

Out in the Garden

Rockport Garden Club, April 2020



Garden Diary: Organic Vegetable Gardening in a Small Space

What is the importance of having an organic vegetable garden? Our government allows our vegetables and fruits to be sprayed with many toxic chemicals. For example, certain foods called “The Dirty Dozen” are heavily sprayed. The list is compiled by The Environmental Working Group which is a non-profit organization that educates people on subjects like agricultural practices, protection of natural resources, and the effect of chemicals on human health.

Here’s the scary list :

1. Strawberries -10 or more pesticide residues
2. Spinach-97% of the samples contained pesticide residues
3. Kale- Kale made the top 12 for the first time in a decade
4. Nectarines- 94% of the samples contained residues
5. Apples-90% of the samples contained pesticides
6. Grapes-96% tested positive for pesticide residues
7. Peaches- >99% had an average of 4 pesticide residues
8. Cherries- an average of 5 pesticide residues
9. Pears->50% of pears had residues from 5 or more
10. Tomatoes- One sample had over 15 different pesticides
11. Celery-Residues were found on >95% of the samples
12. Potatoes– More residues by weight than any other

[Source:](#) Healthline

The key to a successful organic garden is the soil. The practice of organic gardening is essentially nothing more than soil building. I use a special soil formula that incorporates massive amounts of organic materials and nutrients. This “super soil” will support tremendous growth in a small space.

What’s the right size for a vegetable garden? In most cases, it’s smaller than you might think.

- A 5 foot by 5 foot garden will produce a minimum of 200 pounds of vegetables
- A 10 foot by 10 foot garden can yield 1,000 pounds or enough fresh veggies during the season to feed a family of four.

I like to use raised beds. The advantages of a raised bed are faster soil drainage, faster soil warmup in the spring and prevention of soil compaction because you don’t step on raised beds. They also allow concentration and conservation of fertilizer and water.

For me, the greatest advantage is that they allow you to use all available space by growing plants a few inches apart across the entire bed. This “intensive planting” uses every inch of soil. Depending on the crop, these beds can produce up to 30 times as many vegetables as a conventional garden.



If you don’t have space for a garden, you can plant a container garden in 5 gallon buckets with holes drilled in the bottom. Tomatoes, eggplants, Swiss chard, cucumbers, peppers, lettuce and herbs do well in these. I grew small, personal watermelons and peppers in buckets and they did very well.

You also can go vertical! Every square foot of garden space comes with a bonus 6 cubic feet or more of usable growing space above it. You can save space and energy by trellising, fencing, or caging certain vegetables. Peas, beans, cucumbers, melons, some squash and sweet potatoes love to vine and ramble. Or build a set of shelves against a sunny wall or corner and fill them with pots of various sizes — larger ones on the bottom row and smaller ones as you move up.

Gardening organically is a vibrant and viable practice. Every time you eat, you are either fueling disease or feeding health!

—Submitted by Kim MacIsaac



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The Garden Cart: Butterfly Weed What's in a Name?

Latin maybe a dead language. However, using latin nomenclature rather than common names for plants isn't about snobbery but about gardening well. Botanical latin is a highly organized system that helps the gardener know with more certainty which plants are which and about plant histories, native habitats and growing requirements.

If you called two plants by their common names, butterfly weed and milk weed, who would want to plant them? Why choose a plant with weed in its name? If you used the latin name *Asclepias*, you might take a second look.

Monarch butterflies lay their eggs exclusively on members of the *Asclepias* genus. These plants serve as the sole source of food for the larva. Bitter glycosides present in the milky latex or sap, make monarch butterflies and larva toxic to predators. It is best to avoid extensive contact with the sap on sensitive skin. Bees are also attracted to the nectar of *Asclepias*.



In New England, there are ten different native species of *Asclepias* but only two, *Asclepias tuberosa* and *Asclepias incarnata* (swamp milkweed) are worthy of planting in a garden. They are relatively available in garden nurseries, *Asclepias syriaca* (common milkweed) has sweet smelling flowers but it is coarse and an aggressive spreader. It is best kept in a meadow.

The *Asclepias* fruit are long hornlike pods up to 4 inches maturing in summer releasing iconic fully parachuted seeds that children love to blow into the fall wind. They are extremely attractive in fall arrangements

All milkweeds attract orange aphids in late summer. You can spray them off with a strong stream from the garden hose or soapy water. Many gardeners ignore them. Other beneficial insects in your garden will happily eat aphids for lunch. The aphids do not spread to other plants.

Asclepias tuberosa is a herbaceous perennial and adapts to well drained sites. It blooms over a long periods. If cut back and watered during droughts, it will grow back and bloom again, but don't overwater.

Attributes:

Height: 12-30 inches
Spread: 12-24 inches
Hardiness: Zone 3-9
Bloom: Orange, Yellows, rarely Red
Exposure: Sun
Soil: Thrives in dry, sandy/gravelly soil
Soil Moisture: Dry to Average
Maintenance: Low
Ecoregion: Most of the US
Tolerance: Deer Resistant, Salt Tolerant, Drought Tolerant



Asclepias incarnata or swamp milkweed is perfectly happy in wet soils. It is also adaptable to ordinary garden soils as long as drought conditions can be avoided. Two cultivars rose pink 'Cinderella' and white 'Ice Ballet' are available. The pods are beautiful with a frosty snow covering.

Attributes:

Height: 24-42 inches
Spread: 12-24 inches
Hardiness: Zone 3 to 9
Bloom: Pink, Rose Pink, White
Exposure: Sun
Soil: Average to Wet
Maintenance: Low
Ecoregion: Most of the United States
Tolerance: Deer resistant, Salt Tolerant, Drought Tolerant



We have been told not to judge a book by its cover. Please do not judge a plant by its common name. *Asclepias* must be planted if the monarch butterflies are to survive.

—Patty Hock

Member Meeting
Our meeting is cancelled.

A garden is a place for shaping a little world of your own according to your heart's desire.

—Beverley Nichols

We wish all Good Health and Happy Gardening!