

THE EDIBLE GARDEN



APRIL 2015

©Jon Last

GARDEN NOTES

- If you have room for crop rotation each family can be grown in a different part of the garden in consecutive years. Plants differ in what they take from the soil and rotating "families" is good for their soil base. See Dec. and Jan. for crop rotation and succession planting.
- Plants grown for annual produce take a lot of nutrients out of the soil. Therefore annual and semi-annual applications of compost and well-rotted manure are essential for maintaining the productivity of garden soil.
- Succession planting is a way of increasing yield by planting to stagger harvesting dates:
 - Make small plantings of a crop a few days or weeks apart for a continuous harvest.
 - Plant two or more varieties of the same crop with different maturing times to extend harvests.
 - Plant two or more crops together with different maturing periods -early, mid, late.
 - Plant a cool season crop followed, after harvest, by a warm season crop.
- Applying floating row covers over new transplants or seed beds will protect young vegetables from above ground insects. Make sure to bury the edges to prevent sneaky insects entry. Leave enough slack to allow plants to grow.
- Floating row cover should be removed from fruiting plants as they start flowering to allow for pollination.

DID YOU KNOW?

- It is good to know which plants belong to which plant families. Plants from the same family have similar needs and can be grouped together for convenience in their care and general maintenance.
- Many local nurseries sell bags of their own special mix of garden soil at very reasonable prices and will deliver if you require large amounts.
- Adding four stout poles surrounded with chicken wire to square foot gardens will protect from bad cases of "rabbits". Join the wires at one corner so that they can easily be separated for access to plants.
- To keep favourite hand tools close to where you work refit an old postal box or build a tool box. It can rest on a pole or be hung on a fence.
- Rutabaga comes from the Swedish word Rotobagge. It is also known as Swede or yellow turnip.
- In Britain turnips were carved into Jack-O-Lanterns for Halloween.
- Floating row covers are lightweight fabrics that allow a high percentage of water and light through but act as a barrier to above ground insects. They offer a small degree of frost protection.
- Floating row covers can be held down by old drink bottles filled with water or plastic bags filled with soil.
- Floating row covers can also be used with wire hoops
- Ornamental Kales and cabbages are edible, but are considered to be less tasty..

A LAZY GARDENER'S GUIDE TO MAKING A SQUARE FOOT GARDEN

*Julianne Lebreche,
Master Gardener of Ottawa Carleton*

Gardening runs in the family genes. I remember as a kid watching my mom make her vegetable garden. It was back breaking and laborious work double digging up the heavy sod, planting all those rows and, my goodness, all that weeding.

There just had to be an easier way of harvesting all those wholesome summer vegetables.

It was a lucky break therefore that this lazy gardener accidentally stumbled upon Mel Bartholomew's book *All New Square Foot Gardening*. Who knew how easy making a garden could be? One weekend, in a matter of a couple of hours, I'd constructed my first square foot garden and filled it with market grown herbs. By the end of the summer, I'd created two more.



The beauty of the square foot garden lies in its creation. It's so easy and simple. First, find a nice bright sunny space away from shady trees, hopefully, a space with at least six hours of sunshine a day. With any luck, it will be close to your kitchen so you won't need to walk too far to harvest your vegetables or snip your herbs. Once you've found your location, it's time to assemble your square foot box.

Now, if you're handy with a saw or happen to live with someone who is, then it's your lucky day. You'll save lots of money by constructing your own frame. Use any material, except treated wood that contains harmful chemicals. Pine or cedar works well, and your lumberyard will probably even cut it for you. The dimensions are four feet by four feet. Six inches is the usual height. Screw or nail the sides together to form an above ground box. This could even be a good winter project in your garage or basement.

If you're not handy, then you can just buy a commercial kit and assemble it. It will cost you more but really, whatever works and saves some time.



