



GEORGE MARKSON

GARDENING

Growing Organic Food in
Your Backyard



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Your Backyard

By
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Introduction

Dear Reader,

Thank you for downloading the “*Gardening: Growing Organic Food in Your Backyard*” eBook.

This book contains ideas and lessons on how to set up your own garden at home. In the 21st century, we have started relying too much on supermarkets and electronics for living a comfortable life. We sometimes forget that nature is also a vital aspect of our daily life. With this book, I want you to put your cell phones down for some time every day, stop rushing to the supermarket every time you have to buy groceries, and actually spend some time working in a garden. By investing some of your time in an organic garden, you'll be able to develop new skills, connect with nature instead of living in a materialistic bubble, and actually see the results of your effort in the plants you grow. Besides that, the practice of organic gardening can also be extremely healthy and therapeutic for your mind, body, and spirit.

You may be someone who is extremely passionate about extending your backyard with new organic vegetables, or you may be someone who is completely new to the idea of gardening and only has a small gardening space, this book doesn't discriminate. It is going to guide both beginners and expert home gardeners towards building a better organic garden in your home. Sometimes it is just a small detail that you don't usually think of that is affecting the progress of your garden and with this book, maybe you can find that small detail. Each chapter of the book is complete in itself so if you're passionate to know about a specific gardening topic, you can dive right in! If you're someone who is looking to learn in depth about organic gardening and how you can benefit from it, you've downloaded the right book. Experiment, make mistakes, fail, succeed, it is all part of your exciting gardening journey.

Happy reading and happy gardening!

Chapter 1: Why Grow Your Own Organic Food?

In today's society, the organic foods industry and popularity of eating organic food has grown dramatically. We spend extra time and money going to those overly priced farmer's markets to buy "organic" vegetables, yet a lot of us aren't 100% sure what the term "organic" really means and how organic food is actually making us healthy.

Organic food is food that is grown without the use of genetic engineering, synthetic fertilizers, toxic pesticides or drugs. Basically, a 100% organic food means that no synthetic ingredients were used while growing or processing the food. Consuming organically grown food can virtually eliminate exposures to dangerous insecticides known to harm neurological development and increase the risk of cancer in humans. Many studies show that organically grown products have higher levels of minerals and nutrients than products grown with synthetic methods and ingredients. Providing your body with both amazing taste and health benefits, organic food gives you the best of both worlds.

Almost all fruits and vegetables you buy from stores have residues of toxic pesticides. By growing and eating organic food, you're not just keeping chemicals off your plate and eating healthy, you're also contributing towards a healthier natural environment. The use of toxic pesticides to grow food has highly contaminated and polluted water sources. An organic farming system contributes towards a less contaminated quality of water, as it doesn't use any pesticides with harmful elements in it. Organic farming also perks up the soil quality. Studies show that organic farming increases the organic matter content of the soil because of the use of natural manure and compost. Due to the toxic-free soil of organic farms, less water is likely to be lost from the soil, and this gives better environment stability to them even during flood condition and reduces chances of runoffs. Due to the healthy soil of organic farms, plants usually tend to have a higher yield because the soil has a higher water holding capacity. In conventional farming, the high use of chemical fertilizers leads to the erosion of millions of tons of top soil every day and with

organic farming that can be decreased due to use of only natural fertilizers. It feels like organic food should be expensive because of how good its quality is but if you think about it, you can reduce so much of the cost by starting your own organic garden, making your own natural compost, and growing your own 100% organic food at home.

Growing your own food is also a form of therapy and exercise. Working in your garden/farm everyday can make you physically and emotionally more fit. It lets you connect to your natural surroundings and rejuvenates your spirit as you take some time out of your hectic schedule to tend your garden. When you harvest and cook your beautifully grown organic vegetables from your own garden, you'll feel a sense of self-sufficiency and success. Having a vegetable garden of your own gives you the freedom to plant foods that aren't commonly available in stores or are too expensive. With your own herbs and vegetables, you can experiment in the kitchen and create beautiful, delicious, super healthy dishes.

Vegetable gardening isn't rocket science, it is quite simple and enjoyable. With just some good direction and motivation, you can easily set up a garden.

Hopefully, now you're convinced on why you should grow/eat organic foods and by the end of this book, you'll even be able to set up your own organic garden at home!

Chapter 2: Gardening for The Body, Mind and Spirit

For some gardening is a hobby, for some it is a means of eating healthy or connecting with nature. Gardening is a great way to keep you emotionally and physically healthy. Giving you a break from daily distractions, gardening can be highly therapeutic. By just working in your garden for some time every day, you can block negative, stressful, anxious thoughts from your mind and reduce negative emotions. It keeps you occupied and connects you with your natural environment. It allows people to be anchored in reality. As you spend more and more time and energy in your garden, it will grow on you. As you roam through your garden, pull out a few weeds, water your plants and enjoy the fruit of your labors, your mood can lighten within minutes. The goal of therapeutic gardening is to minimize negative outcomes and maximize positive results in a person.

