



the Composter

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UPCOMING EVENTS:

FEBRUARY 19 MEMBERSHIP MEETING

SUBJECT: FRUIT TREES IN TUCSON

It's been a few years since we have had a talk on growing fruit trees in Tucson so we are bringing in Deb North, an expert from the Master Gardener group. Deb really practices what she preaches and has about 90 trees on her property. So come join us to learn the ins and outs of planting, maintaining and harvesting fruit trees in our summer environment. It really can be done!!

Where:

St. Mark's Church, 3810 E. 2nd St.--
northeast corner in the Geneva Room

When: Doors open at 6:45PM
Q & A at 7:15
Speaker starts a **7:30**

Bee Keeping workshop: March 5, 6, 2016
<http://rezonationfarm.com/workshop-info/>

WORKSHOPS AVAILABLE AT THE COMMUNITY FOOD BANK

Sustainable Design	Saturday, February 13, 2016
Water Saving Irrigation	Thursday, February 18, 2016
Making Herbal Teas with Garden Weeds	Friday, February 19, 2016
Soil and Compost	Saturday, February 20, 2016
Planting a Healthy Garden	Saturday, February 27, 2016
Cooking from Garden to Kitchen	Friday, March 4, 2016
Wormania	Saturday, March 5, 2016

Your TOG Board

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BOARD MEETINGS ARE
HELD THE FIRST
Tuesday OF EACH
MONTH AT 7:00 P.M.

THE TOG SHOP

Frost cloth 12' wide
\$1.00/ft

NEW: Home Composting
DVD \$5

Spin diggers \$6

Compost cranks \$40

Price reduction!!
(Heavy-duty tool to
mix compost)

Compost Bin \$40

Planting Guides \$7

*Shop by appointment or at
the monthly meetings.*

JANUARY MEETING REVIEW

MOHYE'S POTTED GARDEN

For anyone thinking that pots weren't a viable alternative to inground gardening, Mohyeddin Abdulaziz sure set you straight! Wow, what a collection of plants! And his philosophy of gardening was impressive too. A larger than average crowd of more than 60 people came to see his presentation.

Let's start with the philosophy. Mohye had a list of words to describe his approach to growing things and chief among them were: Family, Food, Forever (as in sustainable), Organic, Nutrition, Compost. "It's a way of life," he says. "Do as much yourself as possible and aim towards sustainability." To that end he has several rainwater collection tanks scattered around his yard slurping up as much as 3000 gallons of our precious precipitation. His solar collectors are busy every day turning the sun's rays into electricity. And, of course, he recycles and composts. What self-respecting gardener doesn't compost? Mohye composts the traditional way, and with worms in a bin he got from a Food Bank class. Compost tea also finds its way into his fertilization schedule. He tries to make his own potting mix from stuff he finds and makes on his lot but when that isn't enough he will buy organic soil and potting soil.

His lively grandchildren love to participate in the gardening experience and he indulges them by growing some of their desired crops like strawberries. Of course, they are the perfect audience for the promotion of his approach to gardening and life so his philosophy will live on. And from what I could tell, that's a good thing.

Mohye boasts the ability to pick something to eat every day of the year. Some of the things he manages to grow year round include herbs and lettuces. Parsley is a particular favorite of his and he uses LOTS of it. His kale crop is primarily used to make kale-chips and he makes them nearly all year.

One of his favorite things to do is come home in the afternoon, walk around his house, and choose his dinner based on what is ready to pick. And with his diversified crop selection that means many choices. Sometimes the grandkids are there to help prepare the food and that adds to the fun.

His crop selection isn't limited to herbs, flowers and veggies though. In his bigger pots he also has a fig tree from which he makes jam and cookies, a lemon tree, a lime tree and a blood orange tree. Malabar squash, artichokes, ferns, and peppers are other crops planted in larger pots. Additional potted plants include okra, several types of peppers, flowers like snapdragons and petunias, and eggplant, okra, bok choy, strawberries, romaine lettuce, and a whole assortment of succulents.



His crop of native prickly pear gets harvested every year to make prickly pear juice. To do this he brushes off the stickers and freezes the fruits in ziplock bags. When they thaw, he puts them in a strainer with cheesecloth and mashes them; the juice drains easily.

Mohye calls his method, Chaotic Gardening because he lets the plants tell him where they like to grow.

