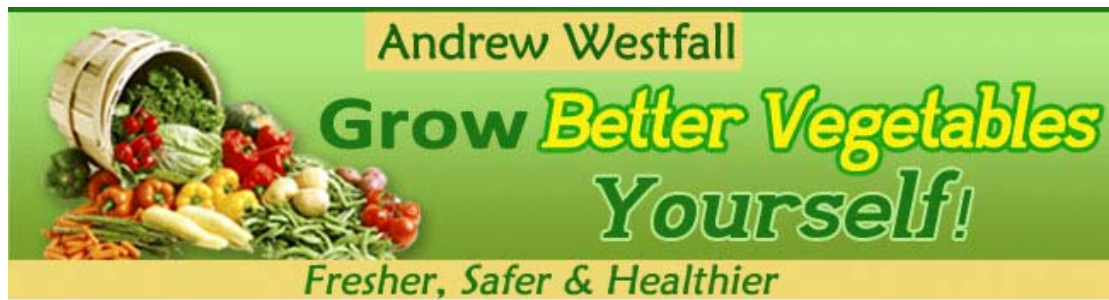


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About the Author

Andrew Westfall first learned about gardening at his junior school, when a teacher started a garden on the school grounds as a practical hands-on project for the students.

His parents encouraged his new interest by letting him help in the family garden.

Andrew said, "The early experience at my school and my parents' support and advice gave me enough enthusiasm to get started and my first taste of some tomatoes which I grew and picked myself hooked me for life!"

Andrew wants to help readers share the benefits which he has got from gardening in various places through his life.

"I have moved around through my job, but I have always had a garden in the various places. So, I have experience which can help people start a garden or improve the one which they already have."

"I know many people who say that they haven't the time or aren't fit enough to be a successful gardener. I wrote my book to show people how they can have a garden which fits with their situation and their lifestyle."

Andrew believes that almost anyone can have a garden which can help to improve their well-being and provide them with healthier vegetables that are probably also safer.

"Some advantages which we get from growing some of our own vegetables are that we can be sure that they are fresh, do not have any chemicals or other treatments which we don't know about and the exercise is as effective as similar effort on special equipment but much more enjoyable."

Andrew gives you the best tips and information which he has learned from his own experience and research, as well as the many generous amateur and professional gardeners he learned from through the years.

"Gardeners world-wide are a great fraternity and gardening is one of the greatest hobbies I know."

Introduction

I have concentrated on practical information and suggestions so that this ebook is of maximum benefit to the wide variety of readers, from those beginning their first garden to people that are looking for ways to improve the results they get from their current garden.

The advantages of growing your own vegetables are widely known.

You know what sprays, if any, have been used on them.

You get exercise and enjoyment from the activity itself.

You can share your excess produce with neighbors, friends and other keen gardeners.

Yes, you will get excess produce to share or preserve regularly after a while, even if you have no previous gardening experience. That’s because plants are prolific and just need regular care to reward you with great crops.



I have emphasized the safety aspect of gardening because it is often overlooked. It’s not that gardening is particularly dangerous but you need to give due care when you are handling heavy equipment, fuel, poisonous chemicals and sharp or heavy implements.

But, you will soon find that your gardening experience is likely to provide so many benefits that your only regret is that you did not start years ago!

Useful Tips

Reduce Transplant Shock

A problem for many gardeners are the number of young plants which are stressed or even damaged when the gardener moves the plants from the seedling boxes to the garden plot where they are expected to grow to full production.

I have used commercially available peat pots or pellets to reduce these losses but there is another way which works well and is very low-cost.

I suggest that you re-use your leak-proof cardboard milk cartons.

I wash them after draining out the last of the milk. Then, I let them dry thoroughly.

Then, I poke a couple of holes in the bottom and fill them to about a half-inch below the top with potting soil, and put one or two seeds in each carton.

This is a low-cost way of starting seeds and it can help reduce losses when you are transplanting plants which don't like being moved.

When the seedlings are established in the cartons, you can dig a small hole in the garden plot where you want to grow the plant. Then, cut away the carton and gently lower the plant with its attached block of soil into the hole.

This reduces any shock which the plant might suffer if you used a regular pot. To get it out from that, you would up-end the pot and tap on the bottom to dislodge the plant so it landed upside down in your hand, and then reverse the plant and drop it into the new location.

The commercial alternatives are pellets or mini-pots made from peat which you insert the seeds into. When the plants are established, the whole assembly of plant and peat parcel can be planted into the new position and the plant will continue to grow larger with its roots growing right through the peat pellet or pot.

