

Square Foot Gardening

Popularized by Mel Bartholomew on PBS Television, square foot gardening is a technique for growing a variety of flowers, vegetables, and herbs in a small space.

A square foot garden is a contained garden four feet square divided into one foot by one-foot sections instead of traditional rows. It's a great method for beginning gardeners and those with limited time or smaller yard space. This garden can be raised to any height for easy access or planted directly in the ground. The one-foot sections are easy to reach from any side of the garden. Hand watering or drip irrigation work well. Water the base of the plant, not the leaves. Mulch each square to save water and weeding. A bonus - you won't compact the soil because you aren't walking in the growing area.

Raised garden beds should have sides at least six inches deep. However, carrots and other root crops need twelve inches. In-ground beds need to be worked to the same depths. Once the bed is filled with soil, create the one-foot by one-foot grid on top using wood, PVC pipe or string – anything that you can see clearly and will last all season. Sow seeds or plants at the recommended spacing shown on the seed packets after thinning. This eliminates the need to thin plants later. Seeds or plants are placed in a square the same distance apart in all directions. Plant 16 small plants like radishes, carrots, or onions per square. Large plants like eggplant and peppers grow best with one plant right in the middle of a square. Set up a trellis, frame, or other support at the north end of your garden to provide vertical growing space for tomatoes, cucumbers, pole beans and other vegetables that require support. Sunflowers and corn should also be planted at the north end, so they won't shade their other veggie neighbors.

Square foot gardening is a great way to grow pest deterrent plants like marigolds and nasturtiums close to vegetables and herbs. As soon as a square is harvested, re-plant the square with a plant from a different botanical family to prevent pests such as nematodes. Interplant small, fast growing crops like radishes or leaf lettuce on the outside edges of squares that have one large plant in the middle. The fast growers will be harvested before the large center plant needs the space. Be sure to note where these are so they don't get mistaken for weeds when they sprout.

Plant protection cages work very well in square foot gardens. Cover a fence wire frame with clear plastic to protect plants from frost, hail, or heavy rain. A frame covered with a fine screen material will protect against birds, harmful insects, and small animals. Use an uncovered frame for plant support. If gophers and moles are a problem in your yard, put down wire mesh before you add soil to keep them out of your garden.

The square foot system lets you grow more in a smaller space with less work than traditional single row gardening. That's great for every gardener!

www.tulsamastergardeners.org is a great place to learn about gardening. You can get answers to all your gardening questions by calling the Tulsa Master Gardeners Help Line at 918-746-3701 or by emailing us at mg@tulsamastergardeners.org.

Sources:

Bartholomew, Mel. *Square Foot Gardening*. Rodale Press, 1981. Print
University of Florida IFAS Gardening Solutions. Website
University of Wisconsin Extension Service. Website
[E-1034 OSU Extension Master Gardener's Manual](#)