

My Compost Garden Book

<http://gravitygarden.com/bucketgarden/>

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As food costs increase and families look to save money in creative ways, home vegetable gardens are becoming more popular across the country.

Composting is a responsible way for you to recycle your organic material into a rich dark soil full of nutrients for new garden plants. Creating “Black Gold” from your discarded kitchen and yard materials is easy to do and takes advantage of naturally occurring processes.

This book is a companion to [My Bucket Garden Book](#) and will be updated periodically.

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A Running compilation of My Compost Garden

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Compost = Black Gold



Gardens are becoming more popular as the economy continues to be uncertain. People are always looking for ways to trim their expenses.

Composting is a major component to successfully increasing crop yields and minimizing material that ends up on landfills.

If you have never built a compost bin, there are several designs to choose from, but essentially this section will focus on the basic concepts and designs that can be serve as a fundamental approach for the basic gardener.

Compost bins are essentially a place to recycle plant vegetation to create a robust material rich in nutrients like nitrogen, that when added to the soil will help new crops grow more vigorously.

Composting is a process that occurs naturally when older material like leaves, grass clippings and old rotting

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vegetation begins to breakdown and decompose into a rich fertile soil material.

This in turn, provides minerals and other nutrients for new plant growth. Worms, micro-organisms are work together with moisture, external temperatures to aids in the decomposition process which has become very efficient process for thousands of years.

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Making a place for Compost – Compost Bins

Location, Location, Location... Just like in real estate your compost bin should be close to your garden for easy transfer of material.

Compost bins can be as simple as a trash can and are relatively

inexpensive. They should be designed to accommodate the amount of vegetation that can be housed during this process.



Yard trimmings such as old leaves, grass clippings and other plant material that has withered over the winter can be added along with kitchen scraps to help the decomposition process. [Composting](#) provides an additional benefit by reducing the amount of natural waste being sent to landfills.

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There are many companies who realize the commercial viability of this material and actually package this as a product that can be purchased at the lawn and garden stores that many visit every day. However, if you are truly looking to become a better more self sufficient gardener, you will find that you can create this same product fairly easily for future planting seasons. It does take time for the cycle to occur once started but can be accelerated if needed.

There are several ways to plan your compost bin:


1. A compost pile is the simplest method for generating this material without any structure whatsoever. However, the material that can be utilized first will lie at the bottom of the pile. In order to harvest the rich black gold, periodic turning of the less mature material will need to be done.



2. Purchasing a compost bin can also be fairly straight forward, and



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- would consist of a plastic tub or larger bin that can be used to hold the plant matter during the composting process. Large garbage bags can also provide the same basic function, but can be a bit unmanageable.
3. If looking to create your own compost bin, it can be as easy as building a square framed structure surrounded by wire mesh or wood to keep the material from blowing away during windy days.
 4. Another approach would be to utilize a more advanced 2 section configuration. The structure is essentially a 2 stage system with each section setup into 3x3 box like configuration. The image shows a two-section compost bin constructed from wooden pallets. It is located outdoors on a grassy area. To the right of the bin is a black trash bin. The background includes a white fence and some greenery.
 5. Compost tumblers are more expensive variations that basically consist of a drum like design. Material is

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kept self contained within the drum. As plant matter is added the decomposition process progresses. The tumbler can be turned regularly to help separate the finished product for harvesting.

In summary, compost bin plans should be defined based on level of effort you are looking to put into it and the finances you can commit to the project. Composting is a simple and straight forward way of using the natural occurring process to create nutrient rich soil material.

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What Do Dog Fur and Coffee Grounds Have in Common?

