

Organic Gardening without Having A GreenThumb ~ Vegetable Gardening Ideas for Beginners



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Chapter 1. Organic Gardening Basics

Organic gardening pertains to growing of vegetables, fruits, seeds, grains and nuts the natural way. This means that there are strictly no fungicides, pesticides, insecticides, herbicides and poisonous fertilizers and chemicals in the scene. The soil is rather prepared and tilled using composed manure, mulch and other organic materials. The plants are naturally grown and sprouted with the help of water, minerals derived from compost and sun. Organic gardeners tend to cultivate the soil and grow plants based on sustainable and holistic approach.

Organic gardening can be both fun and worthy habit. Many individuals these days are getting hooked with organic gardening for the reason that this paved way for worthy utilization of time and resources. This particular type of gardening is proven to be very engaging. But before devoting your time and attention to this undertaking, it would be best to have a clear understanding about the basics of organic gardening and all essential aspects link to it.

The following information can help widen your awareness and familiarity about organic gardening.

The Basics

You have probably been trying to eat organic foods to protect the environment from being loaded with toxic chemicals or reduce the amount of risky pesticide that you and your entire family consume. Organic can be a bit expensive but there is now a possible way of growing your own fresh and delicious produce while at the same time having learning and fun at the same time. This possible way is none other than organic gardening.

Organic gardening is a type of gardening that does not utilize synthetic products such as fertilizers as pesticides. Organic gardening ideally replenishes resources. The bigger picture of organic gardening includes working in cooperation with nature. Individuals who have the heart for this type of gardening view their gardens as natural part of ecosystem. Here are some other basic facts that you need to know when getting started with organic gardening:

Meaning of Organic Matter

Organic matter pertains to decaying animal and plant waste. This includes grass clipping, compost, kitchen scraps, dried leaves, fish heads and more. Organic matter is usually being used as conditioner and soil amendment. This can work on the soil of your new garden or can be used as mulch or top dressing of existing gardens.

The Importance of Soil

One of the primary tenants in organic gardening is feeding the soil and this soil will in turn feed the plants. Basically, plants derive water, nutrients and air from the soil. This therefore play essential role in effective and successful gardening regardless of type. There are actually different types of soil. The clay soil is the type that contains higher nutrients as compared to sandy soil.

Sandy soil is said to be well-drained but there are some remedies that can be undertaken to make this an ideal garden soil. This is definitely where organic matter comes to play. Adding this aids in improving the texture of the soil and attracting organisms that make nutrients in the garden soil.

Controlling Diseases and Pests Without Chemicals

Organic gardening does not really mean that you have to share your plants with worms. Since you are gardening in collaboration with nature, you still have to accept that pests are inevitable scenes in your garden. Vigilance should be your first line of defense. Inspect the plants regularly to determine some problem signs and be able to take action instantly.

Chapter 2. Having a Plan

The success and failure of your organic gardening venture depends into proper planning. In order to avoid failure, you need to invest great deal of time and effort to creating and having solid plan. If you have the desire to get the freshest and most delicious produce, you need to stick with a comprehensive and organized gardening plan.

The following can help you boost up your plan and put things in proper perspective or place:

A Plan

· Explore Possibilities

Thinking about garden designs means exploring possibilities. In designing, you are allowed to think of ways and things that you truly desire for your for your organic garden. You can also figure out the quantity of plants you can plant and cultivate in your chosen space. You can also work on laying out paths and plotting out your unique planting. Never stop exploring until you reach the point that you already settled with the ones that meet you unique

gardening needs.

- Consider the Future

When designing or creating your organic gardening plan, you need to consider the future. Planning a garden is like having a look at the future. You need to have a clear idea on what your organic garden will look like for the coming years. You can join together all the essential components of your plan in order to come up with an ideal garden.

- Make Changes and Stay Flexible

The good thing about planning is that you are being able to figure out things, make assessments and execute changes if necessary especially if conditions change. One of the top benefits of having a plan for your organic garden is flexibility. To adopt changes in your plan is easier than having to change the entire garden.

- Go with the Detail

When planning, you can go to the level of details that you find comfortable with. You can plan for style of planting, amount of plants to be planted as well as the plants and seeds to be purchased. It is essential to always go with the detail for in the end, it will be easier for you to determine what needs to be planted and what you have already planted. You also need to get into the details of planting schedule.