The concept of a healing garden is used by a lot of hospitals because of its ability to heal people. “Horticulture therapy” is a growing field of therapy and is proven to help people cope with depression and other mental illnesses. It seems to be working very effectively due to the combination of physical activity, interaction with natural surroundings, cognitive stimuli, and the satisfaction of the work. Now you don’t necessarily have to wait until you’re ill to use a healing garden. Even better, you can make your own healing garden at home to restrain a lot of health and stress related issues. Gardening isn’t a cure but it takes you a step closer to healing. Gardening is known to reduce stress and calm the nerves as it decreases stress hormones in our brain.

Any garden can be used therapeutically. For instance, even your small flower or herb garden can be therapeutic if you use it properly. It is a simple form of pleasure and satisfaction. There are reasons why working in a garden can be so healing. When you take initiative and work in your garden, you feel a sense of control. When you see the plants

flourish beautifully, you feel a sense of success and accomplishment that helps you think positively about yourself and your abilities. Gardening, along with creating beauty around us also works with our minds. A garden can make all background noise fall away and this allows you to let go of other people's thoughts and judgments. In a way, gardening frees you from negativity and makes you feel good about yourself. When you spend time in your garden, you learn to slow down and keep yourself absorbed in just one activity. It puts your mind in a state of meditation. You'll feel extremely proud when you harvest a dozen tomatoes from the very place where you started with just a few tomato seeds. Gardening is about reclaiming your ability to be able to grow your own food and to have a little more control over your life.

Gardening is also a form of exercise. Studies show that regular gardening outdoors for even just a few hours every week can drastically cut the risk of stroke and heart attack. The vitamin D your body soaks in while working in the sun helps you to fight off a cold and the flu, and makes your immune system stronger. Gardening also makes you healthier cognitively because gardening involves a lot of critical functions: skill-developing, problem-solving and sensory-awareness. Being a part of nature can nurture us.

Gardening isn't just about improving your eating habits and health. By growing your own food and not buying products that have been shipped hundreds of miles to be sold at the store, you're also contributing towards reducing pollution, global warming and the exploitation of resources.

By starting a garden, a space to reconnect with nature, you can provide yourself with the greatest means to heal your mind, body, and spirit.

Chapter 3: Key Components for Your Soil

Soil structure is a major component of gardening. The ability of soil to hold water and air, and provide nutrients to the plant depends on many components. What is excess or what is lacking in your soil can make a radical change in the yield and quality of plants. You don't want your soil to be too sandy nor do you want it to be too clay-like, you want it to be somewhere between the two types, and that is called *loam*. Loam soil is well aerated, has good drainage, and yet is able to hold moisture very well.

In conventional farming practices, plants are directly genetically modified or fed soluble nutrients in the form of soluble chemicals, but organic farming restricts us from practicing the same method. In organic farming, nutrients need to be released into the soil so that plants can take enough time to use them when necessary.

Plants take up three major elements – nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium – in large amount from the soil. These three are also known as macronutrients and are very important for your plant's healthy growth.

Nitrogen

Nitrogen is a key component of proteins and chlorophyll, and is responsible for keeping the plants green and healthy. You need to make sure that your soil is nutrient rich at all times, but at the same time that it doesn't have too much excess nitrogen. If there is nitrogen deficiency in the soil, the older leaves of the plants may show yellowness and stems may show redness. If there is too much nitrogen, plants have underdeveloped roots and their growth is delayed. To supply more nitrogen to the soil, you can add more organic fertilizer and compost manure.

Phosphorus

Phosphorus promotes root growth in plants and increases disease resistance. Phosphorus-lacking soils stunt plant growth and turn leaves and stems purplish. If there is excess phosphorus in the soil, it can leach out of the soil and contaminate the surroundings as well as pollute water sources. The phosphorus content of the soil can also be increased by adding more organic matter to the soil. Since it moves pretty slowly through the soil, it is a good idea to add phosphorus containing fertilizer to the root zone of the plant before planting it.

Potassium

Potassium assists in plant growth and makes plants more disease resistant. If there is lack of potassium in the soil, leaves start to turn yellow/brown and plant growth is very slow. Excess potassium can also slow growth and create nutrient imbalance. Organic matter and granite dust can help add potassium to the soil.

Organic matter releases most of the vital plant nutrients to the soil as it decomposes. In the next chapter, you can learn how it can be made at home.

Chapter 4: Making Basic Organic Compost and Pesticides at Home

Adding natural compost and fertilizer to your garden is a healthy, nutritious way of fueling plant growth and enhancing soil quality. It is an excellent source of major elements like nitrogen, potassium, and phosphorus. Because it releases nutrients slowly, it minimizes runoffs and leaching. Compost stabilizes the pH levels of soil and allows plants to use nutrients effectively. While you can easily buy chemical fertilizers, making your own organic compost at home is an even better alternative. Homemade compost is a great soil conditioner and also allows you to utilize a lot of your household waste. Adding organic matter to your soil can also improve soil drainage when your soil has too much clay. Compost also consists of organisms that help ward off plant diseases and aerate the soil. By attracting beneficial insects to the garden, compost also helps with killing unwanted pests and organisms. Making your own compost is an environmentally friendly alternative to buying chemical compost because you're also making use of some landfill waste. Whether it is your small kitchen garden or your large backyard vegetable garden, your plants are going to face pest problems or have bad productivity at some point, and to solve these problems, you can make your own organic compost and pesticides to fight your problems in a chemical-free way.

