

ORGANIC SQUARE FOOT GARDENING



A PRACTICAL BEGINNERS GUIDE
GROWING MORE IN LESS SPACE TODAY

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Organic Square Foot Gardening: A Practical Beginners Guide Growing More in Less Space Today

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Introduction

I want to thank you and congratulate you for downloading the book Organic Square Foot Gardening: A Practical Beginner's Guide to Growing More in Less Space Today

This book contains proven steps and strategies on how to become a truly successful home gardener. Not only that, this book will teach you all about square foot gardening which is all about producing more food in less space, and with less efforts as well.

Here's an inescapable fact: you will need to be an experienced gardener before you can produce all the vegetables you need right at your own home. You will need to know about plants, harvest cycles and a big enough space that will be able to hold your garden. Fortunately, the concept of square foot gardening makes the whole process easier and more convenient. Not only can you produce hundreds of dollars' worth of vegetables in one year, but you will also be able to do so with very limited space and even right inside your home.

If you do not develop your understanding of how square foot gardening works and the concepts behind it, you will find it hard to grow your own garden at home.

It's time for you to become an amazing home gardener and to use square foot gardening to produce the fruits and vegetables that you love!

Chapter 1: Home Gardening

Many people dream of having their own gardens where they can plant fruits and vegetables all year round. The idea of having your favorite fruits and vegetables available right in your own backyard is very desirable in many aspects. You can raise the plants you want, harvest them at no additional cost, and simply enjoy them at almost any time of the year. Those who are into healthy and natural living will appreciate the importance of having their own gardens the most because they know just how hard it is to get truly healthy foods from all the fast-food joints out there.

For those who are on tight budgets, having a garden can also give as much as a thousand dollars in savings every year. Of course, people who love to cook their own meals will find just what a treat having their own garden is. You can have your most necessary ingredients available any time you need them, and you can always be sure that they are fresh and simply the best.

Growing your own garden also lets you control what chemicals or fertilizers to use, so if you want none of those harmful substances coming into contact with your produce, then you have all the ability to do so. Going organic, living healthy, and having everything available for your convenience at less the cost are just some of the benefits that having your own garden can provide you with.

The idea of home gardening is nothing new. In fact, many people have embraced the idea especially because of the health and economic benefits that it provides. There is no questioning the advantages that having your own garden provides you with, but the problem is that not many people actually know how to do it.

Sure, planting can be as simple as burying a couple of seeds or so into the soil and watering it every now and then for it to grow, but what type of plants are you supposed to plant? Is the soil you have able to support the plants that you prefer? How exactly do you take care of your plants and how do you know if they are safe to harvest and eat? More importantly, where do you get the land that you need for gardening?

In today's world of progress, land is a commodity and even a privilege that not everyone can provide. Unless you are living in the country where gardens and huge lawns and backyards are available, you are probably cooped up in a small house or apartment with hardly any piece of land available for you to plant on. This, along with the lack of knowledge and education, is the main reason why gardening remains to be mostly a hobby for a handful few. Gardening obviously involves soil which is supposed to occupy a piece of land, but most of the time, the land that is available is simply too small to yield any favorable produce.

Having little to no land available on which to plant your own garden is understandably a valid excuse, but this is why enthusiasts have developed a new form of gardening known as square foot gardening. Square foot gardening is all about growing more food in less space. Focusing on an understanding of plant spacing and using grids to maximize space, this style of gardening allows you to yield the maximum amount of crops that can be grown in a single square foot of space.

Gardening is no longer just about planting any random crop seed you can think of or see available in the market. The fact that you are aiming to maximize the amount of yield your square foot of land is capable of producing also helps you to understand the types of plants that are most favorable for the conditions you have. This gives your gardening experience more focus and direction, and thus makes it easier in the sense that you have a clearer picture and idea of what to do. There is also no denying the sense of accomplishment that can come from harvesting your first set of produce, and from every harvest that comes after that.