- Be Prepared

Since planning is a slice of the future, you need to be prepared with all the

gardening tasks that you need to accomplish. Ideal organic garden design gives you the idea what needs to be purchase and when to make this purchase. This also allows you to allocate the resources properly. Be prepared when making plan for your organic garden for this enables you to phase out projects around your organic garden so that tasks are being kept within personal abilities. In such way, organic gardening becomes a joy and not a choice.

Chapter 3. Having the Right Tools

The success of your gardening is nearly impossible if you do not have all the essentially needed tools. It is true that a real gardener starts with his basic collection of tools and starts to build from here. Your gardening tools are vital parts of your gardening venture so their real value should never be set aside. These tools help in speeding up the process of cutting, cultivating, cleaning and doing other garden related tasks. The type of tools to use will still depend on the type of gardening that an individual wishes to pursue. If you are into organic gardening, there are also set of tools that are suitable for this particular type of gardening. Having the right tool is one of the vital aspects of organic gardening.

The following tools can help you deal with organic gardening easily and efficiently:

The Tools

- **Hand Trowel**

Trowels are ideal for planting smaller herbs, annuals and vegetables. These tools are also utilized in digging out stubborn weeds, planting the container gardens and combining potting mixes. If you have enough budgets, buy a trowel that is made up of stainless steel. These are proven to be ultimately durable and usually includes rubberized grip for utmost comfort.

• Digging Fork

This tool is indispensable for dividing and lifting perennials, turning compost and loosening soil that is compacted. When purchasing digging fork, make sure to go for the one with four footrest and square tines for convenient and comfortable digging. An excellent digging fork comes with cast or forged head made of stainless steel and hardwood or fiberglass handle. If you are aspiring to get real leverage during digging time choose a digging fork with D-shaped handle.

• Hoe

There are various different types of hoe ranging from standard hoe up to action hoes. There are also super thin hoes that are specially designed in order to fit in even into tiny and tight spaces. The types of hoes to be chosen depends on the garden you are planning to grow and cultivate.

• Digger

This is another tool that can help you in maintaining and cultivating your organic garden. Diggers are ideal tools for digging out taproot and weeds.

• Rake

This tool is used for digging dried leaves or cleaning the garden area. You should have a rake that is sturdy and durable to make sure that it can stand frequent digging.

- Hand Cultivator

This gardening tool is beneficial in terms of removing smaller weeds and roughing the soil prior to seeding either in garden beds or containers. Look for cultivator that is a piece of molded or forged steel or the one with steel head that is attached securely to wooden handles.

- Bypass Pruners

These are helpful in almost all gardening tasks such as gentle shaping, deadheading and eliminating spent foliage. A great pair of bypass pruners can be costly however, there are some mid-range brands you can use that guarantees good quality. Look for pairs that can easily take part for sharpening and cleaning and make sure that this comfortably fits in you two hands.

- Gloves

These are tools that protect gardeners from thorns and brambles and plants that trigger skin irritation.

- Sharp Knife

This gardening tool is helpful in terms of cutting vegetables and this is also

an excellent addition to your harvesting equipment.

Chapter 4. Making your Own Mulch

Mulch offers finished looks to landscape and provides immense benefits to the soil. Mulch play essential role in suppressing weeds, retaining moisture, protecting from extreme temperatures and reducing erosion. Organic mulch improves the fertility and structure of the soil. If you got the time and materials, you can actually reduce cost by means of making your own mulch. Making mulch utilizing organic materials is a green and environment-friendly sustainability practice.

The following are ways on how to make your own mulch:

The Mulch

- Decide on the volume or quantity of mulch needed by your organic garden. When applying mulch around garden walkways, trees and flower beds, the depth must be two inches at least.
- Find a particular area in your yard that is spacious enough to accommodate the organic material. The area must be free from bushes, bulbs, trees and must also be flat. Remember that putting mulch on top of the grass triggers the death of the grass.
- Start making mulch file during the fall season. This is the time when

leaves are making wonderful base. Rake the leaves up to the mound.

- Put leaves in the wheelbarrow using your shovel and rake and carry the leaves to the mulch pile.

