

# Straw Bale Gardening



Adapted from ***Straw Bale Gardens*** by Joel Karsten

The book is available through your library system or go online at: <https://strawbalegardens.com>

**What is Straw Bale Gardening?** It is a version of hydroponic gardening. The bale is the growing medium that is prepared by adding water and high nitrogen fertilizer. The step by step process of conditioning creates an environment for seeds and seedlings. Getting the straw bales conditioned is an essential part of the process, and should be started approximately two weeks prior to the target planting date in your area.

**What are the advantages and disadvantages of straw bale gardening?** If you have poor soil or even no soil you can place a bale where the sun shines and start a straw bale garden. It nicely elevates the garden much like a raised bed. Other than a few sprouts from the seeds from the original plant material there should be few weeds. And as the straw breaks down after one or more seasons and is composted it can be used elsewhere in your garden. Best if used for annuals and vegetables.

## **Straw bale conditioning steps:**

1. Saturate bales with water for a few days
2. Add high nitrogen fertilizer (at least 20% nitrogen and NOT slow release) in 7 applications in a ten-day process and water each day during that time
3. The bale will heat up; temperature should start to drop in about 10 days
4. Once the bale is about soil temperature, dress with potting soil on top
5. Make a depression on top for plants or seeds
6. Best for low growing plants, but if you want to grow climbing or tall plants be sure to create a trellis or structure to hold them in place

## **Tips:**

- Once you wet the bales, don't try to move them as they will be very heavy
- There may be sprouts from the plant materials and since you don't want to grow oats or wheat, you will need to remove the sprouts.
- Make sure the temperature in the bale has dropped before you proceed with the planting process
- Because plants get their nutrition from what you put in the bale and not the straw itself, keep the set-up uniformly moist and fertilized throughout the season
- The condition your herbs and vegetables like in soil is what they'll want when they are planted in the straw (wet/dry, full or part sun)
- After a one or two seasons, the bales break down naturally and become part of the garden