For example, if a tomato plant isn't doing so well in spot X then he moves it to spot Y. When the plant does well, he leaves it there and lets it grow for as long as it is willing. Of course, some plants aren't so fussy. Arugula and lemon basil grow just about anywhere so he has them scattered all around his yard and for most of the year. That way he has flowers to attract the pollinators all the time.

You might think that an extensive pot user would be picky about the type of pots to use but not so with Mohye. He has pots of all stripes. There are clay pots, plastic pots, resin pots, hanging pots and plain-old generic flower pots. One type that he did single out was a double walled pot that helped moderate the temperature extremes we experience here in Tucson. The major benefit to pots, he says, is that they are moveable. A plant can be repositioned to take advantage of a cooler or warmer spot, a shadier or sunnier spot, or any spot that the plant may prefer. The flexibility is endless.

Now, I know what you are thinking. You're thinking, "How does he water those hundreds of pots?" The answer is simple; he waters by hand, as much as twice a day in the summer. Yes, that does take a lot of time as all gardeners know but Mohye argues that it's the best way to stay in touch with your plants. He finds that the extra work pays off by allowing him to notice problems like pests, excessive dryness, the need for some fertilizer, etc. Plus, it's just plain therapeutic to be out there among the plants every day. A layer of mulch (organic alfalfa) or burlap helps reduce evaporation.

For fertilizer, he mostly uses his own compost and compost tea but on occasion buys an organic slow release fertilizer he found at Costco. Replacing soil in pots is usually unnecessary except for the top few inches once in a while. That way the microbial life in the lower soil area stays in tact helping the next generation of plant in that pot. And isn't that what sustainability is all about, creating an environment where things can just keep on going in a healthy productive way?

GENERAL MEETING INFORMATION

We encourage all members to consider bringing a snack to share with the group. It can be anything from homegrown to store-bought or anything in between. Treats are such a treat!! Also, if you arrive a few minutes early and are able, please lend a hand in setting up our chairs and tables. Of course, putting things back to the way we found them at the end of the presentation is very much appreciated. Lastly, we encourage donations to help pay for the rental of the church's meeting room. Without the room we wouldn't have a meeting.



SQUARE FOOT GARDENING

No Weeding, No Digging, No Tilling, No Kidding!

By Mel Bartholomew (MB), Karen Bastow, Pat Westaway



What is Square Foot Gardening?

A simple, unique and versatile system that adapts to all levels of experience, physical ability, and geographical location. Grow all you want and need in only 20% of the space of a conventional row garden. Save time, water, work and money.

The Ten Basics of Square Foot Gardening

1. LAYOUT

Arrange your garden in squares, not rows. Lay it out in 4' by 4' areas.

2. BOXES

Build boxes to hold a new soil mix above ground - only 6 inches deep.

3. AISLES

Space boxes 3' apart to form walking aisles.

4. SOIL

Fill boxes with special soil mix: 1/3 compost (made from many different ingredients), 1/3 peat moss, 1/3 coarse vermiculite. Existing soil doesn't matter. BE ADVISED THAT THIS MIXTURE ISN'T THE BEST FOR THE DESERT. Try something closer to 60% compost, 20% native soil, 10% coconut husks, 10% vermiculite.

5. GRID

Make a square foot grid for the top of each box to organize the garden for planting.

6. CARE

Never walk on the growing soil. Tend your garden from the aisles. Few, if any, weeds sprout and are easily pulled with fingers. Soil stays loose and friable. Easy to protect from weather.

7. SELECT

Plant a different flower, vegetable, or herb crop in each square foot, using spacing of 1, 4, 9 or 16 plants per square foot. Crop rotation happens naturally.

8. PLANT

Conserve seeds. Plant only a pinch (2 or 3 seeds) per hole. Place transplants in a slight saucer-shaped depression. Plant only what you will use during each season. No waste.

9. WATER

Ideally water by hand from a bucket of sun-warmed water (hose or drip system okay).

10. HARVEST

When you finish harvesting a square foot, add compost to replenish nutrients and plant something else.

LOCATION

1. Pick an area that gets 6-9 hours of sunshine daily.
2. Stay clear of trees/shrubs where roots/shade may interfere.
3. Have it close to the house for convenience and protection.
4. Existing soil is not really important. You won't be using it.
5. Area must not puddle after a heavy rain.