- Chop leaves to tiny pieces using electric leaves shredder. In case you do not have this electric tool, use a shovel or lawnmower when breaking the leaves.

- Saw organic materials and fallen limbs to tiny pieces.

- Put in wood chips in the wheel barrow and haul these wood chips to the mulch pile. Dump these chips on the top of the leaves.

- Let your mulch set during the entire winter and apply this in your organic gardening during spring. Use rake in spreading the mulch in about 2 inches.

- Continue putting in organic materials in the mulch pile.

- Add more layers of mulch to the organic garden during fall to safeguard your organic plants from cold during winter.

Chapter 5. Natural Pest Control

Natural pest control is an ideal option in managing and eliminating pests. This natural method of pest control utilizes biological materials in reducing and managing pest infestation in your garden. Natural method of controlling pests is proven to be eco-friendly.

The following information can help you gain clearer understanding on what natural pest control is all about.

Pest Control

The Natural Method of Controlling Pests

This method is referred to as new materials intended to fight pests inhabiting your garden the natural way. This is also specially designed to utilize organisms in controlling pests in a given environment. There are instances that organisms are raised or grown and then eventually released in increased numbers to fight back infestation biologically. The best part about controlling pests with the natural method is that pests are being reduced significantly without posing any harm to the environment and agriculture.

Considerations and Benefits of Natural Methods of Controlling Pest

Natural methods are less damaging and safe as compared to the other method which is chemical pest control. The latter is said to work on both the dangerous and harmless pests. Natural methods are organic in nature which means that there is definitely no additives and chemicals used. The longer this has been introduced the more effective it becomes.

There are natural pesticides that you can use in controlling pest in your organic garden and these include Neem oil, which is utilized in landscapes and gardens and used mainly for eliminating insects that chew plants such as the weevil. Another one is the Diatomaceous Earth which is a powdery or natural dust and dry material utilized mainly for killing and deterring crawling pests both outdoors and indoors. These are just few of the many natural pesticides you can use when controlling pests and growing your garden well.

Chapter 6. Organic Fertilizer

Organic and natural fertilizer differs from that of the chemical fertilizer. It is true that organic fertilizer is highly recommended for growing and cultivating your organic garden. When plenty of organic material is present in the soil, it remains airy and loses and can hold more nutrients and moisture. This can ideally promote soil organism growth and foster healthier plant development.

You have to note that using chemical fertilizer to the soil result to losing microbiotic activity and organic matter. When this type of fertilizer is used, the structure of the soil deteriorates, become lifeless, compact and unable to hold nutrients and water.

The following are additional information about organic fertilizer, application of fertilizer and the different types of fertilizer.

Fertilizer

Short Definition of Organic Fertilizer

Organic fertilizer is a type of fertilizer that is derived from animals, mined minerals and plants. Any organic fertilizer combination can feed the soil organisms producing plant food in available plant form.

Organic Fertilizer Application

Since organic fertilizers usually take time to make nutrients available for the soil and break them down, it is highly suggested to apply organic fertilizer at least several months prior to planting. Early application of this fertilizer gives soil microbes the time to absorb organic matter and turn this into a form that your plants can utilize. The easiest way of applying organic fertilizers is by spreading them to the planting beds or soil surface.

Different Types of Organic Fertilizers

There are different types of organic fertilizers so if you are planning to grow an organic garden and have your own fresh produce, you need to be familiar with the following types and see for yourself which among this fertilizer are good for your garden:

- **Animal Based Fertilizers**-these are by-products derived from meat processing and dairy industries producing multitudes of organic fertilizers.
- **Plant Fertilizers**-this includes seaweed or sea kelp, corn gluten and cottonseed meal and alfalfa meal.
- **Mined fertilizer**-this is another type of organic fertilizer that is composed of gypsum, soft-rock phosphate and limestone.

- **Fish products**-these are the by-products coming from fish industries producing organic fertilizers like fish meal and fish emulsion. This contains high level of nitrogen and is made quickly available for plants.

- **Animal Manures**-these are derived from varieties of insects and animals. Most of animal manures are composted, bagged and sterilized at times. Animal manure's nutrient composition varies depending on the bedding, animal and method of storing the manure.