Square foot gardening is not just about maximizing space either, and here are some of the advantages that you can enjoy with square foot gardening.

Chapter 2: Advantages of Square Foot Gardening

Good things come from having your own garden, and even better things come from having a garden that does not need to take up too much space. With square foot gardening, you are able to reap the benefits of gardening and so much more. Growing your own garden allows you to enjoy fresh vegetables all-year round. You can also grow organic products that are totally free from pesticides and other chemicals, and you can enjoy all of these right from your own backyard.

Most of all, growing your own garden allows you to save up on hundreds of dollars of grocery bills and you can even have enough left over to share or even sell for profit. Now imagine taking it up a notch with square foot gardening. This concept of gardening will help you maximize the amount of harvest from a limited space. You can also easily design your garden and style it any way you want. Best of all, square foot gardening allows you to produce more with even less effort.

- **Fresh vegetables all-year round**

Vegetables are great at any time of the year. They are healthy, can be made into salads, snacks or side dishes, and they give the vitamins and nutrients that your body needs. Many people take these vegetables for granted however and prefer to have meat as a larger part of their diet, but partaking in fresh fruits and vegetables as often as possible can be the best thing you can ever do.

Having access to fresh vegetables all-year round will be a great leap to giving your body only the best. In some cases, people just don't have access to fresh fruits and vegetables and that is why they find it hard to make these a part of their daily meals. Indeed, when nutritionists say that you should eat 8-9 servings of fruits and vegetables a day, with one serving consisting of one cup of healthy goodness, many of us are just left wondering where we can get that much in the first place.

By having your own garden, you can enjoy a myriad of fruits and vegetables at any time of the year. You no longer have to rely on what fruits and vegetables are available in the market because you can grow your own and therefore grow the foods that you want at almost any time of the year. Of course, most plants have to be grown at certain times of the year, but with the many varieties of fruits and vegetables available, you should be able to grow your favorite foods the whole year round.

- **Organic products free from pesticides and chemicals**

Having pesticides and chemicals come into contact with the foods that we eat is not a very pleasing idea. Unfortunately for us, pesticides and other chemicals are a normal part of commercial food production. When it comes to large production gardening, pesticides are the most practical way of getting rid of pests that endanger the plants and the fruits and vegetables that they produce. Even in the case of privately owned gardens, some people still use pesticides and other chemicals to make sure that the plants are not destroyed by outside factors.

If you want organic and all-natural products however, you can be sure to enjoy them by having your own garden. Planting your own garden gives you the power to control what goes in and around your plants. You can be sure that no harmful chemicals are used, and you also know about anything and everything that comes into contact with your plants. While keeping things all-natural and organic may require more effort and patience, you can be sure that the fruits and vegetables you produce are safe, healthy, and as beneficial as possible.

- **Home-grown vegetables right from your own backyard**

Preparing a salad? Making a sandwich? Cooking any dish? With the variety of dishes that are made using vegetables, chances are that you spend a great deal of time at the grocery so that you have everything you need available. The thing with vegetables is that you cannot really store them for long as they are best when fresh, and the chiller can only keep them for so long.

As a result, you have to buy vegetables from the market at least twice or thrice a week. Imagine if you had those vegetables growing in your own backyard? You will most likely have whatever you need, and you no longer have to make those trips to the store. What's more, seeing those vegetables available at your own backyard gives you an idea of what dishes to cook. From simple salads to gourmet foods, all of these become possible because of your very own garden. And it will all be right there for the taking!

- **Savings of hundreds of dollars off your grocery bill**

For most people, the best thing about growing a garden is not just having access to all these fresh produce all-year round, but the fact that you have access to them at very little cost. Remember that having your own garden can save you from going to the store, and this means saving you from hundreds of dollars of expenses.

You can grow a few pounds of vegetables every season or even every year, and you will already be saving a huge amount of money. It is not just the money that you save from not having to buy the vegetables either. In most cases, going to the store pulls us into buying things that we do not really need. So bottom-line is, the lesser the number of trips to the store, the more savings that you get.

