

10 Steps to Easy Grid Gardening

A grid garden is essentially like taking a full vegetable garden and condensing it down so that it fits in a 4 foot by 4 foot box. In order to make the “box” more efficient and to allow for a greater variety of vegetables to be grown, the box is gridded into a series of smaller boxes.

Grid gardening is easy to do, economical, and efficient. Specifically, grid gardening requires up to 80% less space than a traditional garden, eliminates all tilling, weeding and digging, and can harvest up to 5 times more produce than a conventional garden. In addition, you get to select what you grow and how you grow it, which means no pesticides or chemicals. The 4' X 4' size allows you to easily reach in from any side to work with the plants, as well.

1. Location, location, location. When figuring out where to begin to build your garden, look out for an area that receives about 6–8 hours of sunlight, that is clear of trees or shrubs that might interfere, and is not prone to puddles or excess moisture. For greatest convenience, you should try to position the garden close to your home.

2. When planning your garden, you must also consider layout. Always think in squares, and specifically, 4 foot by 4 foot squares. If you're planning on building more than one grid garden, be sure to plan for aisles, so that you can access and tend to your garden without disrupting or destroying the other boxes.

3. To build the box frame, you can use just about any material except treated wood, which contains chemicals that can seep into the soil and, thus, the food you eat. We recommend taking a trip to your local lumber yard to scope out some 1 by 6 or 2 by 6 lumber. In most cases, the lumber yard will be able to cut the wood for you at little to no cost. Once home, layout the lumber to form boxes and secure corners with deck screws.

4. Now that you have created the box frame, it's time to fill it with something that will nourish and fortify your garden. We recommend filling the box with a mixture of 1/3 compost, 1/3 peat moss and 1/3 coarse grade vermiculite. When purchasing these items, be sure to look for organic varieties that contain no fertilizers or chemicals. Alternatively, if you already make your own compost, feel free to use that to fill the boxes (although you'll still need the peat moss and vermiculite to help retain moisture and keep the soil aerated..)

5. Now it's time to create the grid that will form the one-foot squares within the box frame. This grid, which can be made shorter to fit inside the box or be

secured on top of the box, will keep your garden organized and improve manageability. Much like the box frame, the grid can be made from just about any chemical-free material, including wood, nylon rope or plastic strips. Use screws to secure the grid at each place where the strips intersect and to attach the grid to the box. The grid should be left in place all season.

6. Depending on the mature size of the plant, you'll want to grow either 1, 4, 9 or 16 plants per square foot. For example, if the seed packet recommends that the plants be spaced 12 inches apart, you'll plant 1 per grid box. If it recommends a 6 inch spacing, you can plant 4, if it asks for 4 inch spacing, you can plant 9, and if it recommends 3 inch spacing, you can plant 16 per square foot grid.

7. Now it's time to start planting! Since the space is so small, you'll want to use your fingers to make a shallow hole in the soil and place one or two seeds in each spot. You should then cover the seed, but be sure not to pack the soil so that air and water can penetrate.

8. Once planted, you'll need to water the plants regularly. Since the garden is so small, its best to water by hand and to use water that is room temperature or slightly warmer (it helps warm the soil and promote growth, especially in the early stages of the plants development). Saved rain water is ideal.

9. Once the plants have matured, you can harvest continually. Once the crop has been removed, dig out any roots or debris, add new compost, and plant a new seed (or seeds) in that square.

10. You might want to set up a simple irrigation system in the early gestation period. Here's an economical way to create one. Take a series of six or so water bottles and poke a small hole in each using a sewing needle or safety pin. Fill the bottles with water and use your finger to dig a small trench about the length of the bottle in each grid square. Place the bottle, pin hole down, in the soil. Over the course of the day the water will drain from the bottles into the soil, leaving you with a well-watered garden. For best results, fill the water bottles back up each morning, which will allow the soil to dry out across the day and reduce the chance of fungus or disease developing.