Organic fertilizers are compound fertilizers containing more than one type of organic materials. The ingredients making up these fertilizers may be vegetable or animal matter or maybe a combination of the two. When speaking of fertilizer, it is imperative to keep in mind that this is composed of important elements that are completely produced the natural way and without any trace of additives and components that are manufactured synthetically.

Chapter 7. Planting

To make sure that you will get the best from your organic garden, plant seeds and seedlings in the right time and appropriate time. There are zone charts that can help you deal with your gardening venture. This chart provides you with great ideas on when and how to start planting. The average temperature of the soil is also an essential aspect that needs to be considered when planting seeds. The temperature of the soil also dictates the most suitable plants or root crops to be planted.

Once you are certain that it is safe to plant in your organic garden, start with the soil preparation. It is easy to just dig up the soil, plot the land and throw seeds in the ground but what matter is that you are able to create a healthy garden. Dig only when the condition of the soil moisture is right. The soil needs to be moist not soggy so that it will work easily.

The following information can help you gain clearer idea about planting seeds as well as the ideal way of watering the plants in your organic garden.

Planting

Seed packets come with set of instructions concerning the distance and depth when planting the seeds in your organic garden. In planting seeds, it is advisable to use the corner of a trowel or your finger. You also need to prepare the trench to the desired depth. Take few seeds and begin to spread them to the trench. In many instances, seeds are being sown closer than the final spacing for the reason that having many seedlings is said to be better than having only a few. Thinning the rows is also required and spreading an ideal layer of soil or mulch is essential to protect the seeds. This also aids for better seed germination. Never forget to water after completing the planting tasks.

Planting Transplants

Transplants are excellent choice when you are having a difficult time growing the seeds especially if you are residing in an area with shorter growing season. The proper spacing needs to be considered before investing your time and effort in planting. The right depth and width is also an important aspect as far as digging holes is concerned.

You can also add a compost or organic fertilizer to the hole but make sure

to mix it with some soil before putting particular plant in. The next step to take is removing the transplant from the container and checking the root balls. In case roots are seen circling the bottom, loosen the roots gently.

Disturbing root balls a bit is essential; use your hands in placing the plant in the hole. See to it that the base of the plant is even to the surface of the soil. Transplants requires water so as soon as these have been planted, it is advised to water them at once.

Chapter 8. Harvesting

You have spent many days working hard for your organic garden and it is now about time to reap what you have sown. Harvesting is the most exciting and fulfilling part of your gardening journey. Though harvesting seems to be the final part of reaping the fruits of your hard works, you still need to do this task the right way. You need to carefully determine if the plants are really ready for harvesting. The following information can serve as your helpful harvesting guide.

It is highly essential to know the right harvesting time in your organic garden. This does not just depend on the ripeness of the crops or fruits nor the length or duration of growing season. There are other factors that need to be taken account for to ensure that you will have quality and plentiful harvest.

Maturity is one factor that defines if the plants are ready for harvesting. However, environmental conditions like day length and temperature can affect maturity.

There are different harvesting rules concerning each and every kind of plant and these are outlined below:

Harvesting

- Crops that gardeners have grown for vegetative parts such as roots, stems and leaves must be harvested while they are tender, young and immature. Good examples of these are radishes, lettuce, basil and broccoli. As a common rule, harvest often and early.
- Fruits like apples and tomatoes must be allowed to ripen in the plant however, there are exceptions to these. There are vegetable fruits that are better picked when young.
- Plants like pumpkins must be harvested when they reach the stage of maturity. Facilitating a thumbnail test is the best way to determine if these have already reached maturity.
- If you have planted potatoes and onions, harvest them when their tops started dying or falling over.
- Harvest pepper even if it is not yet ripe. These can be eaten in just any state or size but these are more flavorful when fully matured. Peppers are in full size and reached its final color which have reached full maturity.

The most ideal time to harvest your organic garden is during early in the morning. This is because plants and crops during these times are cooler and got high water content. These are also crisper in texture as compared to those plants harvested during the latter part of the day.

Chapter 9. What to Avoid

Just like any other tasks, organic gardening also requires full yet discreet attention. There are things that gardeners must do in order to achieve healthy garden while on the other hand, there are also things that need to be avoided in order to maintain and preserve the garden.