These are best for really sensitive and more expensive plants or if you want to keep labor and time to a minimum. Otherwise, use your milk cartons to save money and do some practical recycling.

Learn from what doesn't Work

Every gardener has great ideas which don't work out as well as they had hoped or even planned for. This can be very disappointing when it is something which you put a lot of resources into.

They're the things which most gardeners try to forget and rarely mention to their friends.

But, my Dad always talked to me about the things which he'd tried which didn't work. He said that they were valuable lessons for the future. He put some effort into finding out why something failed so that he could decide whether to try that plant again with some changes to its treatment which might produce better results or whether it would be better to just try something different for the next season.

I learned that everyone makes mistakes. There's nothing wrong with that unless you forgot what happened in previous years and kept making the same mistakes over and over.

Give Your Children a Garden



You can also encourage your children by giving them a small area to start growing the vegetables or other plants which they want to grow.

I leave the selection of plants to them, then take them with

me when I buy the plants for them, but they have to provide the labor.

I do keep an eye on their efforts but don't interfere.

Some parents do too much of the work, giving orders rather than letting their kids make the decisions about “their garden” and become less supportive if the results the kids achieve don't fit the parents' expectations.

That can negatively affect their self-confidence or even destroy any desire to continue their gardening efforts.

I have seen our kids make some mistakes but the overall results get better every year. The kids now have great enthusiasm for gardening which will be very useful to them through their lives.

Why Grow Your Own Vegetables?

I did a quick, informal poll of some of the people that I know who grow vegetables to find out what they thought were the main advantages, if any, which they got from gardening.



There were a lot of variations in the answers, but the factors which I mention in this chapter were the most common.

You will probably find one or more of the highlighted factors is something you can connect with.

Freshness: The most obvious advantage which all gardeners get from their garden is that they eat fresh-out-of-the-ground produce.

For me, that is reason enough!

I enjoyed the first couple of tomatoes which my parents helped me to grow when I was very young a lot.

And the difference between the taste of most store-bought produce and that from my own garden has convinced me that the effort and expense involved in my garden is a small investment which pays really great dividends.

Healthier: Almost everyone acknowledges that a properly maintained home garden can produce the healthiest vegetables.

The difference between our vegetables which travel only a very short distance to our kitchen and the bulk-produced ones which may travel from one side of the planet to the other, be stored for periods in coolers and then held in warehouses for a period before even arriving in your local Mall is obvious.

Safety: I can eat some of the produce out of my garden plots straight away, but I wash or even peel everything from the shops to protect us from the sprays or other treatments which have probably been applied to them.

We know about everything which has been applied to our plants and the soil and we don't have any way to be fully informed about anything that I bring home from the stores.

Much of the produce which is sold has been treated with a variety of chemicals and it is unlikely that we will be aware of exactly what those compounds are and what risks might be involved in eating something which has been treated with them.

Safety laws related to chemicals and vegetable production vary from country to country. Some growers in certain countries still use chemicals which are forbidden to be used in other countries.

As well as the treatments to stop pests and diseases, many producers and processors apply other treatments which just make the produce look more appealing or delay its natural deterioration.

Some problems with certain chemicals do not become known until they have been used for years.

We mostly choose the varieties of seeds and plants which we have been using for years. We only try new varieties after they have been around long enough for the gardening media and some more knowledgeable gardeners among our friends have tried them and reported good results and no problems.

Not all reports are equally reliable, I always ask the local experts which media writers they respect and follow.

I use some well-tested chemicals which I believe are safe. And I am prepared to put up with a few spots or lose a few vegetables each season rather than accept higher levels of risk.

Gardeners also have to keep in mind the safety of their family and friends that also consume some of the items they produce.

Low Cost: This was mentioned a few times in the little poll. But, I feel that you will probably find your costs are higher sometimes for your home-grown produce.

I worked out that my vegetables cost me more than I would pay for similar quantities in stores at the present time.

I don't mind paying the current higher cost because I believe that it is offset by the advantages I listed above.

Then there is the convenience of not having to deal with parking hassles, gasoline cost, the time wasted driving to and from the shops, etc.

And, the price difference is getting lower as store prices tend to inevitably spiral upward.

I should also mention that you, like most other gardeners will probably keep finding more benefits which only become clear when you have been gardening for a while.



I also get great satisfaction in sharing the vegetables with family and friends.