This section will educate you on the best things that should be added to your compost bin as well as what to avoid. The list below includes items that many compost connoisseurs recommend as the best material to create an outstanding fertilizer for your new garden:



- Cow or Horse manure
- Paper towel or Toilet Paper Cardboard rolls
- Coffee grounds
- Used Coffee Filters
- Used Tea bags
- Old Cotton or Wool towels
- Dryer/Vacuum cleaner lint
- Eggshells
- Fireplace ashes

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- Fruits and vegetables (Orange or Banana Peels, Apple cores)
- Lawn clippings and Small Branches
- Animal fur
- Straw or hay
- Houseplants
- Tree and Bush Leaves
- Peanut shells
- Shredded newspaper
- Wood chips or Sawdust
- Stagnant Water
- Moss
- Weeds that are not seeding



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Now that we have seen what can be added, there is also a list of what **NOT** to put in your new compost bin. If added they can cause unwanted results and should be avoided:

These items can cause issues and be harmful to other plants:

- **No Black walnut tree leaves and twigs**
- **No Coal or charcoal ash**
- **No weeds that could be seeding**



Using these in your compost bin can cause issues with odors and attract pests like rodents or flies

- **No Dairy products like butter, egg yolks and milk products**
- **No animal fats, grease, lard and cooking oil**
- **No Meat, chicken or Fish**



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- **No Animal Bones**

Do not add diseased or insect contaminated plants as they might be resistant to the decomposition process. If they survive, the disease or insects can be transferred back into other plants

Do not add Dog or Cat waste or litter as it might contain parasites, bacteria, germs, pathogens and other viruses that could be harmful to humans

Do not add any lawn or tree material that has been treated with chemicals or other pesticides. These chemicals can kill the organisms necessary for decomposition. This will in turn, delay the process and prevent the compost from forming.



In summary, the [composting process](#) will be successful if you follow the basic rules and apply the right materials to enhance the decay of the material. The resulting compost

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can provide a rich soil mixture that you can add to your garden to produce more disease free fruits and vegetables.

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[Build a Free Compost Box in 3 Easy Steps](#)

Composting is the new buzzword. Backyard gardeners are taking growing food into their own hands and looking for every advantage out there. Composting is a major component to successfully increasing your crops and decreasing the amount of organic material that end up on landfills.

Compost boxes are a storage container made of wood or plastic to house plant vegetation for the purpose of breaking it down to a soil base that is rich in nutrients for your new plantings. Organic decomposition is a naturally occurring process that has existed for millions of years. When old plant material like leaves, grass clippings and other vegetation begins to breakdown and decompose, it creates a rich fertile soil material for new plantings.

Step 1: Free Lumber - The compost box can be a simple design made from recycled lumber. In this case, I came across several hardwood pallets being discarded by a local manufacturing plant. These specific pallets were 3X3 and

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were simple to grab and take home. Of course there are larger pallets available, but these fit my needs.



Step 2: Location - Most gardeners will locate their compost boxes to a remote location in the yard. In my case, I selected a place close to my bucket garden. That way I could use the material quickly and not have to haul it across the yard when I was ready. In addition, it was hidden behind my shed for aesthetic purposes. If deciding to put a more visually pleasing compost box together, this may not be an issue.

Step 3: Assembly – Now that I had the materials and location selected, it was time to make the box.

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I used 3 inch screws, and a hand drill with a screw driver bit.



I stood two pallets on the end and aligned them together to make an L shape.



Stand each pallet side by side. Continue to add screw each pallet together

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Assembling in the location where it will stay is important, since it becomes a heavy wooden box that is not easily moved when complete.

After all sides are connected the compost box is in place

I was able to begin adding my plant material easily into the top of the bin.



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Having the bottom open allows worms to enter and accelerate the process. Once the material breaks down into the rich compost, I can remove one of the front panels to access the “Black Gold” at the bottom.

In summary, making a simple Compost Box is very easy to do, and did I mention it was free? You can use other materials for compost boxes but pallets are specifically suited for this purpose since they are the same shape and size. No sawing involved, and because they are made of hardwood, they will last several seasons.

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Does Your Kitchen Smell?

If you are new to composting, you can add many different organic items to the compost bin. Some of these items come from the kitchen like coffee grounds, egg shells and discarded vegetable peelings. If you are not careful, storing these items in your kitchen before it makes to the backyard garden, can smell up the house. Decomposition is a natural occurrence that happens when the organic materials begin to breakdown. The result is an odor that can make you think twice about taking on this new role.

A simple solution to the problem: A [kitchen Compost Pail](#). This device resembles a small trash can with a lid that can help to contain the odor where it belongs. While you wait to add the material to the compost bin outside, the compost pail keeps the organic material out of sight in a lower cupboard until it is ready to be emptied.