Pro's and Con's

By Victor Gutierrez

To get a good idea of the pros and cons of SFG vs Row Gardening I did a web search and came up with the following.

SQUARE FOOT GARDENING (SFG)

Pros

Space:

The SFG is a good choice for limited spaces.

Soil Mix:

The recommended mix yields an airy, rich medium for plants. It is typically weed-free, unless you start with homemade compost that wasn't cooked enough in a hot pile.

Simple Approach:

A SFG can be created by building a raised bed and filling it with the recommended soil mix. It can go right over grass or weeds without clearing the ground. Mel Bartholomew also recommends putting down a weed barrier under newly constructed beds. Raised beds can also be built on concrete slabs. No need to prepare native soils, worry about rocks, caliche, pH, etc.

Crop Rotation:

SFG readily allows for crop rotation. As a SFG Sq Ft block is harvested, new seeds or starts are planted. Different plants can readily be planted in different locations.

High Yields in Small Space:

SFG is an intensive technique that can produce high amounts of veggies in a small space. Smaller plants (beans, cabbages, salad greens, peppers, onions, etc) can be grown readily. Larger plants (tomato) or vining / sprawling plants should be grown vertically on a trellis to get more use from the garden space.

Organic Gardening:

The SFG as described by MB is a completely organic system. No new purchases are needed after the initial set-up. Plants get their nourishment from the compost produced by the gardener.

Maintenance:

The compact nature of SFG requires less water and soil improvement. As one crop is harvested, it is pulled out and several handfuls of compost are mixed into the soil and new seeds or starts are planted. The variety of plants raised in a SFG minimizes the plants' susceptibility to insect infestations (see ROW GARDENING, CONS, Plant Maintenance).

Appeal to new gardeners:

The SFG approach takes the sometimes complex world of home food production and provides a simple technique that produces consistently.

SQUARE FOOT GARDENING (SFG)

Cons

Initial Cost Setup:

Building beds and filling them with the recommended mix can be expensive. A 4' X 4' X 6' raised bed could cost about \$60.00 to build and fill. Cost could be reduced if recycled materials are used. Working to improve the native soils and making your own compost would reduce costs, but increase overall work required.

Maintenance:

Wood used for raised beds may need to be repaired or replaced every few years.

Raised Bed:

The recommended 6" raised beds may not hold some of the taller or dense foliage plants upright in high winds without additional support which may add to the cost. Raised beds dry quicker, especially in our area, than in ground gardens. This is particularly true in hot, dry climates like ours. Vining and spreading plants (melons, pumpkins) need to be grown vertically to take full advantage of a compact garden. Deeper raised beds (possibly 12in deep) is likely to reduce the smaller plant support issue but increase cost.

Soil:

Mel's Mix (MM) is light in consistency. A newly filled 6' bed is likely to settle, possibly to a depth of 4 or 5 inches and complicate initial plantings (see raised bed above). To counter this one would have to water well at bed prep to assure the mix settles well and beds are fully filled. This may require additional mix possibly raising cost.

Watering:

The recommended SFG is hand watered. As mentioned above, the quick drying of shallow raised beds could easily make hand watering a chore especially in our summers. Automatic watering systems would need to be considered.

ROW GARDENING

PROS

Traditional Planting:

Row gardening is the most traditional form of planting, used both by commercial and hobby gardeners. It's a tried and proven technique used for hundreds of years. Lots of information is available on row gardening.

Large Harvest:

For those that have available space, row gardening allows one to grow larger quantities of food. This is especially advantageous if one plans to

share or sell food, or if one plans to can, freeze, and otherwise preserve food to use throughout the year.

Visual Appeal:

Neat, organized rows are visually appealing. Large space between rows and plants allow for ready access for harvest or maintenance. Mechanical planting or harvesting can be used for large areas.

Irrigation:

If flood irrigation is available, watering of large areas can cut down on the amount of time that it takes to water, and ensures that the entire garden receives enough water. Drip irrigation is also an option, allowing for water conservation.

ROW GARDENING

CONS

Available Space:

Space can be a serious issue with this type of gardening, limiting its use in homes with small backyards and completely taking it out of the realm of possibility for many people who live in the city.