There is also the opportunity of swapping tips and even plants with other gardeners. That helps to increase our knowledge and

gives the opportunity to introduce our family to types of vegetables they might not have tried before.

Vegetable growing can be very accessible so that almost everyone can take part even if your mobility is restricted or you are unable to carry heavy items, you can still grow some great vegetables.

The time and effort which you put into your gardening may also have some positive effects on your self-confidence and your general health.

But, it is important to check with your doctor before starting any activity, like gardening, which may affect you and get them to talk you through any precautions or limitations you should take.

Even if you have limited space, time or cash, you can successfully grow some vegetables and enjoy the benefits of one of the oldest and greatest hobbies we humans have developed.

Planning

It's best to set aside some quiet time to plan your garden before starting to spend money, effort or time on the actual venture.

Whether this is your first garden, or if you are expanding your current garden or renovating a neglected garden in your new home, the time you invest in planning will help you to avoid wasting your available resources during this first season and also pay dividends for years to come.

Taking the time to draw up a plan helps to ensure good results.

Careful planning will ensure that you get better results from all the resources you put into your gardening.

A lack of planning is probably the surest way to end up with poor results every year.

To get the best results from your planning, you need to have as much information as possible about the resources you have already so that you can prepare to improve or replace anything which is not of a standard to provide for good results.

Most gardeners check what type of soil they have and arrange to add fertilizer and sometimes even soil conditioner to it if it seems to be lacking.

A better idea is to get a soil pH test or even a full analysis so that you can take care of any deficiencies that may not be evident just from a visual inspection or even a pH test.

You can buy a pH test kit at a reasonable price and some stores will do a test on a sample you bring in when you buy your supplies from them.

A full analysis is more expensive and you usually arrange them through a college which has an agricultural section or through a private consultant.

A full test might be worth doing once, so that you have a better understanding of the condition of your soil.

Self Check

If you don't get regular medical checks, I suggest that you can avoid serious potential risks by getting one before you start to do more gardening, like it is recommended for us all to do before taking on any new form of exercise.

Gardening of any kind requires effort and you may be required to expend an unusual level of effort unexpectedly any time that you are doing something in the garden.

That extra effort may involve an unknown level of risk.

One of the reasons we do put so much in the way of resources into our gardening is to provide better food for our families.

I believe that we also owe it to ourselves and our families to take sensible precautions that will help to ensure that we are with them to enjoy the benefits of our efforts.

Where to Get Advice

Get advice from your friends and neighbors who have their own gardens. They will know from experience what types and varieties of vegetables are most likely to be successful in your area.

You will have to filter the advice you get so that it works best for you.

Another good source of advice are your suppliers. Most staff at hardware and garden stores have practical experience themselves and more enthusiasm for helping their customers than people at other types of shops.

This is one of the reasons that I keep buying from a couple of local stores even though it would be a little cheaper to buy more supplies from Internet-based sources.

The local knowledge and being able to get the materials immediately will keep me using them for some time to come.

However carefully you do your initial planning, you will need to review your plan of action after each season so that you can improve the results you get from the effort and other resources which you put into your garden.

Maybe, you need to change the variety you grow of a particular vegetable or even replace it with a different type of plant altogether.

This regular review is valuable and a very enjoyable way to fill time when the weather is not suitable for actually getting anything done in the garden.

I have a large calendar on the wall which is just for marking up the gardening related activities through the year.

The current one was provided free by a supplier but it is worth buying a suitable calendar or even drawing one up on a large sheet of paper or a spare whiteboard because it will help to keep you focused and less likely to overlook any important task, like ordering your new seeds ahead of planting time, and give you a better chance of ensuring better results each year.

Planning in advance what you want to grow and where you will actually put the plants of each type will save you time and stress. You can order your seeds or plants early and be ready to deal with them when they become available.

As well as your main garden sections, you might want to grow some varieties you have not used before in pots or other containers. Some of these can be inside, on balconies or in window boxes.

It's a great feeling to pick some cherry tomatoes off a plant and start eating one as you carry the rest to the kitchen!

Even if you want to eventually have a large garden which can produce most of your family's vegetables, I strongly recommend that you start with something more modest for your first year so that you don't become overwhelmed and are almost guaranteed to get good results.



Use the first season to establish your routines, find anything you may have overlooked and check if you have the right varieties and types of vegetables to get good results.

Make your garden areas a manageable size. You might want to set up raised beds to put the plants at a convenient height which will save labor and reduce the chance of injury.

