

LESSON 1 FOOD FROM THE GARDEN

Home grown produce has a special quality. Some say it tastes better, others believe it is just healthier. And there is no doubt it is cheaper!

Watching plants grow from seed to harvest, and knowing that the armful of vegies and herbs you have just gathered for the evening meal will be on the table within an hour or two of harvest, can be an exciting and satisfying experience.

Believe it or not, you can grow a lot of food in an average-sized garden. The key to success is planning. Choose what you want to grow, how you intend to grow it, and how much you will grow very carefully. There is always the danger of having heaps of spinach and not enough strawberries, and who prefers to eat spinach instead of strawberries with cream?



Lemons are indispensable in the kitchen



Nuts, great in cooking or on their own

WHAT CAN YOU PRODUCE IN YOUR GARDEN?

What you produce from your garden will depend on the amount of space that you have. Obviously, the larger the property, the more potential you will have to produce a large variety of crops. Large properties can support a range of fruit trees, vines, vegetables, herbs, grains and even hay and straw as well as animals and chickens.

Of course, you can grow more produce given more land. You may also be more successful in a mild climate with good rainfall than in a dry one; however, it is still possible to grow at least some food, just about anywhere, and in any climate and circumstance.

- Herbs for cooking and sprouts for salads can be produced on a kitchen bench.

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Suggested Tasks

Look around your property. Assess the possible areas for growing vegetables. Think about whether you could:

- Remove some turf to create a bed
- Grow vegetables in a raised bed built up over some poor ground
- Grow vegetables in containers
- Make use of vertical space e.g. grow beans up a wall.

Spend no more than 10 minutes doing this

- A balcony, veranda or courtyard can produce buckets of vegetables, berries and herbs if you go about it the right way.
- Even an arid desert garden can produce food, if you choose appropriate plants and apply a few horticultural tricks to the way you grow them.

There are a wide range of vegetables and fruiting plants that will grow well in pots and containers. So if space is fairly limited you can still experience the joys and rewards of growing some of your own fruits and vegetables. However, the smaller the property, the more thought you will need to put into what you do and don't grow. Ask yourself: what would I like to produce? Then take it from there.



Vegetable gardens can create ambience

On a small property you will also need to use all your available space efficiently. Make an inventory of your garden and think about how each feature or structure could be used or modified to produce something. Here are some examples:

- Walls or fences for supporting climbing plants and espaliers; to shelter plants and to improve fruit ripening.
- Pergolas to support climbers.
- Verandas and balconies for growing potted plants that need extra protection, or for use as a potting area, tool storage, or for drying herbs and other produce.
- Garden sheds can be altered to add a lean-to shade-house, greenhouse, or chicken run.

- Swimming pools can be converted into an aquaculture garden that supports fish, ducks and productive water plants.
- Incorporate terraces supported by retaining walls on sloping sites.
- Rotate vegetable and crop plantings to get the most out of each bed of soil.
- Make the most of window boxes, pot stands and shelving in greenhouses.



A decorative platter of fresh produce



Delicious fruit pies

USE GREENHOUSES

Greenhouse growing is another possibility that will help you protect crops from weather extremes. Greenhouses allow you to modify the climate to control the conditions that will prevent heat stress, cold temperatures, drying winds or lack of soil moisture and soil nutrients. They can also help you control pollination. Furthermore, a greenhouse will also give you added protection from such pests as birds, rabbits or other animals chomping through all your hard work!



Greenhouses protect herbs from extreme weather conditions

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Suggested Tasks

Do an internet search for “growing vegetables in small spaces”. See if you can find some other ideas about how to make use of small garden spaces. Spend only 10 minutes on this.

You may choose to have your greenhouse set up with a hydroponic system so all the plants are automatically fed and watered throughout the growing season. This of course may be your last resort approach to growing produce! You may prefer organic techniques with plants growing in organically enriched soils, in raised beds or pots. You might like to use chickens to control insect pests, pecking

in your garden beds or around your pots and fertilizing the soil at the same time.

Alternatively, you may already be hooked on growing vegetables and want to set up a much larger and more serious growing area, so you can grow enough to sell through market stalls or to locals.

The sky is the limit for your new interest!

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Suggested Tasks

Conduct a quick internet search for “home hydroponic vegetable system”. Are there any systems which look like they would be suitable for your property? What vegetables would they best suit?



The best: freshly picked and cooked produce