Soil Maintenance:

Nonproductive soil (i.e. paths between rows) is typically prepared every season, requiring soil analysis and the addition of needed nutrients. Once planting is done, the work continues. The entire season may become a battle keeping paths clear of weeds and critters.

Plant Maintenance:

Large row gardens or farms typically have large areas of mono-crops (all one crop - corn, lettuce, etc.). This makes it more susceptible to infestations from insects and the spread of disease, they may need to be sprayed with insecticides, herbicides, or other chemicals that limit the presence of unwanted plant or animal life.

As you can see, there are many things to think about when it comes to choosing a garden method and your circumstance may dictate one thing or another but SFG should be one of your prime considerations.

Urban Critters
by Charlotte Weltjen

Several years ago I decided to put a raised bed out back so I could grow some vegetables instead of watering, fertilizing, and mowing the lawn. I put the raised bed between the shed and house with a space about 5' on either side. This location has proven to be a challenge because of reflected heat

from both buildings. A couple years later I put in another raised bed out front and now neighbors frequently stop to chat while I work. Who says gardening can't be a social affair?

The only potential problem with critters I knew about when I first started was gophers because mounds would occasionally show up in the lawn. After determining where the bed was to go, I dug down about 8 inches and laid down hardware cloth which then extended up about 6 inches into the raised bed and attached it to the sides. I've had no problems with gophers in the garden although I occasionally find mounds in the surrounding area.

Then came the stray dog. He was wreaking havoc in the neighborhood digging in flower beds, chewing thru hoses, and messing with anything he could find to play with. Although fencing is generally not allowed in the community, after his second foray in the front garden, I did put up a temporary barrier with t-posts and garden fencing to keep him out. Whew, crisis averted!

Next were kittens. I went out one morning and saw little round things popping up in the garden out back. A momma cat had taken her five kittens on a field trip: Destination, my garden. Keeping a close eye on the little ones, she proudly watched as they completely destroyed the plants. After trapping and taking the momma cat to the shelter, I spent several months getting the kittens tamed and relocated.

Then the javelina arrived. Although the small fence out front was not strong enough or tall enough to keep the javelina out of the garden, they didn't mess with it for some unknown reason. Last spring I built a gated fence attached to the raised bed out back. Then, as a precaution, this last fall I built a gated fence for the planter out front. The javelina have been marauding thru the neighborhood but have stayed out of my gardens.

Lastly, two legged critters - probably of the teenage variety. I thought at first the javelina had finally decided to trample the lightweight fence out front and destroy a tomato plant but then I saw a few onions on the ground lined up in a neat row. Thankfully, this critter has struck only one time.

Critters manage to find their way into places we'd rather not have them, even here in the city, but with a little initiative they can be deterred from damaging our precious vegetable gardens.

Note the square foot layout per article above, and the access from all sides.



BOARD MEMBERSHIP

It's that time of year again, time to seek out and find replacements for the board members who will be retiring this spring. If you like what you get from your membership with TOG, perhaps it is time for you to help guide the future of this most worthy group. Without a board of volunteers there would be NO TOG. The board is the glue that holds things together and has perpetuated what the late Tarke Sweet started in 1971. Contact any current board member to throw your hat in the ring for a term on the board of directors.

HOME GARDEN TOUR

The Pima County Master Gardener announces its 17th Annual Home Garden Tour on April 16, 2016. The distinctive and beautiful home gardens of four Master Gardeners will be featured along with practical demonstrations & talks at each home to include such varied topics as home composting, Grow Zones for water efficiency and plant selection, miniature succulent gardens, perennial container gardening and more. The demonstration gardens at the Cooperative Extension Service will also be open for touring.

Ticket sales begin March 1st and may be purchased: online @ <https://extension.arizona.edu/17th-annual-home-garden-tour> ; at the Cooperative Extension Service 4210 N. Campbell Ave.; and at the following Tucson nurseries: Bach's, EcoGro , Harlows, Mesquite Valley Growers and Rillito.

Tickets are \$15 in advance or \$20 on-line or the day of the tour. Tickets may also be purchased at each home garden and at the Extension's

demonstration gardens on the day of the tour.

For more information call 626-5161

This year's four featured Home gardens:

1. Terrific Terraces: Set against the dramatic backdrop of Pusch Ridge, this terraced garden's lines and borders vanish into the ridge of this beautiful part of the Santa Catalina range.

