

GRID GARDENING

Time Saving! Water Saving! Space Saving! Money Saving!

What is Grid Gardening?

Grid Gardening is a simple, systematic and densely planted gardening method that adapts to diverse experience, ability, and climate zones. Grow all you need in 20% of the space required for a conventional row garden. Save time, water, space and money. Grid Gardening is based upon the concept of *Square Foot Gardening* popularized by Mel Bartholomew in a 1981 book by that name, and subsequent PBS TV series.

What are the Basics of Grid Gardening?

- GARDEN LAYOUT—Arrange garden in “plots” of various sizes not in “rows.” For easy access, create 3’x6’, 4’ by 4’ or 4’ x 8’ plots. Divide plot into 12” squares with an overlay grid.
- PLANTING BOXES—Build planting boxes with 1” x 6” untreated lumber. Deeper boxes are needed for some plants like potatoes and carrots.
- AISLES—Space boxes just far enough apart (1-3’) to provide access. Smaller aisles means more growing space
- SOIL—Fill boxes with special soil mix: 1/3 compost, 1/3 peat moss, 1/3 coarse vermiculite. Mel’s Soil Mix Recipe follows.
- GRID—Make a square foot grid for the top of each planting plot to divide the space for planting. Use wood strips, blind slats, string, yard sticks or simply eyeball the dimensions.
- CARE—Do not walk in the planting bed. Tend garden from the aisles. If a few weeds sprout they are easily removed from the loose soil. Beds are easy to protect from weather if bed is constructed with hoop mounts to hold PVC pipe hoops and crop cover.
- PLANT SELECTION—Plant different flowers, vegetables, or herbs in each square foot, using spacing of 1, 4, 9 or 16 plants per square foot depending on size of plants at maturity. Small plants (ex. carrots) are planted 16 plants per square foot. Medium plants (ex. beets) are planted 9 plants per square foot. Large plants (ex. Lettuce) are planted 4 plants per square foot. Extra large plants (ex. tomatoes) are planted 1 per square foot. Crop rotation happens naturally as plants are harvested and new plants are sown.
- SEEDS—Plant sparingly. Plant 2 or 3 seeds per hole. If using transplants, plant in a shallow saucer-shaped depression.
- WATER—Water seeds and new transplants gently by hand. For ease, drip irrigation may be installed prior to planting.
- HARVEST—After harvesting a grid space, add fresh soil mix to replenish nutrients and replant with a new and different crop.

What is the best location for my Grid Garden?

Chose an area that has good drainage and gets at least 6 hours of sunshine each day. Avoid areas with trees and shrubs (roots and shade may interfere.) Locate garden close to the house for easy access and weather protection.

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How do I make Mel's Soil Mix?¹

To make a 24 cubic foot batch of soil mix—enough to fill three 4'x 4' boxes—use:

- Two 4-cubic foot bags of coarse vermiculite.
- One 3.9 cubic foot bale of peat moss (peat moss is compressed and will expand to almost 8 cubic feet.)
- 4-5 bags, or 8 cubic feet total, of mixed compost.

Mix ingredients outdoors on a non-windy day. If mixing indoors, choose a space that is well ventilated. The materials are dusty so wear protective masks and eyewear. Mix the ingredients by emptying them onto a large tarp. Once the materials are mixed and moist the dust will settle. Some people wet down the dry materials before mixing in order to keep the dust down. However, that makes the mixture heavy and hard to maneuver. Spray *lightly* with a hose mister to keep down the dust.

Open and mix bags of compost together. Add compressed peat moss breaking up any lumps. Add vermiculite and then gently mix the 3 ingredients with a rake or hoe being careful not to cut the tarp underneath. Alternatively, have 2 people--one on each corner of the tarp--lifting the ends of the tarp towards the pile. The ingredients will turn and roll as this is done. Move to the other two corners, and pull the tarp the other way. Keep working around the pile until well mixed.

NOTES:

If the compost comes in bags that are measured in weight rather than cubic feet, add equal parts of the 3 ingredients or 1/3 vermiculite, 1/3 peat moss and 1/3 compost.

Prior to putting the soil mix in the planting boxes, remove weeds/grass growing under the box and install commercial weed barrier cloth, a layer of cardboard, or a thick layer of newspaper to keep weeds and grass from growing inside your box. Once soil is mixed, place in the prepared boxes. Irrigate Mel's Mix all the way to the bottom of the box before planting. It holds lots of water!

Any leftover soil mix may be stored in the bags the ingredients came in. Additional soil mix will be added each time a square is replanted to replenish the nutrients needed for plant health.

References:

1.Bartholomew, Mel (2006). All New Square Foot Gardening. Cool Springs Press.

2.The above text adapted from: <http://ce.byu.edu/edweek/handouts/2011/sfg.pdf>
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