I assembled my kit in early spring and it took all of about twenty minutes. Although I have a green thumb, I'm all thumbs when it comes to assembly. You'll probably be faster. Next, I covered the inside area with some black landscape fabric. That saved the time needed to dig out the sod. What could be easier?

If you don't want to use landscape fabric, the alternative is to spread a thick pile of newspaper in your square foot garden space in the fall and wait until spring to plant. The newspaper will eventually break down, and so will the sod beneath it.

No matter if you decide on black fabric in spring or newspaper in the fall, you'll next add a mixture of one-third compost, one-third peat moss and one-third coarse grade vermiculite. Look for varieties that are organic if you're like me. A wheelbarrow will be useful, and so will a strong man looking for a job.

Your square foot garden is almost ready. What you'll need to finally create is a top fitting grid of one by one foot squares. You'll end up with sixteen altogether. Narrow four foot pieces of wood or string or even old venetian blind slats will do the trick. These are to divide up your spaces and allow for plant diversity. If you buy the kit, the grids are part of the package.

So now you're ready to plant. You can do seeds or plants. By deciding to avoid those traditional vertical rows, the square foot garden will allow you to plant more plants in less space. Look at the directions on your seed packet. If the recommendations are to plant 12 inches apart, then just plant one seed per box. If it recommends three inch spacing, then you can plant 16 per square foot grid. However way you do the math, you'll want to grow 1, 4, 9 or 16 plants per square foot.

If you think the assembly is easy, you'll find the watering and weeding easier still. When plants are grown intensively, weeds become less of a problem. You can bend down to pull them out no matter where you stand around the periphery of a square foot garden. Watering is simple too. No walking down long rows. Just stand and let your watering can do the work.



Maybe you're a weekend warrior in your garden like me. If so, you'll like this easy approach to growing your fresh vegetables and herbs. The only consideration is planting depth. Until the fabric breaks down, your depth will be limited. Six inches

isn't very deep, so carrots will be a challenge.

More advanced square foot gardeners can raise the height of the box, making it deeper for bigger plants. Raised square foot gardens are ideal to accommodate people in wheelchairs or older gardeners who prefer to stand.

It really is kitchen garden made easy. You'll use 80 percent less space than a traditional garden and can harvest five times more produce.

The things your mother didn't tell you, at least, when it comes to gardening.

References

Bartholomew, Mel. *All New Square Foot Gardening*, Cool Springs Press, 2005.

Calkins, Carroll C. *Illustrated Guide to Gardening in Canada*, Reader's Digest, 1979. Culinary Herb Guide, www.culinaryherbguide.com

Segall, Barbara, Pickford, Louise and Hammick, Rose. *A Handful of Herbs*. Ryland Peters & Small, Inc. New York. 2001.

Fawcett, Brian, *The Compact Garden*. Firefly Books. Willowdale, Ontario. 1992.

GROWING SUPERFOODS

*Dale Odorizzi,
Master Gardener of Lanark County*

Topping the list of any superfoods are members of the Brassicaceae family, especially the Genus Brassica or Cabbage. Ontario gardeners are lucky that we can grow so many of these powerhouses in our home gardens.

Brassica are a genus (group) of vegetables that are known for their disease fighting substances. They are low in calories, fat and sodium. They are an excellent source of fibre and contain a variety of essential vitamins and minerals. They contain phytochemicals and apparently have cancer fighting properties. Boiling this group of vegetables can reduce their healthy compounds so it is fortunate that they taste best raw, steamed, microwaved or stir fried.

These plants love the cool weather. Plant in full sun in fertile well drained soil with a pH between 6.0 and 6.8. They grow best in temperatures between 5°C and 25°C. If your transplants are exposed to temperatures below 5°C for 10 or more days, they may bolt (go to flower prematurely). High temperatures also cause bolting. Brassica have very shallow roots so keep the top few centimetres of soil from drying out. Once heads start to form, fluctuations in soil temperature can cause the heads to split. Mulch with organic matter to conserve moisture. They are heavy feeders so apply a good layer of compost around the plants.