Another way to reduce effort and increase yields is to use the “square box” approach which I provide an introduction to later in the book, where you grow vegetables in plots about forty inches square. This widely popular system keeps your effort relatively low, makes it easy to maintain the health of your plants because they are easier to monitor and attend to any problems.

Many new gardeners plant too many things and too much of each one in their first year. It's worth planting a few more plants than you should need to cover the inevitable losses, but planting great numbers and then just discarding most of them is wasteful of a valuable resource.

You can give some of your excess seeds or seedlings to other gardeners and store extra seeds which you don't need to use now for next season rather than waste them by over planting and then thinning them out.

It will also save you some labor and ensure that your plants all get a good start. When you over plant, all the seedlings which you produce have to fight for space and nutrients, so they will not be as strong or productive as they might have been if they were planted more thinly to begin with.

Each garden will be better at producing different produce, even when the gardener uses the same methods and materials.

After each season, you should review what was successful and what you might replace with a different crop or variety. Always take into account any special circumstances, such as unusual weather or high pest numbers so that you don't abandon a good choice because of a one-season season abnormality or some other poor reason.

Preparation

After planning your garden, you need to prepare the area for planting the new plants.

Many gardeners have adapted the traditional system to give them less work and the potential for a better harvest.



Root crops like potatoes and carrots need to have a growing medium which has sufficient supplies of the right nutrients, including specific trace elements.

You can get information about the level of trace elements and other nutrients from a soil analysis.

Also remember that each crop you take from the soil will remove its share of the available nutrients and they will need to be replaced if you want to get similar crops in the future.

If you have any extreme weather conditions such as very heavy rain or high velocity winds, you may need to replace some of your topsoil and also add more nutrients.

You can use some chemicals to help break up heavy soils so that the root growth of our plants is not too restricted or vermiculite to improve the retention of water around the root area of the plants you are growing.

Sometimes, it may be a better option to add a layer of new growing medium onto the soil you have or to remove some and replace it with a larger quantity of new more fertile soil or other growing medium.

Location

It isn't just the accommodation industry which states that "location" is a prime factor in the success of a particular hotel or resort.

Any experienced gardener also knows that using the right location can be critical for their success with each particular type of plant.

Most vegetables need a good ration of sunlight through their growing season to get the best results.

Some will do better when they are near other plants which are not directly competing with them for their essential nutrients.

Other factors which can affect the success you have with particular vegetables are the amount of water which is held in the area where the plants are located.

Some need a steady supply and some others like to be in well drained soil and may be negatively affected if there is too much moisture around their roots.

Protecting Your Plants

You will have to provide protection and support for your plants through their lives.

When you prepare the soil, you should remove any rocks or other objects which might restrict the growth of their roots or their access to nutrients.

Weeds

That is also the best time to remove weeds from the soil. I suggest you work your fork or other implement through the soil, and then kneel or sit on a pad which you move around the area. This is much better than continually bending to remove a rock or weed each time after you have turned over a fork-full of soil. The risk of back injury may not seem high but it does happen and the consequences can be long-lasting.

Try to do this without putting much pressure on your back and legs. If you can sit or kneel, you will probably reduce the risk of injury.

If you don't like to use a pad under your knees, I can assure you is a better option than having an injury which prevents you from kneeling in your garden ever again.

Try to remove as much of each weed as you can. All weeds are more vigorous than most normal garden plants and even a small piece which you overlook can often grow into a large weed and cause problems for your vegetable plants.

Wind

Strong winds can cause direct damage to plants and also remove valuable topsoil and any nutrients in it.

You can use solid windbreaks to reduce the damage. But, there can be some damage caused where the wind is blocked by the structure and the wind whirls around.

You can, as part of your design before setting up your garden, arrange to have stronger plants provide protection to weaker plants.

You can also use panels with holes in them which will avoid the wind-rebound effect.

Water

Water is a vital factor in the wellbeing of all creatures and plants; too much or too little can cause problems.

If you are setting up a new garden or refurbishing one which is neglected, you can reduce the likelihood of future problems by thoroughly preparing the soil.

You should look at the way water moves into and out of the area before deciding exactly where you are going to put your vegetable plants. If you put them at the bottom of a depression, rainwater as well as the water you spray onto the area may accumulate in that depression and seriously affect the development of your plants and the vegetables.

If you mulch your vegetables, water the ground around your plants before applying the mulch so that the water goes into the soils and can be absorbed by the plants.

