Let's Garden

Options for the Home Gardener without Acreage

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Introduction

This publication addresses itself primarily to the beginning gardener and to methods of vegetable gardening not usually used in the past. If you are already a successful gardener, CONGRATULATIONS!! However, even the long-time gardener might find a new idea in this brochure.

The author of this brochure lives in Tehama County. So the focus is from the perspective of Tehama County. However, the ideas put forth could be applied to many places on the face of the earth especially those which have similar weather conditions to Tehama County.

Gardening conditions in the valley portions of counties which are Tehama County’s neighbors (Shasta, Glenn, Butte, Colusa, etc.) would be similar to Tehama County. They are all part of the Sacramento Valley.

Gardening conditions in the foothills and mountains of eastern and western Tehama County can vary considerably within short distances and changes in elevation. It would be difficult to give guidelines regarding gardening in the foothills and mountains in a short, general publication such as this one.

The temperatures in Tehama County in the summer are hot (95°-115°F) with some drying winds. However, a short period of inclement weather usually occurs at least once during summer. Depending on the duration and severity, some fruits or vegetables can be affected. Winter temperatures are cold (25°-35°F) with cold winds and, infrequently, snow. The valley portion of Shasta County is more likely to get snow than Tehama County. Counties south of Tehama County are less likely to get snow. In February there is usually a period of unseasonably warm weather. Therefore, gardeners are reminded there will be more winter weather in March and April. That does not mean the gardener need wait until May to start planting. Just be prepared to give plants some added protection.

The Sacramento Valley has many small microclimates. A microclimate is the climate of a specific place within an area, contrasted with the climate of the area as a whole. A microclimate can be as small as a back yard of a home in a subdivision or as large as several hundred acres.

The soils in Tehama County vary from the rocky, clay soils on the west side of the Sacramento River to the river-bottom soils east of the river. Closer to the eastern foothills, the soils again are more like the west side.

Information about soils in your area can be obtained at your local library.

Wayne Thomas

Quite possibly the home gardener of Tehama County cultivated his garden in this fashion in times past.

[Image]

THE GARDEN

A garden is borne of patience, trial and error. But all the work is worth it when you bite into a delicious piece of fruit or vegetable and feel the pride and satisfaction of having grown something yourself.

Each garden is individual and unique. It represents the strengths of the person(s) nurturing the garden.

There are as many gardening philosophies as there are gardeners. The purpose of this publication is not to “tell” you how to garden, but to give you some ideas and options.

Read this entire publication even if you think a certain part may not apply to your garden situation. You may find something helpful there. For example, you may be a young, healthy person, but something in the special needs section may be useful to you.

The garden we often picture in our minds is rectangular or square and is set on a piece of flat ground. Vegetables and fruits are planted in neat rows.

The garden of today may or may not look like the conventional garden of yesteryear. Many people live in apartments and do not have access to any ground. Or the person wanting to garden may use a walker or be in a wheelchair. Children are encouraged to garden. Those people on a very limited budget may want to garden.

TYPES OF GARDENS

In-ground and raised-bed gardens

There are many books, magazines and newspaper articles which address themselves to these types of gardens. A small publication such as this could not do justice to the countless philosophies of people who have these kinds of gardens. It is suggested you visit your local library, garden centers, University of California Cooperative Extension office, book stores, gardeners who have in-ground or raised-bed gardens and other sources about these types of gardens.

Container Gardening

There are situations in which gardening in the ground or large raised beds are not feasible. Another possibility is gardening in containers. These containers could be plastic, wood, terra cotta, ceramic, concrete, etc. The size could be one to twenty gallons or larger.
One or more plants can be planted in the container depending on its size and how the plants grow. For example, a ten-gallon pot can easily support a bush tomato plant and a squash. The tomato grows upright and the squash is allowed to drape over the pot and onto the ground outside the pot.

Containers can be partially buried in the ground. There are two advantages to doing this:
1. Less water is needed.
2. The ground soil acts as insulation to the pot, the soil in the pot and the plant(s) in the pot. It cools the pot and contents in the summer and keeps them warmer in the winter. The soil which has been dug out of the ground can be piled around the outside of the pot above the ground to act as insulation.

Mulch can be put over the soil in the pot. This also acts as insulation. Keep the mulch about six inches from the plant(s) in the pot. This allows air to flow between the mulch and the plant. It also prevents diseases and pests from having adverse effects on the plant(s).

A vegetable garden in an already landscaped garden

Perhaps you live on one-fourth or one-third acre of land in a subdivision. Your yard is already landscaped with trees and bushes. You may even have a swimming pool. But maybe there are some small areas here and there in which you usually plant annual flowers (flowers which are planted, live, and die within a period of a few months). Plant vegetables instead of flowers. For example, two cherry tomato plants do not require much space. And it is fun to pick a cherry tomato, pop it in your mouth, bite down on it and savor the delicious taste.

Maybe there is a spot in your yard which is neglected for whatever reason. Maybe it is a narrow strip along the fence (for example, next to the concrete pad in front of the garage), and there is access to water. This would be a perfect place to plant squash that is trained up the fence with the help of a wood frame or netting with large squares. Let the tendrils grasp the wood or net frame. Support the growing squash fruit in nylon stockings or pantyhose that are no longer usable for their original purpose. Slip the squash in the stocking and tie the stocking to the frame on which the squash plant is growing. The stocking will expand as the squash is growing. When the squash
is ready to harvest, pull it out of the stocking and use the stocking again.

Gardening on a patio or terrace of an apartment

There is a large segment of the population which lives in apartments or condominiums and has no access to land on which to plant a garden. These people can be successful gardeners by using containers.

ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS ask permission from your landlord, manager, home owners association board, etc., before planting anything on a patio, terrace, or deck. If you live in an upstairs apartment, also ask the neighbor(s) who live below you. If the answer is “No”, there are other options. Perhaps the neighborhood has a community garden. Perhaps a neighbor or friend would allow you to share a piece of ground.

Terra cotta or ceramic pots make excellent containers for a variety of vegetables. Corn might be one of the least practical plants to grow in containers unless the patio or terrace is quite large and corn is the only thing being grown. Remember, corn should be grown in several short rows rather than one long row to pollinate most successfully.

Gardening on a small budget

The expense of terra cotta or ceramic containers may not be feasible for everyone. There are other alternatives. Sometimes plant nurseries have extra plastic pots which can purchased for a very reasonable price.

Or you may want to try something novel. Buy a bag of planter’s mix. Lay the bag on its front or back side on the surface where it is to be used. [If the surface is concrete (or for another reason may not drain well) first lay down some narrow boards (for example, 2-feet-long 2X4’s) or coarse gravel.] Poke holes in one side of the bag. Turn the bag
over. Flatten the soil in the bag. Cut large “X’s” in the top of the bag where plants will be placed. Fold triangle “flaps” under. Place plants into the bag of planter’s mix as you would place them in the ground. Water and fertilize as needed.

Gardening for people with special needs

People who use canes, walkers or are in wheel chairs need not feel left out. But they may need a friend to help set up the garden area.

If a raised bed is not feasible, stack concrete blocks to the height of a coffee table. Put a heavy board, planks, or an old door, etc. on the concrete blocks. Cover the heavy board (planks, old door, etc.) with waterproof material. Place containers on the board. Two advantages of this kind of container gardening over a raised-bed garden is that pots can be moved around on the board if desired, and the gardener need not bend over to garden.

The stacked half barrels shown in the photograph on page three would be ideal gardening containers for a person in a wheelchair if they were placed individually and far enough apart for the wheelchair to move around them.

TYPES OF CONTAINERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>plastic pots</th>
<th>terra cotta</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bags of planter’s mix</td>
<td>metal cans</td>
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Use whatever you have (bath tub, rubber tires, shoes, boots, etc.). Drill holes in anything that does not already have holes in it.

Containers are perfect opportunities to have an individual plant or a whole garden of potted plants in a place or places where a garden might not otherwise be. For example, set a cherry tomato or two close to the front door (or any other door) and pick a few each time you pass by. It is a fun way to get a serving of fresh vegetables.

Another example of how vegetables or fruits can be grown in containers.


SOIL AMENDMENTS-
COMPOST, FERTILIZER, MULCH, ETC.

A soil amendment is any material (as compost, mulch, sand, etc.) that aids plant growth indirectly by improving the condition of the soil.²

Compost is a mixture of various decaying organic substances, as dead leaves or manure used for fertilizing the soil.³

Fertilizer is any material put on or in the soil to improve the quality or quantity of plant growth, as manure, chemicals, etc.⁴

Mulch is a covering, as of straw, compost, or plastic to prevent excessive evaporation or erosion, enrich the soil, inhibit weed growth, etc.⁵

An amendment can serve more than one purpose. A good example is straw placed under and around strawberry plants. The straw acts as a mulch to prevent weeds from growing around the strawberry plants. It keeps the plant leaves and strawberries from coming in contact with the soil and pests, such as pill bugs, slugs and snails, which love strawberries as much as we do. As the straw decomposes, it acts as a compost adding nutrients to the soil. In cold, snowy climates, straw is used to cover the plants to keep them from freezing.

Another good example of a soil amendment is planting a cover crop, also known as a green manure crop. A cover crop can prevent erosion, loosen compact soil, and improve the soil. A cover crop is composed of legumes and grasses. It is plowed under to loosen the soil and add nutrients.

A third soil amendment which may not be the first to come to mind is vermiculture or vermicomposting-gardening with worms. Worms aerate the soil and produce a rich compost material called castings.

There are many soil amendments. What is used may depend on availability, ease of use, cost and the gardening philosophy of the gardener. An organic gardener with one-fourth acre of land may use composted manure, a cover crop, worms, compost and mulch. A person using a wheelchair, who gardens in containers, may find fish emulsion, planter’s mix and sulfate of ammonia (ammonium sulfate) most convenient.

A word of caution: Some manures contain bacteria (e.g., salmonella) that could affect human health. Buy composted manure. No matter what soil amendment you use, follow the directions on the label.
HELPFUL RESOURCES

There are many helpful sources for the gardener. The following are some of them:

- Gardening books in the library or book stores
- Newspaper and magazine articles
- University of California Cooperative - Extension office
- Experienced gardeners
- Employees of garden centers and nurseries
- Shasta College Certified Master Gardeners
- Radio and television shows
- The Internet

Internet suggestions

If you are having trouble finding the information you want on the web sites with which you are familiar, try the following. In the address field type in "www.allsearchengines.com" and press "Search" ("Enter", "Go" or whatever is on your screen or keyboard). When the next screen comes up, in the middle column scroll down to "Complete SE list". Click on it. You will find enough search engines to keep you busy for a good, long while.

In the search field enter key words which will help you find the information for which you are looking (e.g., special-needs gardening, small-space gardening, container gardening, etc.). Press "Enter" and you are on your way.

Web sites come and go, may not be up to date, or may be in the process of being updated when you want to refer to them. Try them again later or access the information through another web site or search engine.

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