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This one is a [RSVP International Stainless Steel Compost Pail](#) and is pleasing to the eye and practical. The cover keeps any odors contained and out of the way. It stands 11 inches tall and can make it a bit more convenient to store your organic material temporarily.



Of course you can use anything with a lid, but this type is more visually pleasing.

Items that can be added to the compost pail would include vegetable and fruit scraps such as celery tops, apple cores and banana peels, onion skins and any other unwanted parts of the vegetable or fruit that is inedible. You can also add coffee grounds, tea bags and potato peels to the pail for safe keeping.

As you can see there are many foods that can be added to the pail, but as with anything, there other kitchen scraps

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that **SHOULD NOT** end up in your compost pail. Some of these items include:

- Meat, fish or chicken
- Animal Bones
- Eggs, Milk, cheese or any other dairy products
(Eggshells are OK)

Having these items end up in your compost pile could very well attract unwanted pests into your rear garden. It is best to stay with the basic principles of composting to be successful and keep unwanted animals from your backyard.

In summary, you're to be congratulated in trying to do your part in helping the environment and start a compost plan. Many people think of the outside compost bin when they begin to move forward, but neglect the need for something indoors to temporarily hold the material. Some people prefer the fancy versions if they intend to keep it in a visible area. However, an elaborate or expensive Compost Pail is not necessary as any old coffee can will do to contain the odors from permeating your kitchen.

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What is a Vegetable Bucket Garden?

The simple answer is... a group of buckets or containers that house your vegetables planted in dirt, potting soil or compost.

Many beginning gardeners like the [bucket garden](#) approach to grow their vegetables in phases. You can start with a small number of containers at first, which can be less overwhelming and much easier to manage.

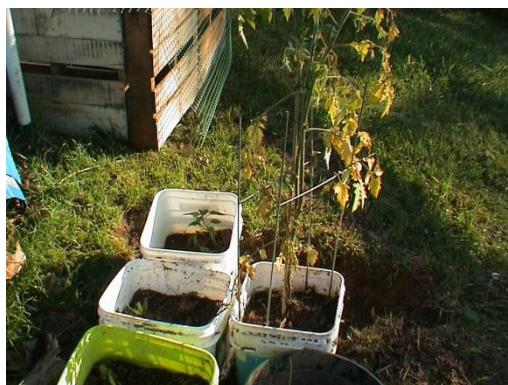
Over time, you can increase the number of buckets and plants in your garden when you are ready. This can be a more organized approach and be less stressful as you decide which vegetables you want to plant. You may decide to add containers in sections or add vegetables by various growing seasons. You may even decide to an [organic garden](#) in buckets or other containers.

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The Plastic 5 Gallon Bucket Garden

If you travel to any home improvement store, you can easily find a plastic [5 gallon bucket](#) to start your [bucket garden](#) project. Whether you use a 1 or 5 gallon bucket for your garden, it is very easy to get started and can quickly grow into larger a larger garden over time.

If you are as thrifty as I am, you can even used recycled buckets from others who discard them. You want to be careful though, as some may be [contaminated](#) with paints, automobile oil or weed killer.



Be sure to inquire from the individual on their prior usage. Even though you are planning to put dirt in the bucket, it will also house your future dinner. If there is any doubt, look elsewhere...

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To create your [first garden bucket](#), start with a single [5 gallon container](#) and drill a few holes for water drainage.

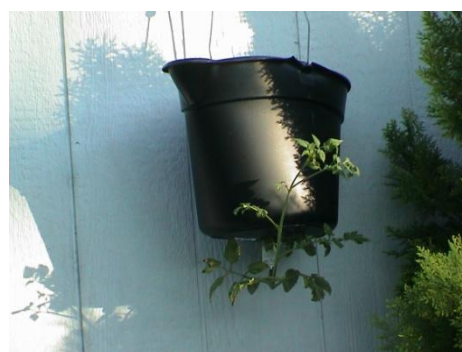


When ready for the next step, add some topsoil and sprinkle in some compost to prepare the vegetable plant for its new home. Add a vegetable plant (pepper, [tomato](#) or other) and you are done within a few minutes.