Then, apply the mulch which will help to keep the water in the soil and reduce evaporation.

A drip-watering system, using a hose with very fine holes in it and a timer which you can set for watering at specified times for a set duration is usually ideal.

Seeds or Seedlings?

This is one of the most common questions I hear from new gardeners.

The right answer depends on the type of plant, how easy the particular type of plant is to grow in your locality and the time you have available for doing the work.

Advantages of Seeds

Seeds are usually cheaper than seedlings because the supplier has had to invest more work and time to get the plants to the advanced stage. You also often get a lot more seeds for the lower price.

If the seeds are able to be stored and still germinate in good numbers, your minimal investment in a packet could provide you with all the plants you need for two or more seasons.

You can usually get a greater number of varieties of a particular plant as seeds than as seedlings. The supplier will naturally focus their efforts on advancing the most salable varieties as seedlings because they require more effort and materials. They won't sell as many plants as some of their customers will only buy seeds.

Advantages of Seedlings

Healthy, well-prepared seedlings will be more convenient and have a higher rate of reaching successful maturity than most plants which are grown from seeds.

When you add the real but often overlooked costs involved in growing your plants from seeds such as the extra time, supplies and work needed, seedlings may be a better option.

Getting a few seedlings of a variety that you want to try as a possible addition to your regular vegetables can be worthwhile because it minimizes the impact on your regular routine and gives you a chance to see how well the new plants can fit in to your garden conditions and climate.

Companions – Good and Bad

You may have heard that some plants’ success can be improved by growing them near certain other plants but wonder what the benefits may be?

Some plants provide protection from weather conditions for smaller and less hardy plants, but that feature does not usually earn them the title of good companions.

Some people believe that certain groupings can actually improve the flavor or production of other plants. I am not aware of any official studies about this.

Certain plants have the ability to repel certain pests which also attack other beneficial plants.

Many plants attract useful insects which also help other plants which you locate near them. The most obvious example are flowering plants which attract bees.

Plants that can be grouped with others to conserve space help each other and also help you to make better use of the amount of garden area which you have available.

Note that this list has just a few examples and some may not work as well for you as they have for me or other gardeners. That may be due to the varieties planted near each other or the reason may be something quite different in the local environment.

Corn is a good companion which can have smaller productive plants around it without any risk of harm.

Potatoes may have a negative effect on the development of your squash and tomatoes.

Planting garlic, or nasturtium near your leafy brassica plants (cabbage, cauliflower and broccoli etcetera), can help them thrive.



Lettuce seem to like cucumbers and carrots.

Tomatoes don’t like cabbages.

Enjoy Your Gardening



My intention with this ebook is to share the best information and tips I know so that you can more easily achieve success with whatever vegetables you want to grow and consume.

But, I hope that this book will also help you to enjoy your gardening experiences more.

If you don't continue to enjoy your gardening, you will start to find excuses why you should put off doing necessary maintenance and inevitably get poorer results than you expect or are capable of.

If you follow those tips which are appropriate for your level of health and general situation, I believe that you will always be able to find something enjoyable while you are gardening.

If you are wet and cold because you have to repair some supports for your plants which have been damaged in a storm, focus your thoughts on the better harvest you will get because of your work in the storm.

A Simple Way to a Vegetable Bonanza

I’m giving some prominence to this way of gardening because it is suitable for almost anyone and has a high chance of giving you great results even if you are about to start your first serious attempt at growing vegetables.

My introduction to this method of intensive, but fairly easy, vegetable production was from a fellow gardener in my town. There are a lot of people using their particular variations of the system but I think this explanation will help you to get started.

You can have some benefits of crop rotation even with a single plot by replacing some of the varieties in your plot when you finish harvesting each type of vegetable.

To get the best results, you just need four separate plots and use the same tactics that you would use with four larger plots in rotation as in a regular larger garden.

I find that this way is easier and has many advantages which I will explain in the following section while I show you how to set it up. And, despite all this, a garden of this kind may match the productivity of the larger system with the same number of plants in many cases.

This system is only about thirty-six years old in 2012. It was developed by an engineer and efficiency expert named Mel Bartholomew. Mr. Bartholomew has promoted and improved his system right through that time in what must be one of the busiest retirements of all time.

It has been adapted by many other gardeners and most have found the system very helpful and I suggest that you try this if you are setting up a new garden or replacing one which would need a lot of effort and time to bring back to production.

Like me and many of the other people who use this system, you will probably change it in certain respects to more closely suit your own situation and ideas.