To maintain the optimum quality of the soil, you need to continually add more organic matter into it. Composting is a great way to turn your leftover vegetable and fruit scraps, household garbage, and plant residue into a product that can highly benefit your home garden. It can be a very cost-efficient process, easily doable at home. Natural waste materials that are high in nitrogen and oxygen content and make a great ingredient for organic compost include materials, such as fruit and vegetable scrap, egg shells, leaves, wood ash, chicken manure, coffee grounds, tea leaves, paper, corn cobs, etc. Composting meat, bones or fish scraps is not a good idea as they tend to break down very slowly and attract more pesticides to the pile. Adding leaves and plants that are diseased or infected

are going to stick around and re-infect the plants you use the compost in. Weeds that have gone to seed shouldn't be added to the compost pile because they might grow back where you put the compost. If you have space, start your compost pile in your yard. If not, you can start off by keeping a bin or container in your kitchen for waste. You want the texture of your compost pile to be moist, but not soggy. A lot of the green materials you use in your compost are going to secrete water too, so you need to be careful when you add extra water to your compost. In case the compost is too soggy, add more brown materials like wood ash and cardboard to soak up the extra water in the pile. To speed up the decomposition of your compost, make sure to keep turning the pile and mixing up the materials frequently. Depending on the types of materials you use and the amount of materials you use, compost may take up to a few weeks, months, or even a year to be ready for use.

While compost helps in nourishing the soil and improving plant quality, pesticides come in handy when your plants become victims of pests. There are chemical pesticide remedies for your plants, and though they can help your plants flourish again, they can be harmful to your body when you later consume harsh toxins through the products you grow. You can also use bacteria for pest control, but that could be toxic for some companions of your garden, like honey bees and butterflies. Pesticides and ways of killing pests don't necessarily need to be toxic to be effective. Sometimes just a strong jet of water is enough to dislodge pests and insects, however, that is just a temporary solution. Homemade pesticide is a safe, inexpensive choice for a healthy, pest-free garden. You'll be surprised to see that there are a lot of natural, noxious (but non-toxic) homemade remedies that can be used to make basic pest control sprays with great pest-repelling qualities. To destroy the little insects that dwell around your plants, make a mixture of water and bleach-free detergent and spray your plants lightly. Another very commonly used homemade remedy for pests is spray made of chili peppers and garlic puree, bleach-free detergent/soap and water. Peppers and garlic repel insects from biting on the plants as they possess natural insect repelling qualities. Spraying natural neem oil is also a great natural remedy you can use for pest control. It is toxin-free but does a great job repelling harmful insects from your garden.

Before diving right in and using the compost and pesticides you make at home in all your plants, test on a single plant first because sometimes the product may not be completely

suitable for certain plants and could easily destroy them. While using pesticides you need to be careful because sometimes you might even harm beneficial organisms that are actually helping your garden. Although it is a lot easier to just grab a bottle of pesticide or a bag of compost from the store, you should definitely start putting forth a tad bit more effort and invest some time into making your own non-toxic, organic solutions at home.

Chapter 5: Weed Control In Your Organic Garden

To grow the best crops, your soil needs to be relatively weed-free. A weed is any plant that grows where it is not wanted. Weeds are a gardener's worst enemy because they compete with the other plants we grow for water, space, nutrients and light. Weeds decrease the yield of the product we grow. Having a faster growth rate than usual plants and producing relatively more seeds, weeds are always hogging our plants' resources. They can also be carriers of insects and pests that can spread to our crops and eventually affect our health too. Some weeds can be totally safe and harmless whereas some weeds can be aggressive and vicious. They protect the topsoil from erosion and provide food and shelter to useful organisms. Hence, it is important to know how to manage the weeds in your garden without causing too much harm. Since we're promoting the idea of organic farming, we also need to be careful that we're using organic ways to manage weeds. We cannot simply use strong synthetic chemicals to get rid of the weeds because that chemical is going to affect our organic plantation too.

The easiest way to deal with weeds is when they are small. When you weed improperly, you're only increasing the workload for yourself. It is important that you weed your garden everyday because this way you can get rid of the baby weeds before they grow and spread everywhere. You don't want the weeds in your garden to reach to the stage where they produce more and more seeds. The best time to pull out weeds is after watering the garden or after a heavy rainfall, because at that time the ground is wet and roots come out easily. Weeding is also effective when done early in the morning before the dew in the soil dries.

Using chemical weed killers, known as herbicides, is a very effortless way of getting rid of weeds but we need to keep in mind that it is harmful for our other plants too, and since we're focusing on being as organic as possible, this isn't a recommended solution for home gardens.