A bucket garden consisting of [5 gallon plastic buckets](#) can be very beneficial to the weekend warrior in several ways:

One of the benefits of a [container garden](#) is its portability.

If you live in a home that does not provide optimal conditions for a stationary garden, bucket gardens can provide the flexibility you need to address issues like; minimal



access to sunlight, strong wind conditions and animal invaders like the dreaded bunny. A [bucket garden](#) is a little tougher for animals to access and can be surrounded by

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fencing if needed. Some have even used [cinder blocks](#) to create a raised garden.

If you live in a [condo or apartment](#), access to a private plot of land to grow vegetables may not be available. The large 5 gallon container can provide a small area for you to have your own piece of land for the herbs and vegetables you desire. Although they are not visually pleasing, they can easily be dressed up with some pastel paint for designs that add a bit of flair to your plastic 5 gallon bucket.

Back or knee concerns can be less of an issue as these large buckets can be placed on platforms for easier access during weeding, watering or harvesting activities. Of course, the initial lifting of the plastic pail can be a bit stressful, but once in place, there is less of a need for bending over.

Mixing and matching garden containers can be a creative process and still practical. Adding something like an old [clay chimney pot](#) to a garden can add color



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and texture variation to the look and feel of your new garden patch.

In summary, starting your bucket garden with plastic 5 gallon containers is an easy way to get your garden started. You can add containers gradually over time to increase the variety of plants or when time permits. Have fun with your garden by adding some color with basic paints or additional textures of tin buckets or other off the wall containers.

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What's in Your Shed? Plastic, Paper or Tin Bucket

Let's face it, what is the real reason you plant a vegetable container garden is for growing Food! You do not have to spend tons of money on a garden trying to buy all the neat little clay or porcelain pots and containers to house your vegetables. Sometimes people get a little caught up on the looks of their garden instead of the real practical nature of why it is there in the first place.

Whether it is a **tin garden bucket**, plastic garbage can or an old chiminea that had the bottom fall out, any container you come across can fulfill the basic



requirements and act as a container for your garden.

When deciding to begin your container garden, it is more important to spend your funds where you're going to get

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the best bang for your buck; seed, plants and potting soil etc.

Your container garden can be made up from literally anything that constitutes a box, pot or container that you have lying around that can hold soil and your vegetable crops.

The basic philosophy around a container garden is:

1. **Portability** - if you live in a home that does not provide optimal conditions for a stationary garden, container gardens can provide the flexibility you need to address issues like; minimal access to sunlight, strong wind conditions or animal issues.
2. **Urban Gardening** - If you live in a condo or apartment, access to a private plot of land to grow vegetables is not available. Containers can provide a small area for you to have your own piece of land for the herbs and vegetables you want.

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When I started my garden, I wanted to use items I already had lying around. The containers I found in the shed, basement and other various corners of the home were made of different materials, shapes and sizes and worked quite well.

Each unique pot, bucket or even old wooden box can add character to your garden no matter what you plant. You can even hit a few yard sales in the area, and most likely you'll eye an old wooden box, milk crate or *tin buckets* that can be purchased for a small amount.

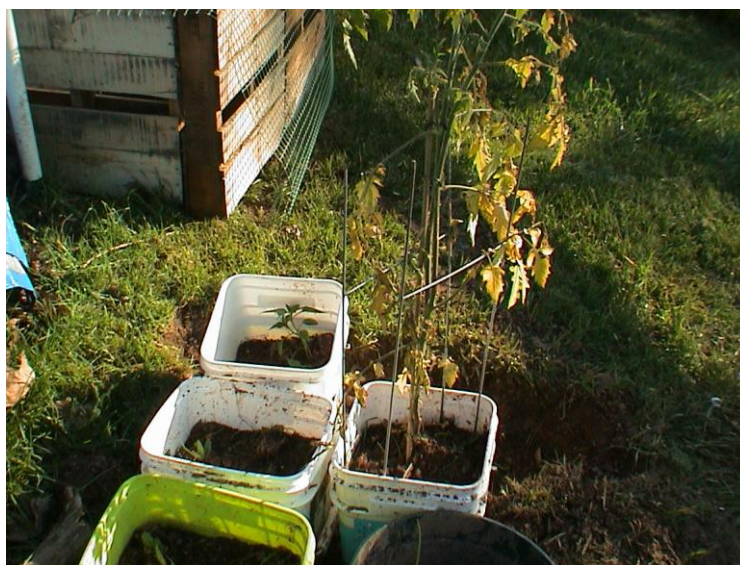
So, when planning your [bucket garden](#), start looking in your basement, shed or garage for containers before going to the garden store. Save your money for what really counts; seed and plants and potting soil.

