

SQUARE FOOT GARDENING

No Weeding, No Digging, No Tilling, No Kidding!

"We encourage you to grow all the food that you feasibly can on your own property . . . Grow vegetables and eat them from your own yard. Even those residing in apartments or condominiums can generally grow a little food in pots and planters. Study the best methods of providing your own foods. Make your garden . . . neat and attractive as well as productive. If there are children in your home, involve them in the process with assigned responsibilities."

- Spencer W. Kimball, *Essentials of Home Production and Storage*, p. 2.

What is Square Foot Gardening? A simple, unique and versatile system that adapts to all levels of experience, physical ability, and geographical location. Grow all you want and need in only 20% of the space of a conventional row garden. Save time, water, work and money.

The Ten Basics of Square Foot Gardening

1. LAYOUT – Arrange your garden in squares, not rows. Lay it out in 4' by 4' areas.
2. BOXES – Build boxes to hold a new soil mix above ground – only 6 inches deep.
3. AISLES – Space boxes 3' apart to form walking aisles.
4. SOIL – Fill boxes with special soil mix: 1/3 compost (made from many different ingredients), 1/3 peat moss, 1/3 coarse vermiculite. Existing soil doesn't matter.
5. GRID – Make a square foot grid for the top of each box to organize the garden for planting.
6. CARE – Never walk on the growing soil. Tend your garden from the aisles. Few, if any, weeds sprout and are easily pulled with fingers. Soil stays loose and friable. Easy to protect from weather.
7. SELECT – Plant a different flower, vegetable, or herb crop in each square foot, using spacing of 1, 4, 9 or 16 plants per square foot. Crop rotation happens naturally.
8. PLANT – Conserve seeds. Plant only a pinch (2 or 3 seeds) per hole. Place transplants in a slight saucer-shaped depression. Plant only what you will use during each season. No waste.
9. WATER – Ideally water by hand from a bucket of sun-warmed water (hose or drip system okay).
10. HARVEST – When you finish harvesting a square foot, add compost to replenish nutrients and replant with a new and different crop.

LOCATION



Pick an area that gets 6-9 hours of sunshine daily.



Stay clear of trees/shrubs where roots/shade may interfere.



Have it close to the house for convenience and protection.



Existing soil is not really important. You won't be using it.



Area must not puddle after a heavy rain.

SFG Ideas:

Humanitarian Efforts
Public/Home Schools
Eagle Scout Projects
Young Women Projects
Senior Centers
Hospitals
Community Gardens
Home Gardens

"Gardening also teaches many spiritual lessons. It lets children see that the Lord's creations, things of great value, cannot be rushed. There is a process that must be followed patiently. They learn that besides doing the work, we must wait upon the Lord to finally see the fruits of our labor. Finally, children can see the hand of the Lord while working on a garden. The miracle of life in all its varieties is manifested."

- Gene R. Cook, *Raising Up a Family to the Lord*, p. 235

MAKING SOIL MIX

24 cubic foot BATCH - Good for THREE 4'x 4' boxes (each box holds 8 cubic feet):

Here is what we would suggest you buy as a start:

- Two 4-cubic foot bags of coarse vermiculite.
- One 3.9 cubic foot bale of peat moss (this bale is compressed and will expand to nearly 8 cubic feet when opened).
- 4-5 bags of a variety of compost to equal 8 cubic feet.

That will be approximately 1/3 each of each of the ingredients and will give you a total of almost 24 cubic feet of the soil Mix. Since a 4'x4' 6-inch deep box requires 8 cubic feet, that batch is enough for 3 boxes.

It is best to mix in a large, open, indoor space that is well-ventilated, or even better outdoors on a non-windy day. We have found it best to mix the ingredients by emptying them onto a large tarp or piece of heavy plastic. Because the materials are dusty at the start, you should wear a standard dust mask. Keep the kids away from the mixing operation until you put the material into your boxes and wet it down. Thereafter, there should be no problem with dust even if all the material dries out.

Going back to the mixing operation, open and mix the various bags of compost together. Then add the compressed peat moss and break up any lumps. (This is easiest to do by hand.) Add the vermiculite and you can then carefully mix the 3 ingredients with a rake or hoe being careful not to cut the plastic or tarp underneath. Or, an even easier way to mix, is to have 2 people - 1 on each corner of the tarp - pulling the ends of the tarp towards the pile. The ingredients will turn and roll as you do so. Then move to the other two sides and pull the tarp the other way. You keep working your way around the pile and if the tarp is big enough to start with, the pile should mix very quickly.

12 cubic foot BATCH:

If you just want to mix up half a batch to start with, you would add together just one 4 cubic foot bag of vermiculite, 1/2 of the 3.9 cubic foot bale of peat moss and enough of the compost mixture to equal 4 cubic feet. Make sure you have mixed all the bags of compost together so that you will have well-blended compost.

NOTE: If the compost comes in bags that are measured in weight rather than cubic feet, just add in equal parts of the 3 ingredients. (For example, one shovel of vermiculite, one shovel of peat moss and one shovel of the blended compost – use anything to measure – a box, a wheelbarrow, etc. Or, just eyeball the amounts. It doesn't have to be exact.) One man recently wrote and pointed out that 12 five-gallon buckets equals 8 cubic feet. So, if you need to measure this is a good way to do it. Just use 4 five-gallon buckets full of each of the 3 ingredients and that will fill one 4x4 box.

If your compost is wet, you may need a little extra mixing to make sure the dry materials are evenly spaced about. Some people have wet down the dry materials before mixing in order to keep the dust down. However, that makes the mixture rather heavy and hard to maneuver. You can spray it lightly with a hose to keep down the dust.

Once it is all mixed, it can all be placed in your boxes. Make sure you have removed any weeds or grass that is growing under your box and then put down commercial weed barrier cloth, a layer of cardboard, or a thick layer of newspaper to keep weeds and grass from growing inside your box.

Any leftover material can be stored in plastic bags (reuse the bags the ingredients came in) for future use. It's always good to have some well-blended compost stored since you will be using a trowel full of this each time you replant a square. This will replenish the nutrients needed for healthy plant growth.

IMPORTANT HINTS: Make sure that the soil mix is completely moist all the way to the bottom of the box before planting. It holds more water than you can imagine so take a hose to it and add a lot of water. Dig down and make sure it is wet. Also it is so important to use well-blended compost made up from at least 4-5 ingredients.