Some strategies you can use in your home for weed control and management include hand weeding, cultivation, mulching, cultural practices, flaming, and successive farming. Hand weeding is the simplest method for weed management. It is a good temporary remedy for your weeds and also a great exercise. The right way to pull out weeds is to use the pinch and pull method. Cultivation is the use of tools to manually kill weeds by uprooting them. You should cultivate the weeds when they're still small. Weeding during hot and dry days slows the rate of weed re-growth, you should avoid weeding when the soil is wet. Mulching is one of the most effective weed management strategies for organic plantations. It maintains an optimum soil environment in the garden by cooling down soil temperature and slowing down evaporation. Mulch oppresses weed seeds and stops them from growing and spreading in the garden surface. It is simply a protective layer of certain materials that is spread on top of the soil. This layer can be formed out of grass, straw, wood chips or leaves. To reduce light penetration, make the mulch compact. You may also use plastic mulch but they have some downsides like warming the soil and lowering the penetration of water and oxygen into the soil. It is also relatively expensive, hence making mulch out of degradable matter is recommended. Cultural practices refer to the way that you grow your plants.

These are practices you use before the weeds grow in order to control their growth. If you are using seeds to start your garden, it is recommended that you use fresh seeds that have a rapid growth rate. Also, spacing plants to grow close to each other can also prevent from weeds to growing because there is less area for them to spread. Adding excess water and fertilizer is also not recommended since the plants will not need them and weeds are likely to take advantage of the excess water and fertilizers for their rapid growth. Another simple, commonly used weeding strategy in organic farming is flaming. Flaming involves passing flames over weeds briefly to make the plant tissues just hot enough to kill them.

This eliminates the above ground portion of the weed but keeps the roots alive and these roots hold the soil tightly, reducing risks of soil erosion. Successive farming is also a technique you can use to avoid getting weeds. This is the idea of intercropping, where you plant one type of crop next to a different type of crop. This is a great way to utilize all the space and soil available and gives much less chance for weeds to spread or grow more

seeds in that area. Using the right tools and strategies, weeding your organic garden can be a very simple task.

Chapter 6: Smart Watering In Your Vegetable Garden

Water is one of the most vital natural resources and it is our responsibility as humans to use it wisely and not waste it. Managing water in your vegetable garden not only saves water, it also improves the quality and productivity of plants. Some seedlings may be fragile and need to be watered with extra gentleness and care. Just by keeping a few things in mind and gardening more cleverly, you'll be able use less water than before for the same or even better result than before, as well as re-use used water.

The time of the day during that you water your plants have a significant effect on plant growth. The optimal time for watering your plants is early in the morning, when the temperature isn't too high because this way you can reduce water loss from evaporation. A great way to save and reuse water is harvesting. Rather than letting the water go to waste, you can make a system to collect the water and use it for your garden. You can also save the wash you used to wash fruits and vegetables instead of tipping in down the sink. This water can be full of rich nutrients and may even save you the cost and struggle of fertilizing your plant. Storing rain water to water your garden is also an environmentally friendly, smart option. Another great source of nitrogen- and phosphorous-rich water for your garden is the used water from fish tanks.

The type of soil you use dramatically affects how much moisture is available for your plants. If your soil is more sandy, your plants are likely to dry out, whereas if your soil has more clay, it is more likely hold moisture for a longer time. It is important to add organic matter to your soil so that it can retain moisture even during droughts. Adding more mulch to the soil reduces evaporation, weed growth, and runoffs, making it easier for plants to utilize the water completely. Mulch conserves water by reducing the soil temperature and slowing down evaporation. When your soil doesn't have adequate moisture-holding

capacity, it will lose most of the water you give to it. Therefore, it is important for your soil to have a vegetative cover or mulch to prevent the soil from drying out too quickly.

Compost and mulch conserve water in the soil by protecting it from strong, hot rays that may cause the water to evaporate too quickly. How much water your plants get also depends greatly on the type of container it is grown in. For instance, metal containers heat up quickly, causing the water to evaporate rapidly and the soil to lose its moisture. Soil in clay pots also dries out fast. Sometimes you need to water in terms of what container you're using rather than what plant you're growing.

Avoid overwatering. Overwatering not only raises your water bill, it also deteriorates the soil and affects the valuable nutrients available to your plants. It causes loss of oxygen in the soil and may even cause the roots to rot due to excess water. When watering seeds that have been planted recently, don't use a strong force of water because that will wash off the seeds from the surface, or move them deep inside the soil. Be sure to keep the seeds moist but not soggy. Sometimes the soil may look like it is still dry on the surface even when it has a lot of moisture. At times like this you can take some soil from the top layer and squeeze out any water and hold off watering if water appears.