- **Maximize the amount of harvest from a limited space**

Now comes the amazing part that square foot gardening was made for. It is all about maximizing the amount of harvest that you can get from a limited amount of space. When you maximize the harvest, you maximize the yield and produce, the amount of fresh fruits and vegetables that you are able to get, and the amount of savings that you are able to enjoy.

For those who are into selling their homegrown fruits and vegetables, this simply means the most profits available. For those who rely on home gardening to feed the family, this means bringing the most amount of food available to the table. Most importantly, for those who think that they do not have enough space to make their own gardens at home, square foot gardening means that they truly can even with just a square foot amount of space.

- **Design and style your garden**

Thinking of taking on gardening as a form of hobby or even an art? Having your own garden allows you to do just that. Growing your own garden will give you the freedom to do anything you want with it. Design it in the way you want, arrange the plants according to your preferences, and style your own garden lot so that it is more appealing to the eyes. Working with square foot gardening also gives your garden plots more potential in terms of style and design.

Of course, having an understanding of what plants should go together will also give direction and more purpose to your little hobby. Some people who do square foot gardening also refer to it as edible landscaping because it provides food and aesthetics at the same time.

- **Produce more with less effort**

I have always believed in efficiency, and this is why square foot gardening appeals to me. The simple fact of the matter is that the square foot method of gardening was designed so that you are able to produce more with less effort. Now who wouldn't want that? Square foot gardening is not just about working on a limited amount of space. In fact, the concept of square foot gardening makes it so much easier to care for your plot or plots of land.

The idea behind dividing your garden into smaller units of land is so that you can tend to each land plot properly and with more ease and efficiency. A garden plot should not be too large that you are unable to tend to all the plants inside it while staying on the perimeter. On the same note, it will be much easier to care for your plants since you can see all of them clearly instead of them being part of just one big whole where the little ones can easily be overseen.

The idea of staying at the perimeters while taking care of your plants also stems from the gardening concept of not stepping on your gardening soil. This

keeps the soil light and in the best condition possible for growing your plants.

Chapter 3: How to Start Square Foot Gardening

First time gardeners may find it difficult to know where to start with their own square foot gardens. Luckily, there are many resources available online and you can even purchase books that will give you tips and directions on how to make your own square foot garden. The concept was created by Mel Bartholomew, and he outlines the square foot gardening method on his book 'Square Foot Gardening'.

The book was first published in 1981, and it has been updated into the 'All New Square Foot Gardening' which came out in 2006. Here is a list of the simple steps that are outlined in both books. The steps are all user-friendly, easy to follow, and of course, easily adaptable to what you as the gardener would prefer.

1. Visualize your Harvests

As with everything else, the best way to start with your own square foot garden is to visualize how you want it to be. How big should it be and what plants should it hold? Where is the ideal location to place your square foot garden? By visualizing your end goal in mind, you will have a better idea of how to go about achieving it.

In most cases, people start by imagining the fruits and vegetables that they would want to have in their own garden. Others could build their vision around a space that they know can hold their future produce, while some may simply be reined in by the resources that they have available. Check with your local store to see the types of seeds they have so that you know what you can work with, and of course, consider your budget limitations.

2. Consider Plant Size

Plant size is perhaps the biggest factor that is put into consideration when it comes to square foot gardening. As Bartholomew himself puts it, think of plants as having their own sizes much like how shirts do. There are four basic sizes here, namely extra-large, large, medium and small. Extra-large plants can be planted one per square foot while large sized plants can be planted four per square foot of plot.

As for medium plants, a square foot garden can hold nine of these, while small size plants can be planted sixteen per square foot. It is important to note the plant size so that you have a better idea of what you can place inside your square foot garden. Also, being aware of the space required by plants to fully

grow is important so that you do not end up with unhealthy and damaged plants.