The following are things to avoid when you are growing and cultivating your organic garden:

Avoid This

- Overcrowding

This is usually the common mistakes made by several gardeners. Planting so many plants in your organic garden may affect the plants' growth. There are plants that need more space in order to grow. Remember that plants compete for nutrients, light and water. These plants will not be able to get the needed nutrients if they are planted and grown in an overcrowded area. You can make some research or look for ideal space recommendations for fruits and vegetables.

- Not enriching and taking care of the soil

This should be completely avoided. Remember that not enriching the

garden soil will result to plants not getting the essential nutrients. Put in compost to the mulch or soil. You can also use grass clippings, dried leaves, green manure and kitchen scraps.

- Planting too late or too early

The soil's temperature can interfere or affect the development or growth of the plants. There are plants that have the ability of tolerating cold temperature and there are those that need warmer temperature. Spinach, lettuce, peas, Asian vegetables, radish, potato and chard can stand cold temperatures while tomato, squash, eggplant, pepper and other crops can live and survive warm temperatures.

- Not maintaining the ideal coolness of the soil during warm weather

Weeds start to sprout when the weather becomes warmer. Use mulch in making the soil cool and as much as possible prevents the weeds from emerging or sprouting.

- Watering Incorrectly

Water the plants deeply but not too often. You just need to water the plants on regular basis when needed. When watering the plants, avoid making the leaves wet for this might trigger the spread of viruses. Water the plants in your garden near or below the soil. Watering the plants consistently as they mature and grow is necessary.

- Setting aside garden problems

If you want your organic garden to be healthy and productive, be mindful

and concern about common organic gardening issues. Avoid setting aside or ignoring garden problems because by doing so, you are just inviting further damages and inconveniences. Pests and weeds are common problems faced by most gardeners. Not paying attention to these problems may destroy the plants. There are insects that are beneficial to plants so you need to distinguish bad insects from beneficial ones.

- **Not having sufficient air circulation**

This is also another thing that needs to be avoided when engaging yourself into organic gardening. Give your plants some slight breeze for this can make the seedlings stronger. The stems also get stronger when there is enough air circulation.

Chapter 10. Benefits of Organic Gardening

Many individuals are now getting hooked with organic gardening because this makes it possible to have their healthy and fresh produce. Aside from this, organic gardening is also noted for its amazing health and environmental benefits that individuals will surely appreciate and enjoy.

In order to reap all the benefits of organic gardening, you need to do the basic and that is feeding the soil not just the plant. In summing it up, organic gardening is healthier and earth-friendlier way of growing foods that you eat. The following are the many other benefits of organic gardening:

- **Higher nutritional value**

Organic foods have high vitamin and mineral content than those present in their counterparts. The chemical-free soil is responsible for creating this bounty.

- Save Money

Organic gardening saves your money because you no longer have to buy expensive chemical fertilizers to grow your plants. You can use compost and organic fertilizers in cultivating and growing your plants. You can also recycle organic materials from your lawn or kitchen and use these in creating compost. This means that you will no longer be buying chemicals and fertilizers at all. You will also be doing a big part in reducing organic waste that is ending up in the landfills.

- You become aware of what Exactly you are eating

When you plant and grow organic plants yourself, you are become aware of the growth process starting from seeds into ripen fruits and crops. You also get more aware of what exactly you are eating. There is a high level of satisfaction when eating fresh fruits and vegetables from your organic garden rather than purchasing these from stores.

- Organic Gardening Changes Attitude

Organic approach imitates nature and this teaches gardeners to utilize natural elements and organic plants. Your views and attitude will be change such as being a lover of nature and a lover of life. Instead of relying on commercial and synthetic products to grow your garden, you learn to execute approaches the natural way. This means less negative effects and damages.

- Foods Taste Better

This is a very simple fact and one of the common benefits of organic gardening. Vegetables and fruits grown in your own organic garden taste better as compared to those purchased from stores and supermarkets. In most cases, individuals can consume these fruits and vegetables after picking them. Produce found in grocery stores are usually harvested longer before and it can still be shipped before being spoiled.

- You will get Exercise and Fresh Air

Organic gardening makes sure that you will get enough of Vitamin D which is the result of ideal sunlight exposure. Getting more of this vitamin is good for your health. Organic gardening is also a recommended activity for those individuals who have the desire to lose weight. Each garden task can actually help you shed about 400 calories per hour.