Talks: A. Perennial Container Gardening
B. Designing Tortoise Habitats

2. Succulents & More: This beautifully creative garden has many different trees, bushes, vines, perennials and a large display of succulents all surrounding a quiet patio and unique fountain.

Talks: A. Creating Miniature Gardens
B. Multiplying Succulents

3. Eclectic Creations: The Perry's began Tucson gardening with a single raised bed garden in 2007. After a successful season of raising vegetables and herbs, two more raised beds were added.

Talks: A. Building a Wicking Garden
B. Creating a Keyhole Garden

4. Desert Oasis: Walking through this expansive and meandering garden, one is surprised at every turn. The Saari's have tucked all species of plants into a blend of gardens, winding from a wildflower wonderland in their front courtyard to an artistic display of cacti and succulents shielded under a canopy of native trees.

Talks: A. Grow Zones for efficient water management and plant selection
B. Desert Composting

5. Master Gardener Demonstration Gardens at 4210 N. Campbell Ave which showcases a wide variety of planting themes and techniques in 13 different demo gardens, which range from growing edibles, to low water use desert gardens.

OUR ANNUAL SPRING FAIR IS JUST AROUND THE CORNER

March 19 has been chosen for the date of our Spring Fair. The hours will be the standard 10AM to 2PM. Please mark your calendars and plan to attend in support of our local growers and businesses who come out every year to help make your summer garden a success. Of course, we are always looking for volunteers to provide the help we need to make the fair a

possibility. Please consider helping out for a 2-hour shift either before, during or after the fair.

PEACE FAIR

Tucson's 34th Annual

FREE TO ATTEND!

PEACE FAIR AND MUSIC FESTIVAL

Saturday, February 27, 2016
11am-4pm
Reid Park Bandshell



**2016 THEME: Compassion
for Refugees & Migrants:
All One World**

- *Live Music
- *Tables
- *Food
- *Entertainment
- *Children's Activities

This FREE event is Arizona's largest gathering of Peace, Justice, and Environmental groups.

For more info call (520) 730-3609 or go to
www.TucsonPeaceCalendar.org



CLIMATE CHANGE

SUSTAINABLE TUCSON MEETING: Monday, February 8 at 6pm
Downtown Main Library

Local Climate Change Actions: Policy and Progress Continuing Sustainable Tucson's theme of "Climate Change and Actions for Our Sustainable Future." Please join us at the February General Meeting to hear about the progress being made locally on the policy and actions front.

To cover or not to cover?

Since we have been having some night time temps in the 20's, I thought it a good idea to repeat the following discussion:

We at the Community Food Bank receive many calls about whether or not to cover vegetable gardens on cold nights. Remember that the veggies we plant for the winter season: broccoli, chard, kale, lettuce, peas, herbs, etc. are frost tolerant. This means they can survive frost and even snow! Some gardeners

like to cover their gardens to give it extra love, but it's not vital unless the weather gets really cold, mid-low 20s or below. We sell a light weight frost cloth for 50 cents/ft. Check out these chilly plants from our first frosty night Dec.



HEAVY FROST ON PLANTS

The second picture was taken just a few hours later after the sun had warmed the plants.



No damage at all!

The food bank is always looking for volunteers to help out on **VOLUNTEER WEDNESDAYS** from 9-noon.

GARDENING FOR CHILDREN

Victor, a former board member and regular host of the book-sales table at meetings and fairs, has been recuperating from an illness but has kept his finger on the pulse of TOG. It's hard to keep a good TOGGER down. He recently came across a website that encourages children to get involved with gardening. It does this by providing lesson plans to teachers who would like to show kids how to grow their own food. Additionally, it promotes family gardening. If you know someone who would like to get kids involved, right down to earth level, this resource is what you need to get

involved, right down to earth level, this resource is what you need to get started.

<http://www.kidsgardening.org>

SOIL FOR SALE

I have Worm-casting-enriched soil for sale. Last year I added earth worms to my 3 stage compost and am currently sifting it. Some soil probably contains tiny earth worms to enrich your soil too. I love my little worm pets. Also, bargain coarse sifted (just chicken wire sift) soil at cheaper prices.

Joy Holdread 628-8180
JoysHappyGarden.com

Tucson Organic Gardeners | PO Box 27763 | Tucson | AZ | 85726