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How to make your Own Vegetable Bucket Garden

As food costs increase and families look to save money in creative ways, home vegetable gardens are becoming more popular across the country. In some situations, one of the major challenges to growing your own food is to find a suitable design that is inexpensive and can provide portability, if needed.

Portability is an important aspect if you live in a home that does not provide optimal conditions for a stationary garden.



Some of the issues that may require portability may include minimal access to sunlight, strong wind conditions or animal control. A bucket garden is a very simple way to begin your journey toward food independence.

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If you are unsure whether or not you even want to venture down the path of becoming a self made vegetable grower, you can start small with one or two 5-gallon buckets. Most begin with the basic vegetable plants; [tomatoes](#), peppers, peas or even green beans before they go full bore. You can even start small with herbs like basil or parsley before tackling real vegetable plants.

To get started, you can go to any home improvement or hardware store to get the following materials:

1. 1 or 2 five gallon buckets
2. Potting Soil
3. [Tomato](#) or Pepper plants
4. Fertilizer



Most 5 gallon buckets come in white, but you can buy different colors to accent your garden theme. You can add a little pizzazz to your bucket garden by dressing up the 5 gallon containers with some paint. Pastel colors and

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designs might be a bit corny, but white buckets may be a bit plain and this may help dress up your growing space.

Once you have everything you need, follow the process below to build your [first bucket garden](#):

1. Drill several holes in the bottom of the 5 gallon bucket for drainage
2. Fill the bucket 2/3 of the way with the potting soil
3. Create several divots in the soil about 3 to 4 inches apart
4. Place plants into the holes and cover with remaining potting soil
5. Add Water and place in partial sunlight

Having vegetable buckets sit on the ground or up on a table can provide the basic portability you need. Another option for your bucket garden is the ability to suspend them off the ground so you can grow your plants upside down. This option can allow [organic tomato](#) or pepper plants to grow out the bottom without having to worry about staking your plants to keep them upright. If selecting this approach, the

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overall planting process would be slightly different to create the desired effect.

Growing your own food is becoming more popular as food prices rise and families look at cutting back expenses.

Another reason the home garden is gaining in popularity is the number of food recalls due to poorly regulated food manufacturers and distributors. [Salmonella](#), botulism and E-coli contamination is becoming very commonplace in the news.

People who have taken notice are looking at developing their own food supplies to become more independent and to minimize exposure to food supply issues.

So, as part of this new wave of do it yourself farmers we will look at some interesting varieties of vegetables that can adorn your landscape and bring a myriad of tastes to the table. Growing [tomatoes](#) , bell peppers, [peas and green beans](#) are common some of the common **green veggies** that you can find in the local home improvement store.

However, if you are looking for more choices and want to

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step out of the box to seek more interesting foods to place in your bucket garden, these vegetables may be for you.

Black Tomatoes are definitely not the normal fruit you would see at the local grocery store, but they can be quite a treat when adding them to your [tomato](#) dishes, like [salsa](#), salads or served with the traditional burger. There are several varieties of the Black Tomato including but not limited to: the [Black Krim](#), Black Cherry or the [Black Zebra](#); which is a hybrid of the Black Krim and the Green Zebra [tomato](#).

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If you are looking to grow something special to garnish your stews or fresh vegetable tray, the [Blood Red Atomic Carrot](#) might be just the thing. This little beauty is exactly as the name implies.

The "Blood Red" atomic carrot will certainly stand out when served to guests as a featured vegetable in your dishes. The flavors are enhanced when cooked in a steamed type of dish.