- Builds and Improve Knowledge

There are plenty of things you need to learn from this particular type of gardening. One of the main objectives why many people are into organic gardening is to make their gardens grow like natural living things. When engaging into this activity, you will surely come across lots of observing and experimenting. Every season and stage of your organic gardening will be based upon the right knowledge on how to cultivate and grow foods that can certainly make you or your family ultimately healthy.

- Organic Gardening is Fun and Engaging

Organic gardening is a routine that aids in relieving stress and delivering great deal of fun. This will not really eat up all your time so you still have enough time to do your other priorities. You can do gardening together with your family and friends. The rewards for your hard work are delicious and healthy foods.

- Discovery of New Approaches in Life

With organic gardening philosophy, individuals are likely to start smart daily life choices about ecology and sustainability. You can recycle and explore more in order to cultivate and grow your plants the natural way. Organic gardening can also be the start of healthier outlook in life.

- Eliminates Chemical Exposure

The danger of too much chemical exposure is given. Exposure to herbicides and pesticides has been linked to many health problems such as neurological, reproductive and child behavior and many more. One of the most amazing and enduring organic gardening benefits is that this completely eliminates risks and dangers to health.

- Rejuvenates Spirit

It does not really take expert for you to realize that organic gardening is peaceful and calming. You can feel these every time you go or visit your organic garden. Peaceful organic gardening rejuvenates the spirit and offers therapeutic benefits to individuals.

- Reduces Waste and Pollution

Another benefit of organic gardening is the waste and pollution reduction.

These are just few of the benefits that individuals can get from organic gardening. Generally, benefits to social, mental and social are known as far as organic gardening is concerned. Organic gardening requires attention, effort, care and passion. If you give all these it will pay you back with fresh, healthy and bountiful harvest.

Chapter 11. Growing Vegetables In Containers For Beginners

If you have a small garden or no garden at all then you can grow your own vegetables in containers. This is a great, low maintenance way for you to grow your own food at home without the expense and trouble of maintaining a full sized garden. For anyone who is pushed for space or who lives in a city, container gardens are absolutely ideal. The same if you rent or move a lot, containers can come with you wherever you go.

Growing your own food at home is a great way to get your own fresh produce that is very tasty and good for you. Home grown produce does not have any of the chemicals in that produce from the supermarket has. It is grown and ripened naturally (unlike store bought vegetables) which means your own home grown produce is packed full of nutrients and flavor.

You will find that many children who refuse to eat their vegetables will happily eat those you grow at home because they taste so much better. Plus if you have children then a container garden is great for them because it is easy to maintain and fun to look after.

Chapter 12. What Can I Grow In A Container Garden?

You can grow pretty much any vegetable you want in a container garden, depending on the size container that you use. For larger plants such as potatoes which have deep roots then you need deeper containers. Most people who grow potatoes at home do not use containers but instead use large plastic bags full of compost or specialist potato planters.

Many of the plants you will grow at home are relatively shallow rooted such as lettuce, radish, spring onions, tomatoes and strawberries. You can grow them in almost any container that you want, even making your own from recycled materials including old drainpipes (great for strawberries and radishes) and more.

Tomatoes do extremely well in hanging baskets if you grow the tumbling varieties. These are ideal for people who are very low on space and they make for a particularly beautiful display. Tumbling tomatoes do come in a variety of different colors which have a wonderful taste and can really enhance the visual beauty.

Normal tomatoes will grow well in containers but will need support. Other larger vegetables like squashes and pumpkins can be grown in containers but you need to be aware that they are going to grow very larger and trail everywhere. In these cases you are going to want to grow them vertically which means good supports need to be in place. Most people will grow these larger vegetables vertically up a trellis fixed to the wall.

For the larger fruits you may need to provide hammocks to support them if you are growing vertically. Larger squashes and pumpkins can become

very heavy which could end up breaking the vine of your plant and killing it. Hammocks can support these vegetables though most people will grow smaller varieties which do not need this extra support in their containers.

