

Gardening during COVID-19

By Rebecca Miller-Cripps

Stephen Cantu is a Master Gardener with the Master Gardener Association of San Diego County. Confined to a wheelchair 37 years ago by a job-site accident, he became a Paralympian and noticed that accessibility issues often exist even when organizations and events try to focus on mobility challenges.

He developed a program he calls FIG – Friendly, Inclusive Gardens. In interviews with The San Diego Union-Tribune* and the University of California**, he talks about his idea of a cradle-to-grave garden that can be accessed by everyone from toddlers to great-grandparents.

One of the questions from the San Diego interviewer referred to our current social distancing and sheltering-in-place. Did Mr. Cantu have any advice for those who are seriously considering starting a home garden? He recommended starting very small, keeping it simple and building on success. He also noted that Master Gardener websites have “tons” of information about gardening.

According to Cantu, “Start out with a small kitchen garden of mostly herbs, something that is in small containers that you can grow next to your kitchen. Start simply, and don’t buy anything until you have an understanding of your needs. For a small garden, all you really need are your hands, a pair of gloves, some soil, and a few herbs.”

In addition to herbs, according to “Central Sierra Vegetable Planting Dates” <http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.org/files/140318.pdf> in April (below 2500 feet elevation), you can plant asparagus, beans, potatoes, radishes, beets, carrots, celery and Swiss chard. If you live above 2500 feet, you can try beets, broccoli and cabbage, and various kinds of lettuce. Everyone can try planting peas and lettuce, but temperatures will start warming from now on and your plants may suffer or not produce.

Did you know that you don’t always need to purchase seeds or started plants in order to produce new garden crops? If you are trying to prevent boredom in your stay-at-home children, try planting parts of vegetables that you already have in your refrigerator or cupboard. The root end of a clump of celery or the top of a carrot (where the leaves attach) can be cut and planted in soil. It will produce new celery stalks above ground or a new carrot below ground. Or try the seed from an avocado, suspended on toothpicks with part of the seed touching water in a small glass. Or bury the entire seed in a pot of soil. If you still have a pumpkin left over from Halloween, try planting some of the seeds. A potato can be cut into sections and planted in the ground as an experiment to see what will grow.

Gardening is not only an activity that can be done by everyone in the family. It also relieves stress and provides food for the future. It gets you outdoors into the fresh air, provides an antidote to all the shrieking headlines, and provides healthy exercise that builds strong bones and muscles. For lots more information, check out the various Master Gardener websites available within the University of California Cooperative Extension Central Sierra webpage <http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.edu/> Click on the UCCE Master Gardener Program and then on each

county's program to find information specific to your county. By clicking on the "More" link at the top of the specific county program page, you will also find Gardening Tips that include planting dates and articles about insects that are NOT practicing social distancing right now (trying to inject a little levity here).

Another excellent source of gardening information is The California Garden Web(site) <http://cagardenweb.ucanr.edu/index.cfm> With the Master Gardener motto of "Advice to Grow By ... Ask Us!" it offers a wealth of information on everything from drought to poisonous plants, flowers to vegetables and an alphabetized glossary of garden terms.

And, of course, don't forget the Integrated Pest Management page at <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/> It will help you deal with all those insects that will soon be swarming to the new, succulent growth provided by our recent precipitation and warming April temperatures.

Happy Gardening!

*<https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/lifestyle/people/story/2020-03-21/making-gardens-accessible-and-inclusive-important-to-master-gardener>

**https://ucanr.edu/Focus_Areas/?focus_area_id=6

Rebecca Miller-Cripps is a University of California Cooperative Extension Master Gardener of Tuolumne County who is currently growing chives, garlic chives, green onions and arugula.

UCCE Central Sierra Master Gardeners can answer home gardening questions. Call 209-533-5912 in Tuolumne County, 209-754-2880 in Calaveras County or fill out our [easy-to-use problem questionnaire](#). Check out our [UCCE Master Gardener website](#). You can also find us on Facebook.