

## **Vegetable Garden Ministries**

There are many ways to use gardening as a tool to assist individuals, groups or organizations, especially during tough economic times. A vegetable garden ministry can be as simple as sharing the fruits and vegetable from your own garden to a church-wide mission garden project covering multiple acres. There are many things you will want to consider before you get started. Some of the most important are:

- Are you willing to put in the time and effort?
- Do you have an area for the garden that gets at least 5 hours of sun each day?
- Do you have source of water for the garden?

### **Small Space? No Problem.**

With proper planning and attention, a productive garden doesn't have to occupy a large area or even involve digging. No-dig gardens or a raised bed gardens, consist of layering organic materials on top of the ground (or even parking lot) to create a nutrient rich environment for your vegetables plants. A no-dig garden has many benefits including:

- easy to build (a few hours, depending on size)
- relatively inexpensive
- low maintenance
- mirror nature to create a rich, organic environment for your plants
- can be built anywhere, to any size
- requires less bending or kneeling

### **To build a no-dig garden:**

It helps to surround the garden with some sort of border material that is 8-10 inches in height. Besides making the garden easier to reach, the border helps to contain the organic material and discourages weeds and grass from invading your garden.

- Begin with a ¼ inch thick layer of newspaper, cardboard or similar natural material.
- Next lay down a 4-inch layer of straw, leaving no gaps.
- Add a 1-inch layer of organic fertilizer (manure). Any type of animal or poultry manure can be used, but be sure it has been well composted or aged. Check with a local horse farms or other livestock facility. They will generally give the manure away. If you do not have a source of organic material, sprinkle on a thin layer of commercial fertilizer.
- Now add an 8 inch thick layer of loose straw.
- Add another layer of fertilizer.
- Add 4 inches of compost. Check with your city or county, many times they offer composted leaves at little or no cost.
- Finally water the garden until it is wet but not soaking.

You are now ready to start planting.

### **Straw bale garden**

Another approach to “no-dig” is to grow vegetables in straw bales. Straw bales provide a well-aerated growing medium for growing plant. Straw or mixed grass hay bales will both work just fine for growing vegetables. However, older bales that have begun to rot tend to work best for this type of gardening although they will be weigh more and thus more difficult to move. Vegetables like tomatoes, peppers, squash, cucumbers and melons will all grow well using this method as long as they are kept watered.

To make the bales productive they will need to be “prepared” prior to planting time.

- Keep the bales wet for 3 days.
- On the fourth day, apply 10 tablespoons of ammonium nitrate fertilizer followed by a couple more days of watering.
- On the seventh day, apply 5 tablespoons of ammonium nitrate, followed by 2 additional days of watering.
- On the tenth day, apply one cup of fertilizer (10-10-10) and lightly water the fertilizer into the bale.
- On the eleventh day, apply a three-inch layer of top soil or potting mix to serve as a bed for the plants or seed.
- Plant your seeds or plants.

## **What to grow larger?**

Organize a meeting of interested people.

Determine if there really is a need and desire for a garden.

Who will the garden serve--youth, seniors, special populations?

Make a list of what needs to be done.

## **Find a garden site.**

-Make sure the site gets at least 6 full hours of sunlight daily.

-Do a soil test in the fall for nutrients & heavy metals.

Soil sample analysis is free through the NC Department of Agriculture and - Consumer Services, check with your local Cooperative Extension Office.

-Consider past uses of the land. Is there any contamination?

-Consider availability of water.

## **Prepare and Develop the Site**

-Clean the site.

-Develop your design.

-Gather your resources--try to gather free materials.

-Organize volunteer work crews.

-Plan your workday.

-Include plans for a storage area for tools and other equipment, as well as a compost area.

-Arrange for land preparation--plowing, etc

-Lay out garden to place flower or shrub beds around the visible perimeter. This helps to promote good will with non-gardening neighbors, passersby, and municipal authorities.

## **Garden Planting and Maintenance**

### EARLY SPRING

1. Clean and rake out bed.

2. Check bed for size and re-define edges

3. Prepare soil in beds

Rent, hire or borrow tiller if area is

Till to a depth of 8 inches

Add amendments:: sand, peat, well-composted organic matter and fertilizer if you wish

Till to mix added amendments very well into the soil

Rake out smooth

Mark areas within beds where plants are to go

4. Purchase plants chosen for planting

5. Plant

Follow directions received with the seedlings, plants or seeds  
Group plants in "masses" for greatest effect

5. Water the bed when planting is complete

Use a fine spray, don't wash soil or form deep puddles

Water back and forth several times rather than soaking one spot at a time.

SPRING

1. Cultivate

When surface of bed dries out to break up crust and uproot weed seedlings

Continue the rest of the season

2. Water

Water ( and rainfall) should equal 1" per week

Do NOT make several light waterings, but water deeply once or twice a week

3. Fertilize

Apply granular fertilizer if you wish as a top dressing mid season

-apply lightly between plants

-keep it away from stems

-cultivate it in lightly

-may add rich organic compost/composted manure instead

4. Mulch

Use rotted manure, grass clippings, compost, wood chips, bark, nutshells

Apply after soil has warmed up deeply

Conserves water and keeps down weeds

SUMMER

Pests

Use toxic pesticides only as a LAST resort, if at all

Unless a crisis exists hand pick bugs or diseased plant parts and try to " live and let live" with a few critters

Call the Safer Pest Control Project, Cooperative Extension Service or the Conservatory for advice

FALL

Clean up garden after fade or frost

Clear out dead annuals, and trim dried perennials (or leave for winter texture in the garden). Add to compost pile.

Apply organic material - peat moss, chopped leaves, manure, compost