Cucumbers do very well in containers if they are grown vertically. Give them good support and they will happily climb upwards, though you may need to occasionally give them a helping hand so they grow where you want them to. The big advantage of this type of growing is that the cucumbers tend to be straighter and have thinner skins, making them easier to eat.

Pretty much anything you want can be grown in containers; it is entirely up to you what you want to grow. All you need to do is ensure that you have a container that is big enough to support its growth! Don't feel that because you are growing vegetables in containers you cannot enjoy a wide variety of different, delicious fresh produce.

Chapter 13. What Soil Mix Should I Use For Containers?

The soil mix to be used on containers is a subject of hot debate with most container gardening experts having their secret favorite soil mix. To be honest it really does depend on the time you have to make a soil mix, your budget and what you are growing.

Different plants have different requirements and some require free draining soil whereas others prefer damper conditions. You need to ensure you understand the needs of your plants so that you can put plants that need the same conditions in the same containers. If you put a dry soil loving plant in with one that loves moist soil then one is going to die.

You can use store bought soil mixes and they will do the job and your plants are going to grow well in them with regular feeding.

For people who really want to maximize the productivity of their containers and grow a large amount of vegetables in containers you need a very special soil mix that is free draining but retains water and is highly nutritious. This soil mix consists of a third each of:

Ø Compost

Ø Peat Moss

Ø Vermiculite

Ideally you want the compost to come from five different sources, i.e. five different brands of compost. The reason being that this ensures the soil is highly nutritious and contains all the micro-nutrients your plants need to thrive.

This mixture does not need to be compacted hard in your pots. Just pushing down firmly but not hard will be enough and will make it much easier for you to plant your containers.

With this particular soil mix you can plant more densely than you would in other soil mixes, meaning more vegetables for you! Unless you are growing particularly greedy plants like pumpkins you will not need to feed your plants during the growing season because the soil is so nutritious.

As you have planted your containers more densely than usual you will find that weeds struggle to take hold in your containers because there is simply no room for them to grow!

Choosing the right soil mix is very important if you want your plants to thrive, be healthy and produce a good crop of delicious vegetables for you to enjoy.

Chapter 14. What Containers Can I Use?

You can use virtually any type of container you want and it is an opportunity for you to be inventive and reuse materials that would otherwise be discarded.

Your local garden store will sell a huge variety of containers of all different shapes, sizes and materials and you can certainly use these if you want to, though be prepared to pay for the more ornate and beautiful pots; they do not come cheap.

Be aware that with a container garden drainage is absolutely vital and that you need to ensure that any containers you purchase has suitable drainage otherwise your plants could end up suffering. If necessary you can drill more drainage holes in the containers, though this does depend upon the material the container is made from.

Clay and containers made from similar porous materials will dry out much quicker than metal or plastic containers, so consider that when choosing a container. Clay containers will also start to break after a few years as moisture gets in to the pores and then freezes. Wooden containers will have a finite lifetime depending on the type of wood used.

You can make your own containers out of wood or you can reuse materials that would otherwise be thrown away. This latter method is by far the cheapest way for you to get a container garden up and running. You can very easily find suitable containers that people will give you for free!

Old tyres can be painted vivid colours and arranged into gorgeous planters; old guttering can be fixed to a wall and used to grow shallow rooted plants; catering sized tin cans make for excellent wall mounted planters and even plastic milk bottles can be cut in half and mounted on a fence to grow vegetables in.

You are really limited here only by your imagination. There is so much you can do to make an interesting container garden using the space that is available to you. Remember if you are mounting containers on walls or fences that the wall or fence is strong enough to support it and that the containers are strong enough to hold the soil mix.

Chapter 15. How Do I Water A Container Garden?

Watering a container garden is vital if you want your plants to survive, so it is important that you think about access to your containers and how far they are from your water source. If they are too far then carrying the water becomes a burden and you may end up finding excuses not to water your plants.

Your plants will need watering whenever they become dry and you can check this by pushing your finger in to the soil up to the second knuckle. If it

feels dry at your finger tip then it needs watering. If it feels wet then do not water it.

Do not think that just because it rains your containers do not need watering. Because there is a limited soil area in a container and much of this is covered by plants you will be surprised how little rain actually gets in to a container! This means that even in the rain you will need to go out and water your containers.