Chapter 7: Seed Storage for Later

When you plant something and have extra seeds left over, you're most likely to store them for future plantations. These seeds need to be stored properly because they're the main genetic linkage between two generations of a plant species. Seeds should be stored properly with the aim of preserving its germination capacity. Studies show that around 30% of the world's seeds are lost during the storage period due to many internal and external factors. Seed storage is greatly influenced by the kind and variety of seeds. Some seeds have a long storage life whereas some have a short storage life. Starchy seeds like beans and rice can be stored for a longer time than oil-containing seeds like soybeans and groundnuts. The quality of the seed highly depends on what type of environment it comes from and that also affects its storage life. If it comes from a plant that was affected by nutrient deficiency, pests, and diseases, the seed collected from it is also going to be of poor quality, hence, it will have a shorter storage life. It is important that you always use healthy, mature plants to collect seeds from. External factors like temperature, insects, and location also affect a seed's storage life. To ensure the quality of seeds during storage, they should be stored in cool and dry conditions. The drier the seed, the longer it is going to last. The time, place, and climate during the time that you harvest the seed also affect the viability of the seed. Seeds harvested from a place with relatively high humidity and temperature during the time of harvest last for a shorter time compared to seeds harvested from a place with cooler temperatures and lower humidity. Insects and mites can cause a big loss in seed storage whereas fungi and bacteria can highly affect the seed quality during storage.

Another thing to keep in mind while storing seeds is where you store them. Since we're focusing on gardening at home, we're not going to store a large amount of seeds for our next planting season. For saving a relatively small amount of seeds, storing them in a closed container like a mason jar is the best and simplest method. For long term storage, place a cheesecloth bag filled with dry powdered milk at the bottom of the jar and refrigerate the jar. For short term storage, simply store the mason jar in a cool, dark

location. Storing seeds for a long period of time can deteriorate its quality, so for fast germination of seeds and rapid growth of plants, it is better to use seeds that have been stored for a shorter period of time.

Chapter 8: Small Space Gardening

When people think of gardens, they usually imagine large areas full of plants. If that were true, gardening would be impossible for city dwellers considering how small their spaces are. In a world where tall buildings and skyscrapers are growing as fast as mushrooms, it is hard to find enough space for gardening. However, that doesn't mean that it is impossible. You'll be surprised to see the number of plants you can grow even in a small gardening space. Indeed, gardening in small spaces can sometimes give you even better produce than larger gardens. Some of the most common gardening styles for small spaces are raised bed gardening, square foot gardening, container gardening and inter-planting.

Raised bed gardens

Raised bed gardens are convenient for growing small plots of plants and vegetables. They are usually raised off the ground surface by at least 6 to 8 inches, making it easier to water, weed, and harvest. A frame for supporting the soil can be made out of wood, stone, concrete brick or even just old rubber tires. However, be careful not to choose a container that may encourage evaporation of the water more quickly from the soil. Raised bed gardens are highly recommended to be located in a space that gets ample sunlight. In a traditional garden, soil becomes more compact from people walking on it or using machines like tractors and tillers, but in a raised bed garden, you have complete control over the soil and can freely add compost and organic matter to improve the soil structure, and on top of that you don't need to walk on your soil so soil compaction won't be a problem. You can plant fruits, vegetables, herbs, anything in your raised bed and because plant diversity encourages more beneficial bacteria and microorganisms in the planting area, you can even plant them all in the same raised bed. As raised bed gardens are more prone to drying out than conventional gardens, checking if your plants are getting enough water is very important. The best time to water them is in the morning because it allows water to remain in the soil for a longer time. If you're someone who has knee and back problems but loves gardening, a raised bed garden is a great alternative to working in a regular conventional garden.

Square foot gardening

Square foot gardening is a special type of raised bed gardening. In this gardening system, the bed is divided into several one-square-foot grids. Each different variety of plant or vegetable gets its own grid. If you're planting vegetables like tomatoes or cabbages, plant only one seed or plant per grid. If you're planting something like chard or lettuce, you can plant 4 in a grid. Nine plants of beets or spinach can be grown in a single grid. Finally, you can grow about 16 carrots and radishes in just one grid! If you want to grow plants with vines, you may place poles or PVC pipes, and chicken wire or bird netting on the north side of your garden to give space for the climbers to grow well. Before replanting or reseeding in a square garden, make sure to mix the soil with more organic compost as this can resupply nutrients for the growing plants.

Container gardening

Container gardening lets you use your creativity and make gardens out of old containers. Gardening isn't just limited to backyards anymore. You can have gardens in plastic bottles, tin cans, wine bottles, cups, and bowls – anywhere! With containers, you can bring your crops close to your home where you can see it and tend it well. This type of gardening goes well with all kinds of settings, you can have a container garden on your balcony, in your living room, or on your walkway. It is also a great way of keeping people with disabilities and mobility problems healthy. Container gardens can give you an amazing amount of herbs, vegetables, and plants, as well as make your place look unique and decorative. Because they are so easy to move around, your plants get just the right amount of the things they require. For example, if you plant only needs a few hours of sun everyday and needs to be in a shady place later, you can leave your garden outside in the sun for a while and take it back it. Leafy vegetables grow particularly well in container gardens. When choosing a container, make sure it has drainage holes and is strong enough to hold the plant till it fully grows. Try to use non-porous containers like glass, plastic, or glazed pots as they hold moisture for a longer period of time. Using a pot that is dark in color is discouraged as it is prone to overheating and destroying the roots of the plant in the pot. Since container gardens are relatively small, make sure to mix some compost with the soil before planting to avoid adding extra compost later on. To make full use of your container space, you can plant vegetables and herbs that have similar needs in the same container.