The advantages which I hope to demonstrate to you with the version of this system which I use include:

- Q It is simple enough to be used by anyone, whatever their level of experience.
- Q Only needs a minimum of space – about forty-eight inches square or 120 centimeters square is enough for your first plot.
- Q if you have the energy and need for more vegetables than that size can easily produce, you can work a bigger plot but would get better results by adding another plot of the same size.
- Q The effort and time to set up and maintain this type of gardening system is significantly less than traditional row planting methods where most plants are set out in long rows.
- Q This system will require less water and maintenance.
- Q You can avoid the expense and effort of adding fertilizer if you use about six inches of enhanced growing medium on top of whatever soil you already have.
- Q A few weeds may still need to be removed but you will not have as many to deal with and the vigor of the vegetable plants in your plots will be such that they will not be as affected as they would be if set out in the traditional system.
- Q Although you can stir some of the growing medium to remove the odd weed that pops its head up, ***you don't need to do any digging or much lifting*** apart from filling the boxes when you start your garden plots.
- Q All physical activity is much easier than what you would need to do to set up and maintain a regular garden which you could get a similar level of production from.

I could continue to add good points about this system to that list but what I've already listed is probably enough to have you anxious for a list of the problems which I've encountered since I started using this system and some details about how much it will cost to set up.

I have not found any problems apart from harsh weather but even that has probably caused no more damage than it would with any other layout.

I first tried this system, because it seemed to be easier than the traditional long rows method. I was fairly confident that it would work. Of course, anybody who does any sort of gardening has to be some sort of optimist or you might find it hard to keep going when some of your plants or even whole crops strike trouble.

How to Set up the Box System Garden

I believe that Mr. Bartholomew’s idea (or really a bunch of ideas) is truly revolutionary. It has been a great asset for people with low physical strength or other problems which made preparing and maintaining a garden using the traditional methods almost like a form of torture.

Start by deciding what you will build your boxes from. You can use almost any kind of wood, provided it has not had any chemical treatment which might leach from the wood into your garden plot and be either taken up by the plants, making them risky to eat, or which might cause damage to the plants themselves.

Second-hand timber is fine because nobody will be interested in the frame when they see the prolific growth of your plants inside it.

I said that four feet square is the recommend size. You will also have to include internal panels which will separate the one foot square sections so that each type of plant is not overwhelmed by bigger or faster-growing neighboring plants.

You will probably want to put something under each large box to discourage weeds from growing through the soil beneath and up through the box to compete with your vegetables.

The recommended mix is $\frac{1}{3}^{\text{rd}}$ vermiculite, $\frac{1}{3}^{\text{rd}}$ well decayed compost and $\frac{1}{3}^{\text{rd}}$ well decayed peat moss.

If you do not have your own compost heap, you can substitute good quality compost from a nursery or garden store. If you have to use packaged compost, I suggest that you try to examine the contents of the package before buying (pretty pictures of crops supposedly grown with that type of compost are not really much help), or buy a few bags of two different formulations and use each type in a different plot so that you will know which one you might prefer to keep using the following season. Then, start your own compost heap or, better still, compost bin as soon as possible.

You may still want to add some fertilizer to help your seed or seedlings get a good start if it is recommended by your seed or plant supplier, but many people are finding that it is not necessary.

You will save money by not needing to supply fertilizer during the growing period for most plants.

Setting all your plants in these square boxes means that almost any adult can prune, prop up or pick the plants output without ever having to step on the growing mixture. This means that the soil doesn't become compacted from you walking over it and the plants will have better chance of growing through the medium and using the nutrients in it.

You do not have to stick with the standard size of box. You could set up a few deeper boxes for your root crops. Filling them with the enriched growing mixture would cost more, but you would probably be happy when you harvest the produce.

If you want to encourage your children to grow their own plants or even look after some for the benefit of the whole family, you can make the boxes narrower so that the kids find them easier to work with.

Boxes which are from two feet to three feet wide would be okay for most children.

These narrower boxes could also be used in area such as along fences or between your home and your garage if you want to grow more vegetables or other plants and have only a limited area to do your gardening in.

You could put your boxes on the ground or raise them up on stands or rough tables which would make them even easier to access and maintain.

Most traditional gardens have wide paths between the plots which take up valuable space. This system can be operated with paths that are only about two feet (sixty centimeters) wide, because you don't need to be able to get any large equipment into the garden area.