Plants prefer watering in the morning which is when they are sucking up water to prepare for their growth during the day. However, if this is not possible then feel free to water them in the evening as they will not complain too much.

Just be very careful that you water at the roots of the plant, directly on to the soil rather than on the leaves. This prevents the water from running off the plants and completely missing the roots of your plants. It will also prevent many of the diseases and problems that plants have.

If you water the leaves in the morning then the water droplets on the leaves can act like magnifying glasses and magnify the rays of the sun so that the leaves get burnt and damaged. If you water them in the evening then you risk introducing mildew or other fungal diseases because the leaves do not get chance to dry out well enough.

You will want to water your plants daily during the growing season if they need it and whilst you do, check the plants for any pests or diseases too.

Chapter 16. What About Fertilizing My Containers?

If you have used the soil mix that was mentioned earlier in this report then you will not need to fertilize your containers at all in the first year. If you have not then you are likely to have to start fertilizing them when the fruit appears.

A liquid feed is best as it is easy to apply and goes straight to the roots where it is needed. You can get specific feeds for specific plants, i.e. a tomato food. It is best to use this where you can as it gives the plants the exact balance of nutrients that they need to promote healthy growth. If you use a fertilizer high in nitrogen with tomato plants then they will concentrate on producing leaves and not fruit. Therefore you need to use the right type of food for your plants.

Follow the directions on the fertilizer for how to best use it with your vegetable plants. You will want to feed them once every week or two, depending on how greedy the plants are. A pumpkin will need a lot more food than something like a radish or beet.

Chapter 17. How Can I Minimize The Risk Of Pests?

Pests are a big problem for any gardener and hopefully you will avoid many of the problems that come from growing directly in soil. When you water your plants, give them a quick visual inspection and check for pests and other problems.

You may encounter aphids, which gather on the tender tips of your plants and the new growth. If you catch these early enough then you can pick them off by hand and crush them between your fingers. If they have taken hold then you are probably going to have to use a spray to get rid of them. Use organic if you can as this is going to be much better for the environment. Always check the label though and make sure that the spray is suitable for edible crops. If it does not explicitly state this then avoid the spray as it could introduce potential toxins in to your vegetables and so in to your body.

Slugs and snails are other problematical pests that you are likely to encounter and these can be tricky to get rid of. There are lots of gimmicks that supposedly deter them but sadly none of them are particularly effective. Your best bet is to go out at dusk and pick them off your plants by hand and destroy them. Do not think that throwing them over the wall will deter them; they will be back! Therefore you have to destroy them to stop them destroying your crop. During the day time, check around your pots for their slimy trails; you may find them hiding underneath or behind your pots during the day!

There are other pests that can affect particular plants though just look out for any problems, holes, discoloration and the like on your vegetables. If you do spot anything then look in to it carefully and see what is causing it. It is better to take action sooner rather than later as you are more likely to be able to save your crop.

Chapter 18. What About Diseases In Container Gardens?

Diseases tend to be less of a problem in containers because you are using a clean soil. Many of the common plant diseases are found in the soil and

by not growing in the ground you can avoid these problems.

Some diseases are air born and you can find diseases such as potato or tomato blight affecting your plants where it has blown in. This can be noticed by the leaves and stems starting to turn brown and curl up. If you notice the blight then you need to treat it immediately in order to prevent it from taking hold and killing your plants. If it is late enough in the season then you can cut the foliage off potatoes and the potatoes themselves will be okay under the ground. You can remove fruit from tomato plants and ripen it on a windowsill though the fruit can still be affected.

Fungal diseases can be introduced if there is not sufficient air circulation around your plants and you water the leaves of the plant. These problems can be mostly avoided by ensuring that air can circulate around your plants and prevent moisture gathering.

Mostly you are not going to have problems with diseases but if you check your plants regularly and then look more closely at any possible issues you are going to prevent any diseases from taking hold and damaging your plants.

Final Thought:

Container gardening is a great way to start growing your own vegetables at home. It does not require a lot of time or space and avoids many of the problems (and much of the hard work) involved with growing directly in the ground.

For anyone who has limited space or just wants to try growing a few herbs, fruits or vegetables at home this is an ideal way to get started. Even for someone with limited mobility the containers are ideal because they do not involve heavy digging.

Heres to Good Health & Happy Gardening!