Inter-planting

Inter-planting is a way to grow two or more crops in one area for their mutual benefit. It is a great option for those of you with limited gardening space wanting to plant many varieties of plants at the same time. For example, maize and soybeans are grown together in many places to increase their yields. Inter-planting decreases erosion and increases production. It is a good idea to grow a small, fast growing crop together with a big, slow-growing crop to utilize your space efficiently so that both plants have enough space when they mature and produce fruits/vegetables. Some effective combinations are spinach with tomatoes and radish with carrots. By the time one is ready to be harvested, the other one will start to germinate and will have plenty space for its growth.

Stop being discouraged by your small gardening space and start your mini, creative, yet 100% effective organic garden right away!

Chapter 9: Starting A Vertical Barrel Garden in A Small Space

Gardening can be an issue when you live in a congested city somewhere with limited space, but as we all say, “Where there’s a will there’s a way!” A vertical barrel garden is a perfect idea for people who want to expand their gardening space or don’t have a growing space at all. In just a small space, a barrel garden allows you to grow all sorts of herbs, vegetables, and flowers at home. They’re both cost efficient and space efficient. In just one normal sized barrel, you can grow about 50 different varieties of herbs and vegetables without having to worry about buying dozens of different pots for each plant and watering and tending each one of them individually.

To make a barrel garden, you’ll need a 55-gallon plastic drum. Using a buzz saw, remove the top off the barrel. Mark out equally spaced lines where you’ll be making pouches from where your plants are eventually going to grow. Making seven rows and seven columns of pouches with a total of 49 spaces is recommended. Using a saw, cut out the lines and with a heat gun, heat the pouches one at a time and while the pouch is still hot, take a wedge and jam it down the pouch and hold it still for a couple of seconds. This will create slots for the plants to grow out of. Drill a few holes in the bottom of the barrel for drainage. Another component of a barrel garden is a compost tube and for that, you’ll need a 4-6 inch PVC pipe. Drill a few rows of small holes in the PVC pipe and insert it into the barrel by making a hole in the center of the barrel. Finally, close the bottom of the PVC pipe with a plastic lid with some small holes in it. If you don’t have enough space for a big barrel, you may also start a mini barrel garden using a bucket instead.

To start off your garden, fill up the barrel with organic soil. Now you may choose to grow just herbs or just vegetables, but if you’re trying to grow both, plan the smaller plants at the top of the barrel, and vining plants should be planted at the bottom. Vegetables like

carrots, tomatoes, and peppers that grow in an upright position should be positioned at the top of the barrel. Strawberries, spinach, and herbs like chives, cilantro and parsley, are great to grow on the slots of a vertical barrel garden. In a way, a vertical barrel garden is a self-fertilizing system. Inside the compost tube, you can either add already made compost or you may just add decomposable kitchen wastes in it. The purpose of the compost tube is to carry compost and decomposers for all the plants in the barrel. By placing worms along with the compost in the tube, more nutrients and nitrogen will be transferred to the soil as worms tend to eat the compost materials and move around in the barrel, leaving worm castings all over the barrel. To maintain your garden, keep replacing the compost inside the compost tube from time to time. A very useful and water-friendly trick is to raise your barrel by a few inches and place a tub underneath. This way, when you water your vertical garden, the extra water that the soil doesn't absorb will be collected in the tub, making some great compost tea. Since that extra water is mixed with the worm castings and rich nutrients of the soil as it travels down the barrel, you can mix it with water to reuse it again for watering the barrel later, or if you have another garden, you can use it for watering that too.

Chapter 10: The Ultimate Guide To Growing Your Own Organic Herbs At Home

Do you love to cook using fresh herbs but hate having to drive to the store every time you need a bottle of pesto sauce for your pasta or some fresh mint for your chilled mojito? If so, this final chapter will make your life easier by guiding you through how you can grow your own fresh, organic herbs at home. This chapter will discuss some of the common herbs used in our kitchen and tips on how you can grow them at home. Using the information, tips and tricks provided in all the previous chapters, growing beautiful, organic herbs in your own garden is going to be very easy and successful. Previously, we've also discussed the idea of small space gardening so if you have limited space or want to try out container gardening, growing herbs is a great option because it can never go wrong. If you wish to, you may also inter-plant the following herbs next to vegetables in your gardening because they make great companions for each other.

Basil is a very commonly used culinary herb all around the world. Having a strong fragrance and a hint of spice, basil is a highly preferred herb all over the world. It is also known to be a good source of fiber and is also traditionally used as a supplementary treatment for stress in some parts of the globe. It is widely used in the preparation of a lot of soups, sauces, and salads.

Basil can easily be grown indoors and outdoors. When planting basil, you need to make sure that you plant it in a spot that gets plenty of good sunlight and has great drainage, as it is not tolerant to water stress. You need to know that basil is very sensitive to cold and is likely to die off even if it is exposed to a small amount of frost. This also means that it is a good idea to plant basil in late spring or early summer.