If you buy brassica seedlings at a nursery in July or August, check that they are young, vigorous plants. Do not purchase if they look stunted as they will not produce.

What plants are in the Brassica Group?

Broccoli *Brassica oleracea* 'Italic group' - Start some seeds indoors for transplanting in late April/early May. They only take 55 days to mature from transplanting so plant repeatedly to space out your crops. Cut large heads before flowers open and leave small side clusters to develop. Store cold or freeze. If you want fresh broccoli for Thanksgiving, start your seeds the last week of June and transplant the August long weekend.



Broccoli – Large head



Side clusters

Brussels Sprouts *Brassica oleracea* 'Gemmifera group' - Grow for harvest in fall as cool weather during maturity produces the best flavor and quality. Sow seeds early to mid-summer and space 30 X 60 cm. Harvest when sprouts are hard and compact after frosty weather. With protection, they can be left in the garden all winter, even in the far north. Store cold (0°C).

Cabbage *Brassica oleracea* 'Capitata group' - Start seeds indoors for early transplants. They take from 70-100 days to mature. Cabbage can withstand temperatures of -9°C. Space 35 X 60 cm. Store cold with high humidity. Some people believe leaving the root intact in storage prolongs life of cabbage.

Cauliflower *Brassica oleracea* 'Botrytis group' - Set out 6 week old transplants 2-3 weeks before the average last frost date. Space 35 X 60 cm apart. Plants take 50-80 days to mature. Once heads start to form temperatures that are too hot or too cold will cause them to stop growing. When the head is about 5-8 cm pull three or four leaves over the head and fasten with a rubber band. This keeps the head white for the 4-8 days it takes to develop. Harvest the plant before the flower sections start to separate. Leave a ruff of leaves around the head to prolong keeping quality.



Kale *Brassica oleracea* 'Acephala group' - Start seeds indoors or directly seed in the garden. Kale matures in about 60 days so plant multiple crops. Harvest the bottom leaves and keep the crown. You will be able to harvest until mid-October or even longer.

Kohlrabi *Brassica oleracea* 'Gongylodes group' - Is a quick maturing plant so extend the harvest with multiple plantings. Sow seeds directly in the ground about 4 weeks before the last frost date. Thin seedlings to 15 cm apart. Do not wait too long to harvest. They are ready just 6-8 weeks after planting and are most tender and flavourful when the bulbs are 5-10 cm in diameter.

Turnip *Brassica rapa* - Sow your spring crop as soon as the soil can be worked. Do not thin seedlings if you are growing them for greens only. For roots, thin to 5-10 cm. Harvest turnips at any size. They do not store as well as Rutabaga.



Rutabaga *Brassica napus* - Seed direct in late spring after danger of frost has passed. Thin to 15 cm apart but be sure to save the pulled seedlings as they are delicious in a salad or stir fry. Rutabaga taste best if they have been touched by frost so harvest after a few frosts, once the root is 10 cm in diameter.

This group can have problems but most are easily managed with proper cultural treatment:

Fungal infections such as Alternaria leaf spot may occur on the leaves. The spots are brown with concentric rings that develop felt-like dark brown mould in wet weather. Follow proper watering techniques by watering in the morning and around the roots of the plant and practising good sanitation procedures such as removing any diseased plant or leaves.

Bacterial Black Rot causes a wilted, often yellowish V-shape on leaf margins. Veins may be black or brown. The bacteria overwinters in the seed or in plant refuse and is spread by dirty tools or splashing water. If Black Rot is found, collect plant remains and destroy them. Do not compost.

Cabbageworms are a very common problem in Ontario. Pale green caterpillars blend into the plant leaves. White butterflies are a warning that eggs are being laid. Inspect plants frequently and handpick and destroy caterpillars when seen. I find covering the plants with floating row covers is the easiest approach to prevent cabbageworms. Be sure to weight the covers down well and that there are no holes in them. They can be left on all season. Floating row covers allow 80% of the sun to reach your plants. They are also helpful in maintaining a not too hot/not too cold temperature.

