



SQUARE FOOT GARDENING BASICS

A quick overview: Build a square frame that is not wider than 4 feet, and 6 to 8 inches deep. The length is not as important but a recommended size for your first time is one frame 4 feet by 4 feet. You can, of course, go smaller. 1" by 6" lumber is ideal, and comes in 8-foot lengths. Most lumber yards will cut it for you at little or no cost. Exact dimensions are not important. Two inch long deck screws work best to fasten the boards together at the corners.

Since you will NEVER walk on or depress the growing soil, don't make the frames any wider than 4 feet (or 2 feet if only one side is accessible). Any wider makes it too difficult to reach in to tend the plants. If you plant to have more than one growing bed, separate them by 2 or 3 feet to form walkways.

Fill the frame with a mixture of ½ compost, and ½ peat moss, or 100% compost (no soil needed). Compost provides all the nutrients the plants require (no chemical fertilizers needed.) Peat moss helps hold moisture and keep the soil loose. When buying compost make sure it is truly compost. Some stores sell mulch and other ground covers but call it compost. It's best to make your own compost or buy from a reputable source, and then you know what goes in it.

If placing frames over grass or weeds, first lay down several layers of newspaper or cardboard to discourage grass or weeds from coming up through, because they will, especially dandelions.

On top of each frame place a grid that divides the box into one foot squares. The grid is the unique feature that makes the whole system work so well. To show you why the grid is so important, do this little demonstration: Look at your 4 ft by 4 ft box with the grid on and imagine up to 16 different crops. What you see before you is a neat and attractive, well organized garden that will be easy to manage. Now remove the grid. Could you still organize and manage this space without dividing it up into squares? Besides, without the grid you will be tempted to plant in rows, which is a poor use of space.

Planning Methods in One Square Foot

x	x	x	x
x	x	x	x
x	x	x	x
x	x	x	x

x	x	x
x	x	x
x	x	x

x	x
x	x

x

Grids can be made from nearly any material: wood, plastic strips, old venetian blinds, etc. Use screws to attach them where they cross. On a 4 ft. by 4 ft. frame, the grid divides the frame into 16 easy-to-manage spaces, for up to 16 different crops. **Leave the grid in place all season.**

Depending on the mature size of the plant, grow 1, 4, 9 or 16 equally spaced plants per square foot. If the seed packet recommends plant spacing be 12 inches apart, plant one plant per square foot, if 6 inch spacing: 4 per square foot, if 4 inch spacing: 9 per square foot, if 2 inch spacing: 16 per square foot.



Types and amounts of Crops to Grow
(number indicates the number of plants per square foot)

	Leaf Crops	Fruit & Legumes
Potatoes 1 Sweet potatoes 1 Beets 1 Carrots 1 Turnips 1 Radish 16 Onion (small) 16 Onion (larger) 9	Cabbage Family Broccoli 1 Kale 1 Collards 1 Oriental Bok Choy 1 Lettuces Fancy 4 European greens 4 Chards 4 Spinach 9	Beans Green (string) 5 Soy 4 Fava 4 Peas 9 Melons 1 Squash 1 Tomatoes 1 Corn 2 Eggplant 1 Cucumber 1 Peppers 1 Pumpkins 1
Herbs	Other	Special
Parsley 4 Onion (green) 16 Cilantro 4 Basil 4 Oregano 4 Mint 4	Horseradish 1 Ginger 1 Garlic 9	Medicinal Cultural

Plant one seed in each spot by making a shallow hole with your finger. Cover, but do not pack the soil. Thinning is all but eliminated. Seeds are not wasted. Extra seeds can be stored for two or more years. Don't over plant. Plant only as much of any one crop as you will use. This 4 foot by 4 foot box will grow more than a conventional garden that is 10 feet by 10 feet.

Water only as much as each plant needs. Water often, especially at first, and on very hot dry days. But be careful not to over water – this special soil holds water like a sponge. Water by hand from a sun-warmed bucket of water. Warm water helps the soil stay warm. Water at the base of the plant. Try not to get the leaves wet.

Harvest continually and when a crop in one square is gone, add some new compost and plant a new different crop in that square. Rotate by moving the planting location of each crop in 4 year cycles to avoid common pests and diseases.