A simple trick to grow a large and abundant basil plant – harvest often! The more you harvest basil, the more the plant will be able to grow. Another smart trick to grow more

basil is to pinch off the upper portions of the stems as it enables the plant to grow more new leaves from the pinched off section. It is also important to remove flowers from the plant as often as possible because basil leaves tend to lose their pungent flavor once flowers start to grow.

In order to preserve the basil you harvest, you can either freeze the whole leaves, puree the leaves and freeze, or dry the leaves in the oven and store in airtight containers.

Mint

Mint is a highly aromatic herb vastly used in culinary kitchens all over the world. It is a rich source of Vitamin A and a good herb for your breath, digestion, nausea and pimples. It is a fast-growing herb and can easily be grown both indoors and outdoors. Mint comes in handy while making cold/hot beverages, salads, sauces etc.

When planting mint, find a location that gets good sunlight in the morning but also doesn't get too much sunlight throughout the day. Mint plants require organically rich and moist, well-drained soil. To check whether or not your plant needs more watering, touch the upper part of the soil and if it's dry, it is a sign that the plant doesn't have enough water. To avoid mint leaves from being lopsided, it is suggested that you rotate the plant every couple of days as leaves tend to bend towards the light. Though you may use some organic fertilizer in your plant, don't overdo it because it'll lead your mint leaves to lose flavor. It is recommended that you plant mint during autumn or spring.

Like basil, mint plants are also best when harvested before the plant starts flowering. Also, pinch off the flowering buds to extend its harvesting season. Always make sure that the pot or container you use to grow mint is not cracked or broken because its roots have an aggressive nature to get outside of the surface in which it is planted and take over the whole garden.

Parsley

Parsley is a popular medicinal and culinary herb that plays a very popular role as a table garnish. Parsley is full of nutrients, being especially high in Vitamin C and Vitamin K. Though most people use it only for decorating their meals with greens, it is highly recommended cooking with parsley because of its great taste, fragrance, and incredibly high health benefits. It can be added in soups, sauces, salads, vegetable sautés and many more dishes we cook every day.

Parsley can be grown both indoors and outdoors and doesn't require too much attention. The ideal time to plant parsley is during the spring. Parsley should be planted in organic-rich, well-drained (moist but not soggy) soil. Make sure your soil isn't too dry because once a parsley plant wilts, it rarely recovers. It is healthy for the plant to be exposed to 6-8 hours of sunlight daily. In case you get too many seedlings, it is better to pinch them out or clip them off with scissors as pulling them out may lead to damage the tap roots of the surrounding plants too. You can also grow other herbs like basil, thyme and chives in the same pot at the same time.

Your parsley is ready to be harvested once its leaves start to curl. To preserve fresh parsley for later, you should store it in a Ziploc bag or wrap it in a slightly dampened paper towel before refrigerating. Though not as strong as fresh parsley in flavor, you can also make dry the parsley and store it in an air tight container for later.

Rosemary

Rosemary is an herb with a wonderful aroma and a very unique, pungent flavor. It goes well with a lot of chicken, fish and lamb dishes as well as all sorts of soups and sauces. Being an evergreen shrub, it grows all throughout the year. Besides adding a delightful taste and fragrance to your food, rosemary also contains a lot of substances useful for stimulating the immune system.

Being an evergreen plant, rosemary grows all year round. Though it is possible to grow rosemary indoors, results aren't very satisfying, hence, rosemary is best when grown outdoors. The main reason rosemary plants don't thrive indoors is due to lack of adequate sunlight. If your rosemary plant cannot have access to sunlight 6-8 hours a day, you may use fluorescent light bulbs or lamps in lieu of sunlight. During the winter, rosemary plants grow at a much slower rate and also require less water than usual. You also need to make sure that the soil of your rosemary plant is never dry. However, don't water it too much as that leads the roots to rot. Rosemary plants also face more pest problems than most other herbs and to get rid of these pests, make sure you use homemade pesticides. Remember to always use organic solutions to cure your plants because you're going to be using that rosemary in your food and you don't want to consume any harmful chemicals. For a guide on how you can make organic pesticide and fertilizer using natural wastes around the house, refer back to previous chapter.

To make rosemary plants grow faster and thicker, you can trim one-third of their leaves from time to time before the beginning of winter. You can also dry these trimmed sections of the leaves and use it while cooking.

Cilantro

Cilantro is a common herb used in a lot of Mexican and Asian cuisines. It is also used all over the world to enhance the flavor of salads, beans, omelets, soups etc. It has a very sweet and pungent flavor and also helps with digestion problems. Because of its antioxidant properties, it also delays your food from spoiling quickly.

