



Summer Gardens

Square Foot Gardening

Interested in growing vegetables, but don't have a lot of space? Square foot gardening may be your solution. According to the Square Foot Gardening Foundation, this method, which separates a gardening box into 12-inch by 12-inch squares, with a different crop in each square, saves time, tools, water, and of course, space.

The popularity of square foot gardening is growing throughout the world, particularly in Third World countries where residents rely on home-grown food to eat but rarely have much space to plant a garden.

This inventive form of gardening was started by Mel Bartholomew, gardened as a hobby after he retired from his work as a civil engineer. It can be done on rooftops, yards and plots of all sizes, such as community gardens.

While there is some strategy to square foot gardening, it isn't harder to grow successful square foot garden, and there are many ways in which it's easier — little weeding, no rototilling and no heavy tools. It starts with a box, good dirt and an irrigation system.

The Box

Square foot gardening boxes are available to buy, but you can also build your own. Use untreated wood, or only treat the outside of the box, to avoid the chemicals having contact with the soil. Brick, cement, vinyl and even recycled plastic can be used to build the box. Put weed mat on ground beneath the box to ensure you

don't get weeds in your garden.

The Soil

It's just dirt, right? Not really. While you can garden in many types of soil, the foundation recommended equal parts coarse grade vermiculite, sphagnum peat moss and organic compost. For a 4-foot by 4-foot box, you need about one cubic yard of soil. Squash may need a little extra space as well. Tomatoes and peas will need some structure to climb up.

The Grid

Add the grid using old window blinds or wood, showing the gardener exactly how much space is available for each crop. This could also be done using twine. The most important factor is to be able to easily delineate each square.

The Plants

Most backyard garden crops can also be grown in a square foot garden. If you want to grow tubers (potatoes, yams), carrots or other root vegetables, ensure your garden is deep enough that they can grow underneath the soil.

Future Years

For best success in your garden year to year, plant different crops in each square so the nutrients in the soil are spread out and not repeatedly used by the same plant.

Stay Cool and on Budget

As the temperatures go up, so do many people's electric bills as air conditioners crank on. While people in some parts of the country will always have to rely on cooling systems, the U.S. Department of Energy recommended a number of steps people can take to minimize how much you have to run the AC.

Take Advantage of Cooler Hours

If the nights get cooler, turn off your air conditioner and open your windows when the sun goes down and the temperature drops enough to be comfortable. In the morning, shut the windows and blinds to keep the cool air inside. You can also install window coverings that prevent heat from coming in through the windows.

Turn it Up

Your living room doesn't need to feel like a sweat lodge, but do set the thermostat as high as you can while still being comfortable. When you're away for long periods of time, set the thermostat to a higher temperature. When you return to a hot home, don't set it lower than you normally would; this won't cool your house any faster and likely will cost more. Consider a programmable thermostat to help keep your house temperature reasonable.

Use Fans

Combined with air conditioning, the use of ceiling fans allow you to set your thermostat about 4 degrees higher than you normally would with no noticeable change, because it moves the cool air throughout the house. Use a fan in the bathroom during a shower or bath, which will



remove the heat and humidity from your home.

Keep the Oven Off

Cook on the stove or on a grill to avoid heating up your house with the oven. You can also avoid turning on lights, which add to the ambient temperature, and use the washing machine, dryer and dishwasher only when you have full loads and not during the heat of the day. Even curling irons, hair dryers, computers and televisions can contribute heat to your home.

Get Checked Out

Make sure your air conditioner or swamp cooler is running as efficiently as possible by getting it checked out by a professional. You also can get your home assessed to find cracks, broken seals and other openings that allow hot air in and your cooled air out. Caulk seams and add weatherstripping to block that air flow.

Oven-free summer dinner ideas

Mid- to late-summer is appropriately known as "the dog days of summer" because it can be so doggone hot. The humid, sticky conditions of late summer can make people feel sluggish and looking for ways to cool down. The idea of warming up the house by turning on the oven to cook a meal may be especially unappealing.

Recipes that require little to no cooking — and no stove — can be a home cook's best friend as summer progresses. Here are a few ideas to get started.

Grilled paninis

Gather some favorite sandwich fixings, such as sliced meats, vegetables and cheeses, and head to the grill. Put ingredients between two slices of crusty bread and place on the grill over low or indirect heat. Weigh down the sandwiches with cast-iron pans to flatten out the sandwiches.

Savory salads

Cool salads can be refreshing and light on hot summer evenings. Salads can range from tradition lettuce- or greens-based salads to pasta salads and chicken or tuna salads. Mix ingredients in advance and store them in the refrigerator. Serve chilled with toppings like shredded cheese, bacon bits and croutons to dress up the salads.

Cold buffet

Summer is a time to avoid hearty, belly-filling meals. Instead, produce a spread of finger foods, ranging from crackers and cheese to vegetables and dips. Fresh fruit also can accompany buffet-style meals, as can slices of Italian bread and homemade tomato bruschetta.

When the weather is hot, think cool, no-fuss meals that keep the stove off but bellies full.

An Easy, Beautiful Flower Garden

Perennials are the types of low maintenance flower that brighten up a yard or garden but don't require much attention from gardeners. Unlike annuals, perennials last from year to year instead of needing to be replanted each year. Better Homes & Gardens collected a couple dozen of the best perennials.

Here's a roundup of the easiest, most beautiful of these blooms.

Blanket flower is a drought- and heat-resistant wildflower that produces bright pink and yellow petals in a daisy-like bloom. This flower can grow in poor soil and blooms through the summer and into the fall. It is short-lived.

Russian sage is a tall perennial filled with stalks that produce an abundance of tiny blue flowers. This plant blooms in the late summer and likes the sun; it survives well in drought and

They bloom in late summer and autumn and appear in pink, blue, purple and red, growing as tall as five feet. They can grow in flower beds or the borders of gardens and also look great in a vase inside.

Yarrow is the flower for the first-time gardener or the returning gardener who may not have a green thumb. The flower can thrive in environments throughout the United States and can survive cold, drought and heat. Yarrow pop up as bright, flat-topped clusters in pink, yellow, white and red that last from late spring to early fall.

Black-eyed Susans bloom from midsummer until the first frost comes, often continuing to show off its golden petals repeatedly throughout the season. The flower is drought-tolerant and grows well in hot, sunny environments.

Hardy hibiscus, unlike its more delicate tropical cousin, can overwinter as far north as Zone 4 in the USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map, in which winter temperatures can drop below zero. They can grow to be several feet tall, with yellow, pink and red flowers the size of plates. They need sun and a rich soil and won't grow in spring until soil temperatures heat up.

Daylilies bloom better in the sun, but they'll still produce flowers when growing in the shade. They can grow in a variety of soil conditions and are able to survive drought. All daylilies need is a lack of competition; keep grass and weeds away from this yellow-tinted white blooms.

heat. More than anything else, Russian sage needs room to grow.

Asters channel daisies as they bloom, with a beautiful sunlike appearance of petals surrounding a bright center.



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