In fact, you don't need much in the way of tools because the growing medium is tailored to the needs of the plants and doesn't need to be turned over like plots in the traditional gardening system.

These systems are not as time-consuming or costly as traditional long row gardens to set up. They also will probably need less water.

You could set up a drip system, attached to the boards separating the sections of each plot to keep water use and wastage to a minimum.

An important part of the system is to reduce the number of seeds which are planted and then removed and discarded.

Many gardeners still use a full packet of seeds when they are only planting one or two traditional rows. Then, they thin out the weaker or less mature seedlings soon after they poke through the soil.

Then, they will still probably find that they get more vegetables than they can possibly use. After they give some to friends, relatives and possibly a few to charity, they have to discard quite a few more.

With the box system, you plant only the number which you require, setting them out at the distance apart recommended by your supplier.

If they are supposed to be six inches apart, you will plant two or four in a single square foot section. If you give each plant six inches space from the other plants and also six inches space between the plants and the dividers around the section, you put two per section. But, I have found that separating the plants to be six inches apart and leaving just three inches between the plants and the dividers works just as well for me.

When you get the produce from all the plants in a section, you can either leave that section bare until it is time to plant more of the type which you had there or you can replace them with a different plant. Before doing that, remove the used growing medium and clean the sides of the section before putting in some growing medium.

I prefer the second option because it gives you more variety in your diet and, perhaps more importantly, it reduces the chance that pests or diseases which favor the type of plant you have in that section will be able to build up over time.

This system has been used to help people in poor countries set up community gardens which have helped some of them to produce some extra vegetables or flowers for sale as well as more than enough for their families.

There is no reason this can't be used for community gardens anywhere.

It is also helpful if you want to grow test crops of new vegetables or new varieties which you aren't sure will be productive in your area.

You can also cover your boxes with netting or plastic to reduce attacks from pets, animals, or damage due to bad weather. The wooden surrounds makes it fairly easy to attach wire frames to support the coverings. It's your choice whether you fix the frames in place for the season or just lift them on and off at particular times.

A friend moved into a house where there was no garden area, but a large and poor quality lawn. She asked permission from her landlord to replace part of the lawn with a couple of garden plots and he agreed as long as they were well maintained.

Using this system, she soon had the basis of a very productive garden becoming established. She, with help of a few friends, cut two squares of the lawn away. Then, they used those pieces of turf to start her compost heap.

Then, she put her new boxes over the bare earth and filled them with the growing mixture. She added more boxes after the first year.

Container Gardening

This is another gardening system which can be used where you have little space or lack the time and other resources to set up a regular garden.

It can also be a way of adding variety to what you produce from your regular garden.

Containers can be recycled from things which you would otherwise discard or you can buy a wide range of containers which are designed for growing and protecting your plants.

The wide popularity of this form of gardening can be gauged by looking at the huge variety of containers, miniature plants and special tools and other equipment which are manufactured for people who do container gardening.

You can use your containers to grow a wide variety of plants which you have not tried to grow in the past.

Delicate plants can be protected by being grown inside your home under controlled conditions.

Current research suggests that some greenery in your home and work area helps you maintain a sense of well-being. When you can pick and eat items like small tomatoes from that same greenery, you are likely to feel even better.

There are even containers available which you can fill with a suitable mixture and suspend from a frame or the underside of a balcony.

These can be used for flowering plants which can grow down over the container but they are most often used to produce vegetables and fruits such as tomatoes and strawberries.

Use a quality potting mix for your containers. Using cheap mixes may severely compromise the results you get.

You need to ensure there are holes in the bottom of most containers to allow excess water or other liquids to drain away. But, put a layer of small pieces of broken crockery, stones or shards from old clay pots in the bottom so that your expensive growing mixture does not all fall out of the holes as well.

Don't fill any container right to the top with soil or you will risk serious spillage whenever you water the plants.

Don't put too many plants in the same container because they may grow bigger than you expect and then produce less vegetables because of competition between them for the available nutrients in the container.

Always discard the growing medium and clean your containers thoroughly before re-using them.

You can make better use of a container by planting some complementary plants in it. A small variety of cucumber in a pot with a miniature tomato plant has eye appeal because of the contrasting colors and shapes.

There are practical benefits as well because they can be picked and served together after being quickly washed.

You can also add some herbs which will add variety and flavor to your meals.

Safety First

I have seen the serious effects on people that have a moment of inattention or take what they consider a small risk just once. So, I am including some safety tips to help keep you, your family (including your pets) and visitors who work or socialize in your garden.