3. How much do you need?

Many people make the mistake of just planting everything that they can fit in their gardens. While this may be highly tempting as you want to produce the most yield possible, you should keep in mind to plant only the plants that you will need. Square foot gardening will have you harvesting a lot of produce every season, and having too many plants can leave you frustrated as you try to keep up with the harvesting schedules. Of course, if you do not know what to do with the excess harvest either, you will end up wasting a lot of fruits and vegetables along with the time and effort it took for you to produce them.

4. Set up a Box

Once you have a clear idea of what you want to plant and how much you need to plant, it is time to set up your garden space. Do this by building a box. Bartholomew suggests the use of raised beds as this makes garden planning easier. A raised bed typically allows you to build above ground. While you may have to work harder to place in the soil and set up everything you need to take care of your garden, you will not be restricted by the type of soil and land that you have available.

The raised bed is usually contained using a border made of solid material. Wood is a preferred substance, while other options include stones and rocks, bricks, or anything you may have. Keep in mind that your raised bed will have to be able to weather out the conditions that it is exposed to. If you plan on keeping your garden for a long period of time, you should consider making a sturdy bed that will also last for a few years at the very least.

When setting up your box, be sure to keep it at a manageable size. This is one of the core ideas behind square foot gardening. The idea is to have a small enough garden that you will be able to tend to all the plants that are inside without having to step on the garden soil directly. In most cases, a garden plot that is four feet wide should be manageable enough as you can still easily have everything within reach from the perimeter of your garden. Having a raised bed also makes access easier so be sure to plan ahead to make your garden more convenient for you.

5. Square Foot Gardening Soil

The type of soil to be used for square foot gardening is very important. By Bartholomew's guidelines, the soil should be made up of equal parts coarse grade vermiculite, sphagnum peat moss, and blended compost. Check with your local gardening store if they have the right supplies available. You should

also consider how deep your soil needs to be. As a rule of thumb, six-inch deep soil is enough for standard plants, while plants that need deeper spaces such as carrots and turnips should be planted on at least ten inch or twelve inch deep soil.

6. Add a Grid

Finally, divide your garden into square foot plots. This will make it easier for you to plan out where the plants can fit and how many plants you can fit into your garden. You should also be able to divide the square foot plots into smaller spaces, marking off where one plant should go. Remember that some plants take up a whole square foot of space, while other plants can be planted sixteen pieces to just one square foot of garden space.

You can use wood planks, pebbles, even simple garden threads to mark out your garden plot. Keeping these grids in place will also make it easier for you to take on succession planting. That is, when one plant is harvested, you can easily replace it with a new plant by using the space that was left available.

7. Start Planting

Finally, you can take out your seeds and start planting in your new garden. The seed packets that you buy will normally have instructions printed on them on how they should be planted. Many will inform you about row spacing which will allow you to provide enough space between plants to keep them healthy, but will also leave a lot of space left unplanted. Instead of following the recommended row spacing, simply go back to plants sizes and how they should fit in square foot gardens. A seed packet will also tell you how much space you need for your plant to grow so you can work from there.

Chapter 4: Planning the Space and Design of Your Garden

A typical square foot garden will be a four feet by four feet square of space, but you can adjust this depending on the space that you have. Some gardens can be as large as five feet by twenty feet, while others can be a simple and single square foot space. Still, there are those that are not bound by four corners and sides at all. When deciding on the space and design of your garden, there are some tips and factors to keep in mind to help you with the planning process. You can also check out some online square foot garden planners that will help you to plan and design your own gardens.

1. Determine the location of your garden

The space your garden will take up and its look will rely a lot on the location that you have available. In fact, your whole garden will most likely rely on whatever space you have in your home that has a potential to hold it. The good thing with square foot gardening however, is the fact that your garden space does not have to be limited to where it is that you have soil at the moment.

Remember that square foot gardening goes perfectly with raised bed gardens, and this means that you can place them on concrete or even on tabletops as long as you plan them out properly. What you will need to make sure of is for your garden to be close to a water supply, as well as a drain system that will prevent it from making a mess.