If you are looking to spice up your Spanish or Mexican dinners and want something that stands out, you can serve



the Peruvian White Lightning Habanero Pepper. This is definitely not for the faint of heart, but if you are willing to stomach this chili pepper or put it into the

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famous "[chili grill](#)" you may be surprised on how tasty this little firecracker can be.

If your taste buds can't handle the Peruvian White lightning, perhaps the more colorful and tame [Organic Rainbow Bell Pepper](#) will be more to your liking. Adding this to your food repertoire will add unusual colors and tastes to many of your standard recipes and a bit of fun along with it.

So, if you are looking to go beyond the standard variety of green veggies, and into a more adventurous path for your food garden, these are just a few of the interesting vegetables you can select from.

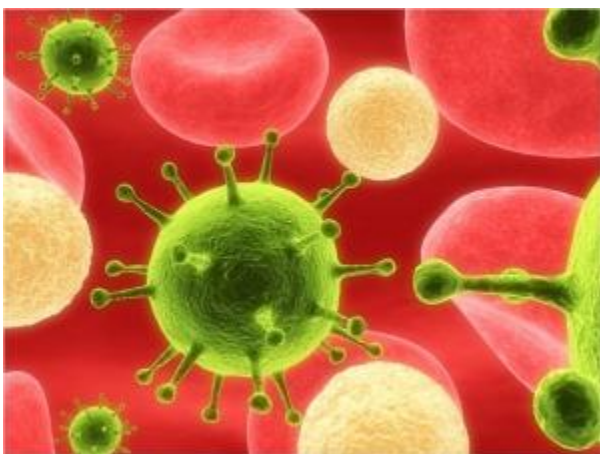
When you finally add to your table, these off the non-garden variety foods will add to the dinner conversations and envy of the other gardeners.

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Grow your Own food to avoid Salmonella

Food Poisoning

If you read the headlines about the multitude of Food



recalls over the last several months, it is becoming more apparent that our regulatory agencies may not be able to prevent various outbreaks of

bacteria that could lead to safety issues across the country.

Salmonella is a group of bacteria that live in the intestinal tracts of humans, animals and even birds. Food that has been tainted will usually have no visible signs of being contaminated and look and smell normal.

Eating raw unwashed foods can spread the bacteria which is why people should not eat raw or undercooked eggs, poultry, or meat. Even though you do not intentionally eat raw eggs, they may be found in some of the foods you eat at your typical restaurant or at home without even thinking

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about it. These foods could include homemade Hollandaise sauce, Caesar dressing, tiramisu, homemade ice cream and cookie dough.

Cross-contamination is a common way many people ingest the bacteria. Having uncooked meats or poultry sit away from raw vegetables and fruit will help avoid this issue.

When cutting meat, make sure you use a separate cutting board and utensils when dicing vegetables. Wash hands often and do not wipe off the counter with towels tainted with the liquid from meat packaging and then dry dishes.

As a way to minimize exposure from outside food sources, some are adopting the strategy of growing their own food to combat this issue. Not only does this help in saving money toward sky rocketing food costs but overall health and safety issues are becoming the forefront of our daily lives.

If you refer to the FDA's web pages (FDA.GOV), you will see that there have been several recalls over the past two

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years that seem to question the safety of our national food supplies.

Salmonella in peanuts or pistachios, botulism in canned green beans or E-Coli in leaf spinach are some of the many issues that have reached the headlines with more to come as the nation becomes more aware of the cracks in our regulatory agencies and their ability to keep us safe.

Each individual needs to become more aware of this expanding problem and take into account the safety of themselves and their families that consume these potentially dangerous foods. Creating your own garden in the back yard may not sustain all your food needs, but as you begin to reduce your dependency on external food sources, you begin to reduce the risk of contracting food poisoning from these very real threats.

If you do not have a large plot of land to plan your home based garden, there are smaller alternatives that can provide a creative smaller scale approach to this issue. Hanging [tomato](#), pepper or strawberry gardens can be added to the

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back patio as a source of fresh fruits and vegetables. You can also [grow indoor herbs and vegetable gardens](#) using units specifically designed to provide artificial sunlight and hydroponic technologies.

In summary, if you are concerned about the various issues that threaten your family's health, you may want to consider adopting a "Do it Yourself" attitude to combat the continuing threats to your food supply.