Cilantro is best when grown outdoors but you may plant it indoors too. Because of its big taproots, pots are usually not deep enough to accommodate a cilantro plant. Cilantro also doesn't grow well when you transplant it so it is always better to start with seeds. It grows best in moist, well-drained soil. Cilantro grows very well during spring and fall seasons. If the cilantro is exposed to too much sunlight, it is prone to bolt and once cilantro bolts, it loses its strong flavor. Instead of cutting off the bolts, let the cilantro go to seed. Cilantro seeds, commonly known as coriander can be used to spice up many curry dishes. But if you're not a big fan of coriander, you should harvest your cilantro plant more frequently to nip off immature bolts and flowering stalks.

To store fresh cilantro for later, loosely pack it in a plastic bag and refrigerate it. You can also place cilantro leaves in a mason jar with some water in it to make the leaves stay fresh for a few days. In case you harvest coriander seeds, dry them out, make a powder out of it and store it in an airtight container to use while cooking later.

Dill

Dill is an ancient herb with feathery leaves and a sharp taste. It is a popular spice in German and Scandinavian cuisine. It has great health benefits like aiding the digestive system, relief from insomnia, diarrhea, cancer, and menstrual disorders. Both the seeds and leaves of dill can be used. It has a strong tangy flavor and is a great addition to pickles, salads and fish dishes. To grow dill at home, summer is the best time because this herb requires a lot of sunshine.

Dill grows better when they are directly planted from seeds rather than from a transplant. Taking care of dill plants isn't a hard task, and they grow rather easily. Dill grows best when they are planted in full sun outdoor. Both dill leaves and seeds can be eaten and used for cooking. To harvest dill leaves, regularly trim the amount you need directly from the plant. If you're looking to grow dill seeds, let the plant flower and those flowers will later face and develop seed pods. Always use fresh dill in lieu of dry dill when possible.

To store fresh dill for a longer time, wrap it in a damp paper towel and refrigerate or put in it a container of water without removing the stems. If not stored properly, dill will only last fresh for a day or two. You can also dry dill seeds and store them in an airtight container in a cool, dark place for around six months.

Sage

Sage is a famous herb used for stuffing and poultry dishes during holidays. It is also used in tea to help soothe your body during fevers and pain. It also has many medicinal values and is used externally to treat sprains, swelling, and bleeding. Sage can be used fresh, dried, as well as in powder form. Sage is a native to the Mediterranean coast. It has long, narrow leaves with a musty flavor. Due to its delicate flavor, it is recommended that you add it to your cooking only towards the end.

Because it comes from a hot, dry region, the best place to grow sage is in a sunny setting. It can also be grown indoors near a sunny window but is very likely to need supplemental lighting for better results. Sage seeds are slow to germinate and need a lot of patience. Sage needs to be planted in a well-draining container as its roots can die off otherwise.

To store fresh sage leaves, put them in a loosely tied plastic bag or wrap in a damp paper towel before refrigerating.

Oregano

Oregano, having a pungent, warm and aromatic flavor, is a perfect addition to your dishes. It is a flavorful herb that belongs to the mint family and is commonly used in Italian, Greek and Spanish cooking for seasoning. It has been a very famous medicinal and culinary herb for hundreds of years. Oregano is a great solution for your acne, dandruff, gastric issues, and menstrual cramps.

Oregano is a heat loving herb and is best when grown in warm and dry climates. It can also be grown easily in places of drought because it is native to hot, arid regions. This herb is a great companion for vegetables like broccoli and beans during inter-plantation due to its ability to repel common insects and pests. Once the risk of frost has passed, you can also plant oregano in a window that gets good sunlight. This herb doesn't need much effort to grow well but for it to have a strong flavor, you need to pinch off its flower buds before they begin to bloom.

Fresh oregano can be stored in plastic bags and refrigerated, you can also dry the oregano and store it in a cool, dark place for around six months. When cooking with fresh oregano, add the leaves into the dish towards the end of cooking as the heat can cause a loss of its delicate flavor.

Lavender

Lavender is a beautiful herb with a lot of different roles and purposes. It has a soothing aromatic fragrance and is used for cooking, tea, body products or simply just its fragrance. It is widely known for its antibacterial, stress-relieving, antiseptic properties. Lavender also goes very well with baked items. Even if you're not going to use lavender at all, plant it to make your garden looks vibrant, colorful, and fragrant!

Lavender enjoys hot, dry conditions and can grow very well even in drought prone areas. This means that they don't require constant watering and only need water when the soil is very dry. Soils rich in organic matter encourage higher oil production in lavender plants and also enhance the fragrance. Lavender plants generally take about a year to be ready for harvest. When harvesting, you should harvest early in the morning and pick flower spikes that haven't fully opened yet. To dry lavender, hang the flowers upside down in a dry, dark area for a week or two.

Final Word

Thank you again for downloading this book!

I hope that with this book you were able to find the answers you were looking for. I truly hope the content of this book helped you take a step closer to starting your garden or bringing positive results to a garden you have already started. If you just invest a few hours out of your week to gardening, you can benefit greatly in terms of learning a new skill, saving money on expensive groceries, feeling a sense of achievement, and being able to eat the food you grow with utter pride and satisfaction. If you are to come across an issue at any time while gardening, please do refer back to this book for solutions.



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