

GROW Home, Garden & Outdoors

How to GROW a LOT on a LOT



Photos by Kathleen Ellyn/Chieftain
Peggy Goebels' great-grandson, Blaine Fisher, 5, stands proudly outside of his great-grandma's greenhouse in Wallowa.

By Kathleen Ellyn
Wallowa County Chieftain

Limited garden space? No problem. There are as many ways to make it work as there are gardeners. To prove that point, we introduce two very different examples of gardening on a city lot.

Let's begin with two enthusiastic gardeners from Enterprise who are making the most of limited funds and a tiny backyard.

Jeremy Koerperich and Jeff Wingo share the tiny backyard of a house on 7th Street in Enterprise that is already making the most efficient use of space possible. Jeremy rents the house and Jeff rents the mother-in-law add-on.

Their garden spaces, set perpendicular to each other in the postage-stamp-sized backyard, measure about 8 by 12 feet each.

"You work with what you've got," said Jeremy.

Needless to say, neither fellow expects to have a commercial garden, but since both are absolutely dedicated to growing organic and need to grow as economically as possible, the two neighbors are excited about sharing their knowledge, skills and tools.

Jeremy has the added benefit of a narrow flowerbed that runs the length of the house — half of which he discovered had been planted with strawberries sometime in the past. He quickly ripped out the grass and is planning not only a double crop of strawberries interspersed with runner beans, but a "science experiment" as well.

He's going to clone his best strawberry plant to fill in gaps and extend his strawberry field the length of the house.

"Cloning is such an easy way to do that. It's a nice little



Blaine Fisher enjoys the garden inside his great-grandma's greenhouse.



Two Enterprise micro-gardeners, Jeff Wingo and Jeremy Koerperich pose by the shared greenhouse where their organic gardens begin.

experiment," he said.

Cloning sounds pretty state-of-the-art, but it's actually something a lot of window box gardeners have already done.

Most everyone knows that if you pick an African Violet leaf, soak it in water for a bit, and plant it — you get a new African Violet.

It's the same with strawberries, peppers, tomatoes and a host of other plants.

So, Jeremy selected his best strawberry plant, cut a few leaves off at a 45-degree angle, shaved the stems just a bit to encourage root growth, dipped them in Rootblast Growth Formula (available locally) and put them directly into the dirt.

"Cloning saves me about three weeks of growing time over planting seed," Jeremy said. "And I get exact replicas of my best plant instead of having to wait to see how each plant produces."

Jeff Wingo, for his part, is sharing his greenhouse space. Jeff has two greenhouses, both tiny little portable houses with zip-on plastic covers. These micro greenhouses, (19 inches long by 27 inches wide by 62

inches tall) cost about \$80.

Jeff uses them to start his own vegetable seeds in March — simply dragging the greenhouses through the sliding glass door of his apartment at night to keep them from freezing and then dragging them out in the morning to make the most of the sunshine.

He's been rewarded with egg-cartons full of various vegetable starts he will soon transplant into both micro-gardens.

He's got spinach, basil, peppers, carrots, cabbage and zucchini sprouted already.

Jeff has also kept himself in leaf lettuce by planting the core of a butter lettuce he purchased at the local grocery store. Leaf lettuce will continue to put on new leaf from an old core for months. Celery is another plant that grows well from an old core.

Both men are "organic all the way," said Wingo, and a conversation about fertilizers and soil amendments will quickly convince you that they've both done their homework. Wingo favors Alaska Fish Fertilizer and BlackGold worm castings, "Oh yeah, you've got to have Black Gold worm castings," he said.

Koerperich favors the Fox Farm line of fertilizers including Happy Frog Multipurpose fertilizer and agrees with Wingo on the Black Gold worm castings.

The Koerperich/Wingo shared garden on a city lot in Enterprise is miles away from our next city lot garden, both in distance and purpose.

Our next garden is Peggy Goebel's semi-pro garden in Wallowa.

Peggy has gardened "for, oh, 20 years," she said. But three years ago she saw son-in-law's greenhouse and developed a desire for extended gardening seasons, raised beds, and the ability to share a lot more produce with others.

The result has been the addition of a 20 by 30-foot greenhouse to go with a newly designed outdoor garden of about the same square footage.

Peggy filled her raised beds with dirt from "up Bear Creek" she purchased from the Henderson Logging Company. She mixed that with compost, and "a little Miracle Grow."

Most of her plants are started from seed, she said.

She rotates crops in the greenhouse, starting her greens in March and then letting them die out in May as the weather warms sufficiently to grow greens outside. New crops take the place of the greenhouse greens as they move outside.

Some crops even winter over; she planted spinach last fall and it "just sat there" until spring. Then, up it came. It's almost done in the greenhouse, now, and about to become an outdoor crop.

She also sows double-crops — growing cabbage between her rows of lettuce, for instance.

She's growing a lot of tomatoes this year in addition to the various greens she sells through the Lower Valley Growers Network. Since tomatoes are notorious for sucking up the soil nutrients, she waters her tomatoes with a special solution; she crushes eggshells and pours water over them, let's them soak overnight, and waters the tomatoes with that.

She has drip irrigation throughout the greenhouse and has so far managed the whole operation on city water.

"They haven't started charging us the new rates (since the completion of the water project) so we'll see this year if it's economical," she said.

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