

Spring into a sustainable veggie garden

Earth First

By Haidee Nelson, ECCO

If you have a vegetable garden at home you are already helping the environment greatly. You will use less water than commercially grown veggies, clock up virtually no petrol miles in food transportation, and will demand little energy for the packaging and storage of the veggies!

So how can you best approach gardening in a sustainable way? One of the most important things is to realise that your garden is a system. How much do you import into your system? Where does it all come from? How much energy is used to make the products?

Similarly, how much do you export from your system and where does it all go? The ultimate aim is to reduce the amount of external inputs into the garden *and* to plug up all the leaks of the system.

Take nutrients for example. If you are an enthusiastic composter, you probably provide your garden with concoctions of compost and manure as inputs. These nutrients are then taken up by vegetables and weeds, we then eat these nutrients, our body processes them, and then... well I guess that's one leak in the system that we don't really want to plug up!

So where else do we lose garden nutrients and how can we stop the leak? There are so many simple solutions to this problem.

- Ensure all weeds are put back into your garden system by composting or drying them and using them as mulch (be mindful if they are seeding or are particularly invasive).
- Ensure that all organic waste from your kitchen and vegetables are put back into the system by composting or using them as mulch. Also use other organic waste materials from your household to boost the nutrient inputs into your garden.
- Ensure that you mulch your vegetable garden to prevent loss of nutrient rich soil to wind, and solar exposure etc. This will also help stop the loss of water through evaporation. If you can see bare soil you are losing water and nutrients!
- Be creative and take a good look around your home – you will find many organic things that can be used as inputs for your garden system. If you don't have access to some cow manure or compost of your own, try and obtain some local products such as manure or nutrient rich soils from your local nursery.

Nutrients are just one element of the garden to look at. If you take the same approach by visualising all aspects of the garden as a system consisting of inputs and outputs, you will then be on the right track to further reduce your environmental footprint.

Community gardens

If you would like to get involved in growing your own vegetables but don't have space at home, or would simply like little some help, there are numerous community gardens in Orange that could be a good starting point for ideas.

- Every Thursday at the O'Brien Centre there are activities at the permaculture garden
- Every Monday at the Cootes Community Garden a working bee is held from 11am to 2pm, also,
- The ELF Community Garden at the showground holds working bees and workshops every second Saturday of the month.

Further information

The library has a wide range of books that explain how to grow vegetables on a large scale or in pots and containers. Alternatively, visit to ELF Community garden at the showground and make the most of Spring!

See also: http://recyclingnearyou.com.au/documents/2005126_compost_eng.pdf
and <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/0507031.pdf>