make that recipe. With a little supervision, you do this a couple dozen times, and you have it. A complicated recipe like Bordelaise Sauce may take more work than that, but little by little, you learn how to cook.

When you garden, however, you only have one or two chances per year. When those seeds go in, all the knowledge you've learned about that plant goes into the ground with the seed. If it doesn't work for some reason, you have to wait a full year to try again. So any little hints you may garner each year may help you gain some time in the quest for good garden food.

Each year I've learned just a little more, and after a couple decades we grow some serious product. Here are a few of the things I have learned in the past year, and some of the reasons our gardens this year are so productive.

### ***Mushroom Soil***

Red Hook, NY has soil that is clay and rock. The only way to create a good growing environment is to add organic matter into the soil, in large quantities. I have successfully used bagged manure, and our own compost, but this year I discovered Mushroom Soil. Ginsberg Foods buys all our mushrooms from Bulich Farms, in Catskill, NY. So I go up there, and buy a square yard at a time, for \$30, an easy haul for a small pickup truck. It has improved our soil immensely.

### ***Soil Screening***

I wish I'd thought of this years ago. I bought some heavy screen, about 1" squares, and created a frame about 3' x 3'. With a shovel, a wheelbarrow, and two sawhorses, I have taken tons of rock from the garden. Even better, I have created these large piles of very soft, rock free soil, which is a great help, especially to small plants, such as lettuce, and spinach.



***Screening Soil for rocks***



***Bulich Farms Mushroom Soil***

### ***Thick rows***

One little row of spinach or lettuce is very nice, and the plants can get pretty big. It is much more productive to make a row as wide as a garden rake, however. Plant the seeds as thick as you would grass seed, and cover with screened soil, so they are not disturbed after sowing. Within a week you are picking Microgreens, which are very valuable as a garnish to any restaurant, and very expensive. After they get a little larger, you are picking baby greens which make up the best Mesculin Mix, better than you can buy. Then, when they're all nice and thinned, you get some nice small, tender heads of whatever kind of lettuce you planted. This works very well for any lettuce, spinach, peas, and flowers.



***A thick row of baby spinach in late March***

### ***Edible flowers***



***Borage Flowers***

There are many kinds of flowers that can be grown and used for any food service establishment. Nasturtiums, Borage, and Chamomile can produce great numbers in a small space. They are used as garnish, or ingredients, and are a great topic of conversation between waiter and customer



***Nasturtiums***

### ***Bulk plantings***

In growing for a restaurant, I've found it best to concentrate on only one or two crops. If you only have a small space, and you plant lots and lots of different plants, you will end up with little tastes of each one. This is fine at home, but in a professional area, you need enough to make a serious improvement in at least one dish. At the Reservoir in, outside of Kingston, NY, Tony grows 4 raised beds, about 10' x 2' each, in view of the parking lot. In these beds he planted lots of basil. He planted basil like you'd plant grass seed, each bed about a week after the next. In this way each raised bed provided about 20# of the freshest basil. He and his kitchen then would spend a morning cutting, trimming, and cleaning the basil. This is made into pesto, and frozen in conveniently sized packages. This was plenty of fresh pesto for the whole year, and house specialty, of course, and fresh basil from "our own farm" for 2 month or so. A very efficient use of space and time. If you plan mass plantings around your menu, even in a small space, your garden may have a positive impact on your culinary skills.

### ***Fall crops***

There are great items to plant late in the season, extending your garden well into the winter months. Certain plants thrive in the colder weather, and some are greatly improved in taste. If you are able to plant a lot of spinach, for instance, you will find after the first real good frost that the leaves are no longer bitter, but have a sweet, nutty taste that is unique to the time of year. Spinach will also live through the winter and can be cut until the hot weather next summer.

Other plants which take cold weather and frost include: Radicchio, Radishes and Daikon Radishes, which grow to great sizes in the fall, Collard greens, Beets, Lettuces, and Broccoli Rabe. You don't need greenhouses or any protection for any of these plants to be able to enjoy them in December.

### ***Bulk Seed Companies***

Those little packages of seeds in the garden stores are great for window boxes, but if you want to have an impact on your restaurant menu, you need a good source of seeds. There are plenty of seed companies around, and everything is available online. Our favorite is New England Seed Company, [www.newseeds.com](http://www.newseeds.com). They have a full product line, as do the other companies, and good service. You buy the seeds by the ounce, quarter pound, or pound and up, and the more you buy, the more the price is dramatically lowered.

### ***Vacuum Cleaner Bags***

I have saved my best garden hint for last. We have a lot of deer, gophers, and other critters around our gardens, and in the past I have lost a lot of plants. I have heard my neighbors try everything, from poisons, to very expensive electric fences. But I did hear this thing about hair. And, I do know that our doggie does help keep the pests away somewhat.

So I got this bright idea and it sure works. We fill up a vacuum cleaner bag about every two weeks, and of course this is probably mostly dog hair, along with cat hair and human scent. So, instead of throwing it out, I cut it open and spread it around the garden, well away from the plants, close to the woods from where the critters emerge. It works. This year we've lost very little.

### ***Flowers***

One last note about restaurant gardens. It is very nice to grow food for an establishment, but it can be just as profitable to grow flowers, as they are very expensive, and go a long way towards beautifying your place of business. Use the mass planting technique, plant early, and plant often. After they're established in a few weeks, they take very little work. It'll be worth it. Good flowers to try include Cosmos, Sunflowers, Zinnias, Strawflowers, Asters, and Snapdragons.

