

Make Your Bed, Then Grow In It!

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Basics of Veggie Growing

Vegetables require 8 hours of sun and fertile, well-drained soil. Lettuces and kale can tolerate some shade. Warm season crops will do better with more than 8 hours of sun. Harden off before transplanting. Water consistently giving each plant 1-2 gallons of water per week. Most vegetables can be grown in containers at least 12-inches deep and 12-inches in diameter. The bigger and deeper the container, the better. Use 4 parts commercial potting soil and 1 part compost. Fertilize with liquid fertilizer every 2-4 weeks.

Soil and Veggies

Soil is living, microbes are the engine, compost/organic matter is the glue. To improve any soil add compost or organic matter. Most ornamental plants don't need added compost if they are left to naturally mulch themselves. Vegetables require additions of compost and fertilizer because they take up more nutrients and those nutrients are removed when produce is harvested.

Poop and Veggies

All of our natural and organic vegetable gardening approaches are reliant on large amounts of organic matter to feed soil critters and replace nutrients taken out with the harvest. This was fine when there was poop around but now it is more difficult to find enough organic matter to sustain these systems. Especially if you are trying to limit outside inputs. Consider using some of your land to grow green manures such as clover, buckwheat, phacelia or cereal grains.

Raised garden beds – what are they and why we like them. With or without frames.

Traditional Rototilling

Wrecks soil structure, puts too much air in which burns up nutrients fast and compacts soil. Loud, noisy, stinky exhaust, hard on the body.

No Till / Low Till / Natural Way of Gardening

Gardening in mulch. Smother and layer. This includes lasagna gardening. Ruth Stout, Fukuoka, other YouTube sensations. Sheet mulching or sheet composting to create garden beds. Builds soil, loosens hardpan from the top down by letting the microbes do the work. This is lazy-bed gardening.

Double Digging / Biointensive / Biodynamic-French Intensive

Super deep cultivation with additions of compost and manure. Encourages roots to grow down rather than out. Allows for closer plant spacing – intensive planting with off-set centers rather than in rows. Three or four crops per year. Grow cover crops for biomass and soil building. Employs season extension. Good for rocky soils, very labor intensive.

Strawbale beds

Grow plants in a rotting strawbale. Quick way to build up without bringing in a lot of soil. Moisten strawbales thoroughly then put on a thin layer of fresh manure or alfalfa meal and pile on soil as thick as you can. Level off the top and plant. After a couple of years, the bale will decompose and you will have a nice raised bed. Voila!

Burlap sack or Biobag beds

Fill old gunny sacks or Biobags with about 18" of soil and plant.

Hot beds

This is also a season extension technique that heats the soil from the bottom up. Dig a pit about one to two feet deep the size of your cold frame or hoop house, put the soil aside. Pile several inches of moistened straw or spoiled hay in the pit then cover with about 8" fresh manure deep. Cover all of it with the soil that is set aside. Cover with a cold frame or hoop house so that it will heat up and keep out extra water. Monitor temperature, remove plants as temperature goes down.

Sod composting

turn it upside down, get it wet, make a tidy pile, cover so it is dark, dark, dark. Wait one to two years. Sift and enjoy!

Hugelkultur or wood swale planting

Uses the slow rotting of woody material to feed the soil and plants. With or without digging a pit. Pile big branches and woody material, cover it with leaves and other plant material then cover the whole thing with several inches of soil. Take care to fill in spaces so as not to create a creature hostel. Plant seeds, potatoes, squash, blueberries, pumpkins and other vines.

Books

Maritime Northwest Garden Guide, 2nd Ed. by Lisa Taylor, 2014.

Your Farm in the City, An Urban Dwellers Guide to Growing Food and Raising Animals by Lisa Taylor, 2011.

Growing Vegetables West of the Cascades by Steve Solomon, 2007.

Gaia's Garden: A Guide to Home-Scale Permaculture by Toby Hemenway, 2001

How To Grow More Vegetables . . . by John Jeavons, 2006

The Ruth Stout No-Work Garden Book: Secrets of the year-round mulch method by Ruth Stout, 1973.

Seed Houses That Offer Heirloom Varieties

Adaptive Seeds adaptiveseeds.com

Deep Harvest Seeds deepharvestfarm.com

Johnny's Selected Seeds johnnyseeds.com

Kitazawa Seeds kitazawaseed.com

Peace Seeds peaceseedslive.blogspot.com

Seed Savers Exchange seedsavers.org

Territorial Seed Company territorialseed.com

Uprising Seeds uprisingorganics.com