

BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO

AT-HOME GARDENING

Story & Photos
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LEARN THE BASICS

WITH AFFORDABLE
OPTIONS

9

FRUITS AND
VEGGIES TO GET
STARTED

FOOD JUSTICE

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO AT-HOME GARDENING



Timothy and Lourdes Longwell

of Loveland, CO. have taken a small step to avoiding the produce section at the market. In their backyard lives a small wooden box where they grow some different fruits and vegetables that they use from spring through summer and fall all the way up until the first frost.

There are some serious benefits to skipping the produce aisle and growing your own vegetables and fruits. Home-grown fruits and vegetables have more nutrients than purchased produced, it saves on the grocery bill, plus it's a great way to relieve stress.



Buying produce can definitely be daunting. Wandering through the produce section at a grocery store, sorting through the different brands or organic versus non-organic. Then you get to the checkout station and a hefty price rings up.

There are many people who avoid the grocery store because it can get tough to pay for food, but there are other options that might give your wallet a breath.

COVID

COVID seemed to change a lot of the way we live our lives and we have seen many trends come and go as we've gone through the ups and downs of quarantining and distancing. One trend experts say may be a long lasting trend is gardening.

Since COVID hit in 2020 Hunger Free Colorado found that 1-in-3 households in Colorado are currently food insecure. For comparison in 2019 1-in-10 households were food insecure.

While gardening became a way of coping through the pandemic, at-home gardening may be a longer-term solution for some families battling food insecurity.

The Longwell's at home garden saves them from having to buy tomatoes, peppers, and onions. Although these may not cut the bill entirely it makes a difference for their household needs in the growing season.

Tomatoes, peppers and onions are some of the easier vegetables to tend to in an at-home garden and are often used in the Longwell home in salsas, different egg meals, pasta meal variations and plenty of other dishes they enjoy regularly.



Let's start with containers

The Longwells used a wooden raised base for their garden with mesh covering to keep out their cat and bugs, but there are ways you can create your garden depending on your living situation. Whether you're living with a backyard, a patio, or no patio there are ways to customize your garden to your lifestyle.

Buying supplies, however, to build a raised garden bed like Timothy's and Lourdes', can get pretty pricey, but don't fret there are alternatives!

Using supplies like old buckets, large food storage containers, old milk jugs, even strawberry containers, anything that you might otherwise throw out like this are potential candidates to start your garden. As long as you make sure the material being used is not toxic to the soil and the plants you'll grow since they will be eaten. But, bonus - Recycling!



The brilliance of using these odd objects also means that those who don't have land to grow on or space to store, which often keep people from growing their own food, can start doing so.

These upcycled containers can fit in all types of spaces, in a windowsill, on your patio or in your backyard, without taking up too much space.

Many reusable plastic also hold a lot of moisture, which is great, but make sure you use them for plants that require a lot of moisture. Some plants may drown due to lack of oxygen when they are overwhelmed or stuck in water.

If you are using these containers, be sure to make some holes to let the air move through the roots easily. Materials like the clay pots or wood structures are more breathable than plastics allowing this aeration to happen naturally. Both work just as well as long you prepare them!

Final container tip: the larger the plant you are growing the larger you want your container.

Let's talk soil!

Now that we have some materials to work with, it's time to set some soil prepared.

It may seem simple to grab some dirt from outside your home, but the native soil are typically denser than soil you purchase specifically for gardening. With dense soil we run into the issue of oxygen flow again. The soil should be light but able to hold water and nutrients and allow those to move through to the roots of the plant.



When picking a soil to purchase look for "soilless potting mix." Gardening soils are just as dense as native soil and not ideal for growing foods.

You'll want a mixture that contains peat moss or ground bark, vermiculite and perlite. These ingredients help hold nutrients and water in the soil as well as keeping the soil loose.

These specific soils can be purchased, but depending on how much you'll need but those can add up in price fast which can pose an issue for those who are already struggling to afford food.

The Longwells usually purchase their soil because it is not too far out of their price range when they need it, but for other families this may be a hurdle to cross. There are methods of mixing your own soil, which would involve other costs and are more time consuming, so it's a decision each individual family or person must make.





Now, let's talk fruits and veggies!

These are the easiest fruits and how
they like to grow

Veggies	What they like	Fruits	What they like
Lettuce	5-6 hours of sunlight, <u>well drained</u> soil, good for containers	Strawberries	8 hours of sunlight, drained soil
Green beans	Well drained soil, needs poles, warm temperatures	Raspberries	8 hours of sunlight, drained soil, prefers raised bed but will grow in containers
Tomatoes	Warm temperatures, needs poles, moist soil	Blueberries	8 hours of sunlight, Moist and acidic soil, grows well in containers
Zucchini	Well drained soil, full sun	Blackberries	8 hours of sunlight, moist and slightly acidic soil
Bell peppers	Very wet then very dry soil, warm temperature		

At-home gardens fight food insecurity

Different veggies grow in different seasons as well, which is something to be aware of going into your gardening. Winter might be a more difficult time especially if you are planting outside to have continuous growth, which may affect those who rely on the vegetables or fruits as a source of food.

The Longwells have chosen to let the seasons take its course and harvest only in the prime seasons (spring, summer and fall). Which means that they purchase their produce in the winter. Other individuals and families may not have that choice.



Across the globe, millions of people use home gardens to combat food insecurity. Some places even use their home garden as an extra source of income if they are growing enough crops. This method has been an internationally proven option for those who are experiencing deficits in resources around them.



Timothy and Lourdes Longwell spend the majority of the year harvesting a modest amount of veggies for their home and their family. They are a prime example of the small difference we can make in our lives that may ultimately have a larger impact. Whether that be in nutritiousness of the food we grow, the stress relief and mental health managing or providing food for our families, an at-home garden can go a long way.



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