Clubroot is a serious disease caused by soil borne fungus, acidic soils favour development of the fungus. Roots develop club like swellings. Dig out all affected roots at harvest and destroy. Eliminate weeds from the mustard family, such as yellow

cress, stinkweed and shepherd's purse. Incorporate agricultural lime or wood ash into your soil to raise the pH. If purchased seedlings have these swellings, destroy or return to garden centre.

These superfoods are easy to grow and need little maintenance. The above mentioned problems are easy to manage and I hope will not discourage you from enjoying these members of the Brassica group.

BOOK REVIEW

*Julianne Lebreche,
Master Gardener of Ottawa Carleton*

All New Square Food Gardening

Mel Bartholomew; Cool Springs Press; 2006
ISBN- 10: 1591865484

For those interested in growing more in less space, this book is a useful guide. It's a primer written for the novice gardener, with the ABCs of square foot gardening clearly explained. As Mel Bartholomew points out, he's an engineer, not a gardener (even though he's a bestselling garden author). His skill comes in keeping gardening simple, fast, efficient and easy.

Bartholomew's style is clear, straight forward and witty. There are ample photos and illustrations to inspire any reader. Just as constructing a square foot gardening is an easy weekend garden project, this book is an easy read to accompany any such planned project.

The book explains how to plan a square-foot garden, including how to build the boxes and structures required. There is ample detail on how to put together a soil mix that will give the gardener the best 'bang for their buck', with the promise of abundant, healthy plants and minimal weeding and watering. There are chapters on vertical gardening, extending the seasons, and special gardens for the aging gardener and people with disabilities. Children and adults are encouraged to grow the square foot way.

A useful guide near the end of the book describes various vegetables, herbs and flowers, with specifics on how to plant, grow and harvest the edibles. Problem pests, tips and hints are provided. As well, there are details on how to prepare and use the vegetables. From soil to table, the content is practical.

It's a useful addition to any gardener's library, and a good reference tool. Gardening needn't be too complicated. Bartholomew makes it sound easy and fun, just the way it should be.

RECIPE

*Susan Bicket,
Master Gardener of Lanark County*

Cabbage Salad

This is a very flexible recipe, so don't be afraid to adjust proportions or change ingredients. For example the celery can be changed to apple, adding Walnuts adds another texture

Shredded White or red cabbage
Grated carrot (2 large)
Finely chopped celery – (2 sticks)
Sultanas – generous handful or to taste
Vinaigrette (approx. 1/3 cup or to taste) or favourite salad dressing: - mayonnaise, yoghurt dressing, sesame dressing, poppy seed...

Mix and allow flavours to mingle overnight

Watch for **Trowel Talk** the Master Gardeners of Ottawa Carleton electronic monthly gardening newsletter available on the 15th at <http://mgottawa.mgoi.ca/>

Visit the Almonte online community newspaper '**The Millstone**' - <http://millstonenews.com/> -for a column by David Hinks of the Ottawa Carleton Master Gardeners; under the Gardening tab

Photographs: Square foot gardening – Julianne Lebreche, Cauliflower, rutabaga – Edythe Falconer, Broccoli – Dale Odorizzi

The Edible Garden logo was created by Jon Last (jonlast13@rogers.com)

Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton and Master Gardeners of Lanark County are member groups of Master Gardeners of Ontario Inc., a registered charity with the mission of providing gardening advice to homeowners

Need help? Contact us at:

Telephone Help Line: 613-236-0034 - Wednesday and Thursday 1–3 pm (all year)

Ottawa E-mail Help Line: mgoc_helpline@yahoo.ca - monitored daily

Lanark E-mail help Line: lanarkmg@gmail.com