Tools

Garden tools are expensive. The cheap ones cause injury when they break or fail to support you.

The quality brands cost more but are less expensive over time because they are reliable and repay regular light maintenance with years of service.

The damage you can cause yourself with poor tools is obvious.

Using cheap spades, forks and other large tools can result in strains or other injuries because they aren't well designed and we have to do most of the work.

Using small tools with sharp blades or edges, large metal springs or weak hinges can also be plain dangerous.

It's not cheap if you can't trust it to do the job you bought it for.



Insurance

Check that your insurance includes Third Party Cover to deal with any possible accident or misadventure which affects anyone; friend, employee or tradesperson who comes on to your property.

The premiums are usually only a small part of the cost of your general insurance. Some people don't realize that they don't have that cover or only to an inadequate level until it's too late.

Don't let the fact that you do have good cover make you complacent about anything on your property which might cause injury or loss to someone. Get it fixed or replaced as soon as possible.

Lifting and Shifting

If you have large containers, whether they have growing medium or plants in them or not, be careful when you have to lift or move them.

Many people cause injury to themselves by using the wrong stance when picking up or pushing heavy objects. You may suffer serious damage, even which lifting or shifting something light if you do not carefully follow good workplace guidelines about how to stand and lift things.

A large pot landing on your foot might put you in hospital or cause permanent damage to your foot.

If you have a number of large containers or have to move bags of fertilizer and other materials fairly often, I suggest that you buy and use a small trolley like those used in stores for moving large boxes.

They may seem expensive but can be very cheap if you compare the cost to having to stay in hospital for a few days.

And, my doctor says that such injuries may be treated, but there can be lingering effects which can limit your enjoyment of any vigorous activities for years afterwards.

Chemicals



Always be careful with chemicals that you use in your gardening.

Wear full-cover, non-absorbent clothing with gloves, boots and disposable masks where required.

An open container can be a deadly risk to anyone, but especially to a child or a pet.

Snail Baits: Snail baits are notorious for the number of pets that they cause injury and worse to.

There are now some products which contain iron compounds instead of the more common and dangerous metaldehyde. Although some claim that

these newer baits are safe for pets, my local vet said that they are treating pets that are near to death in some cases after eating this type of bait. Don't take any risks with them.

Fuel: Many gardeners have one or more powered devices to reduce the labor required for their gardening.

Spillage of fuel can cause damage but, of course, the major risk is fire.

I’ve read of people keeping fuel in unsuitable containers. Your safety and that of your family and your neighbors means that you need to only use approved containers in good condition for any dangerous materials, if you must keep them at home at all. If there is an accident, the presence of these materials may void any insurance you have, especially if they were not stored in accordance with local regulations.

Manure

Manure from horses and other creatures, while accepted as good for the soil, may contain organisms which can be a danger to humans and pets.

Always wash your hands, tools and clothing thoroughly immediately after a session in the garden.

Replace any gloves or clothing which has any holes – that’s just cheap insurance.

Some of My Favorite Vegetables to Grow

These suggestions are based on those vegetables which are likely to give less trouble and more reliable harvests than some others for people that have little experience with vegetable gardening.

Tomatoes: These are not always a sure thing but I still suggest that you try a few. They are nutritious and there is something about the taste of your own home-grown tomatoes which is worth the occasional disappointing results.



There are also many different types and ways to grow them. Put a pot on a balcony or suspend and bag from underneath the same balcony and let the tomatoes grow down to where

you can pick them without even reaching too high.

The smaller varieties are possibly the easier to grow well. The very large types take longer to reach maturity and therefore risk more changes in weather conditions and exposure to pest and diseases.

Your main crop may be ready when store prices for tomatoes are at rock-bottom but the taste and the nutrient levels in your home-grown tomatoes will far surpass most of them.

Lettuces: They are very easy to grow and can be ready in a few weeks.

Remember to be thrifty with your seeds and a packet will produce all your family need for a long time.

Carrots and Radishes: Easy to grow and easy to eat.

I must mention herbs here – you can grow them in a window box, tray by themselves or alongside many of your vegetables.

Ready, Set Grow!

Thank you for investing in my gardening ebook.

I know that the tips and methods I have explained to you can help your future gardening ventures be more productive and reduce the stress, effort and cost you need to invest to be successful.

Some may not suit you as much as they do me and some tips will need adapting for some readers because of their particular needs and situation.

I wish you boundless success and harvests as big as your dreams.

Andrew Westfall

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