It is also good to remember that most plants love the sunlight, so be sure to plan your garden where your plants will be able to get a lot of sun. Indeed, you can now grow a garden even inside your very home and still have it as productive as possible.

2. Determine the space you have

This is where your imagination will be challenged, and where your skills as an artist can come into play. Square foot gardening most likely takes on the form of a square or even a rectangular garden. However, the same basic concepts can be used to create gardens of different sizes and shapes.

For example, some gardens have been designed to take on a circular shape. Still, there are those that are more irregular that can take on almost any shape depending on the space that is available. If you are working on very limited space, chances are that you will only be able to create your garden along the walls of your house.

Imagine your garden running along one wall, only to bend and follow another wall, and so on and so forth. Keep in mind that no matter the size and shape of your garden, you should be able to take care of all the plants inside conveniently without having to step into the garden plots.

3. What to plant and where?

Once you have laid out your garden in the design and space that you wish, it is time to think about the plants to produce and where. Square foot gardening gives you a lot of freedom when it comes to the variety of plants that you can use. You can mix large plants with small ones, and not have to worry about whether or not they have the same growth and harvest periods as long as you are able to access them easily. At this stage however, you should do your research.

Aside from selecting your plants based on the amount of space they need to grow, you should also consider the amount of sun that each plant needs. Place plants that need more sun along the outer parts of your square foot garden so that they do not become shaded when the other plants grow. If you would like to plan ahead, consider the height at which the plants grow and take this into consideration as well.

Another concept that you can apply along with your square foot gardening is that of vertical gardening. The use of this concept not only maximizes space a bit more, it also improves the aesthetic quality of your home-grown garden. Vertical gardening makes use of plants that are made to grow on walls, fences, or trellises, and can even be used as an aesthetic wall or divider for your home. Some of the plants that flourish from this upward growth include melons and peas, so you can make use of vertical gardening to add these to your garden.

4. Plant and have fun!

Choosing what plants to place in your garden is one of the most crucial factors when it comes to square foot gardening. As discussed earlier, the plant size will decide how many of each you can plant for every square foot of garden space. There is also the factor of how much sun they need, and how long it will take for the plants to be ready for harvest.

Above all of course, prioritize the plants that you simply want to have included in your garden. Growing more peas and carrots or cabbages will not matter much if you will not enjoy the crops anyway. Make sure to plant those that you and your family enjoy, and also to plant only enough so that you do not have to worry about having too much in your hands.

Other Things to Consider:

- Make it a point to diversify your garden. That is, plant different types of fruits and vegetables not only to enjoy a myriad of produce, but also to help keep the soil healthy.
- Maximize space. This is one of the main concepts behind square foot gardening. You want to maximize the amount of space you have available to be able to produce more food with your home garden. Also, filling in all the space available will prevent weeds and other unwanted plants to grow in between your plants. You can also add plants that naturally repel weeds, or other plants that have similar natural effects as well.
- Never step on your garden soil! It cannot be stressed enough that you should never step on the soil of your square foot garden. Doing so will compact the soil and cause it to lose the ideal properties that you have worked so hard on. Leaving the soil unharmed also means that you let the plants be free from harm so regardless of the type of garden you have, try to keep in mind that you should not step on the soil for your garden.

Chapter 5: Soil for Your Square Foot Garden

One of the most important considerations in making your own garden is choosing the right soil for it. The good thing is, square foot gardening was developed with a very specific type of soil in mind. This type of soil was developed by none other than square foot gardening founder himself, Mel Bartholomew, and is used by many square foot gardeners around the world.

Mel's Mix

If you are a square foot gardening enthusiast, you will know that the soil you will need is one that is referred to as Mel's mix. This soil is made with three equal parts of compost, peat moss, and vermiculite, and is considered to be the most ideal for square foot gardening. You can purchase a ready-made mix from your local gardening stores or even through Amazon.com for \$29.95 per bag of 2 cubic feet. If you want to save on costs, you can make your own special mix for your square foot garden.

Compost

The compost is the most important component of Mel's mix or any garden soil you wish to use. Compost refers to decayed organic material that is often used as fertilizer or plant food. It can come from a range of sources such as food wastes, biodegradable materials, and other organic materials available. One word of advice is to create a soil mix that is made from at least three different types of compost. The compost acts as food for the food and therefore having different types of compost means different types of food and nutrients for your plants.

Some of the types of compost you can use are dairy manure, those from chicken and other poultry manure, mushroom compost, and also worm castings. You can also make your own compost by recycling your own wastes, thus making your garden self-sufficient. Making your own compost also allows you to be sure that it is all-organic and therefore safe from any artificial components or other harmful chemicals.

How to Make your own Compost

To make your own compost, you should start with a bare piece of earth. This allows worms and other decomposers to easily work on composting your materials without the hindrance of rocks and other hard matters. As with your gardening soil, it is also ideal for your compost to be as aerated as possible. Do this by first digging a few inches below ground level and filling the space with twigs or straw. Aside from aerating your compost, this also provides drainage to help keep your compost moist.

Moisture speeds up the decaying process and helps to break down the compost materials easily. Next, add your compost material in layers. Some of the items you can use include tables scraps, fruits and vegetable wastes, leaves, grass clippings, weeds, flower cuttings, ground coffee beans, and even cardboard pieces or shredded paper. Be sure to avoid bones, meat, or fish scraps as they can attract pests. If the materials you use comprise of wet and dry ones, be sure to alternate between them to avoid clumping together.

After adding the materials, you can put a layer of green manure or any nitrogen source that will activate the compost pile. Finally, cover your compost with plastic sheets, carpet scraps, or even wood to keep them from heat and also to retain moisture. You should keep your compost moist by watering it from time to time, and aerate it by turning the pile over every few weeks. The materials will break down over time until you can be able to use them on your garden. If you want to add more to your compost pile, there will be no need to add additional layers. Simply mix the new material in when you are turning your compost and they should blend well with what you already have.

Peat Moss

Peat moss often comes in bags of compressed material that can be bought from gardening supplies stores. Many of those who decide to make their own square foot garden soil make the mistake of mixing the compressed material directly with the other components. Unfortunately, the compressed peat moss requires you to let it sit out for a while so that it becomes loose.

One of the most important purposes of having peat moss in your garden soil is its ability to retain water. It also keeps the soil loose, thus making it easier for your plants to breathe and to have access to all the nutrients that they need.

Vermiculite

Finally, your square foot garden soil also needs vermiculite. Vermiculite is actually made from granite that has been blown out to smaller particles. Much like the peat moss, these small particles of vermiculite are very efficient for holding water. Take note that there are also different types of vermiculite depending on the size of the particles. What you want is a course type of vermiculite that is made up of larger particles. This allows the material to last longer and also to hold more water for your plants.

Water retention is very essential for your square foot gardening soil. This is because the limited space that you have also limits the amount of soil and amount of water and other material that you need to help your plants grow. The water retention properties of the vermiculite and the peat moss, as well as the all-organic component of the composts make for the ultimate garden soil for your square foot garden. Similarly, keeping your soil loose helps your plants get the nutrients they need. This is in line with the principle that you should never step on the soil of your square foot garden. If you do not have access to gardening stores that have the special Mel's mix or if you

do not have the components required to make your own mix, you can still use other types of soil available, just keep the reminders mentioned above in mind.

Conclusion

Thank you again for downloading this book!

I hope this book was able to help you to know more about square foot gardening and how you can use it to grow more food in less space!

The next step is to try it out for yourself and grow your own fruits and vegetables at home.

Finally, if you enjoyed this book, please take the time to share your thoughts and post a review on Amazon. It'd be greatly appreciated!

Thank you and good luck!