# *SQUARE FOOT GARDENING*
## *No Weeding, No Digging, No Tilling, No Kidding!*

***What is Square Foot Gardening?*** A simple, unique and versatile system that adapts to all levels of experience, physical ability, and geographical location. Grow all you want and need in only 20% of the space of a conventional row garden. Save time, water, work and money.

## *The Ten Basics of Square Foot Gardening*

1. **LAYOUT** – Arrange your garden in squares, not rows. Lay it out in 4' by 4' areas.
2. **BOXES** – Build boxes to hold a new soil mix above ground – only 6 inches deep.
3. **AISLES** – Space boxes 3' apart to form walking aisles.
4. **SOIL** – Fill boxes with special soil mix: 1/3 compost (made from many different ingredients), 1/3 peat moss, 1/3 coarse vermiculite. Existing soil doesn't matter.
5. **GRID** – Make a square foot grid for the top of each box to organize the garden for planting.
6. **CARE** – Never walk on the growing soil. Tend your garden from the aisles. Few, if any, weeds sprout and are easily pulled with fingers. Soil stays loose and friable. Easy to protect from weather.
7. **SELECT** – Plant a different flower, vegetable, or herb crop in each square foot, using spacing of 1, 4, 9 or 16 plants per square foot. Crop rotation happens naturally.
8. **PLANT** – Conserve seeds. Plant only a pinch (2 or 3 seeds) per hole. Place transplants in a slight saucer-shaped depression. Plant only what you will use during each season. No waste.
9. **WATER** – Ideally water by hand from a bucket of sun-warmed water (hose or drip system okay).
10. **HARVEST** – When you finish harvesting a square foot, add compost to replenish nutrients and replant with a new and different crop.

## *LOCATION*


Pick an area that gets 6-9 hours of sunshine daily.


Stay clear of trees/shrubs where roots/shade may interfere.


Have it close to the house for convenience and protection.


Existing soil is not really important. You won't be using it.


Area must not puddle after a heavy rain.

**SFG Ideas:**
- Humanitarian Efforts
- Public/Home Schools
- Eagle Scout Projects
- Young Women Projects
- Senior Centers
- Hospitals
- Community Gardens
- Home Gardens

**PLANT AND SEED SPACING**: To figure plant and seed spacing, read the back of seed packets. If it says thin to 12 inches, plant 1 per square foot; thin to 6 inches, plant 4 per square foot; thin to 4 inches, plant 9 per square foot; thin to 3 inches, plant 16 per square foot. This applies to everything you plant - vegetables, herbs and flowers. Plant a pinch of seeds then cut off extra sprouts and leave just one.

**Official SFG Website: www.squarefootgardening.com**
**E-mail: info@squarefootgardening.com**
**Ordering information: Please see the Catalog Page on the website to order SFG Products or call toll-free at 1-877-828-1188.**

# MAKING MEL'S MIX

**24 cubic foot BATCH - Good for THREE 4'x 4' boxes** (each box holds 8 cubic feet):

Here is what we would suggest you buy as a start:

- Two 4-cubic foot bags of coarse vermiculite.
- One 3.9 cubic foot bale of peat moss (this bale is compressed and will expand to nearly 8 cubic feet when opened).
- 4-5 bags of a variety of compost to equal 8 cubic feet.

That will be approximately 1/3 each of each of the ingredients and will give you a total of almost 24 cubic feet of Mel's Mix. Since a 4'x4' 6-inch deep box requires 8 cubic feet, that batch is enough for 3 boxes.

It is best to mix in a large, open, indoor space that is well-ventilated, or even better outdoors on a non-windy day. W have found it best to mix the ingredients by emptying them onto a large tarp or piece of heavy plastic. Because the materials are dusty at the start, you should wear a standard dust mask. Keep the kids away from the mixing operation until you put the material into your boxes and wet it down. Thereafter, there should be no problem with dust even if all the material dries out.

Going back to the mixing operation, open and mix the various bags of compost together. Then add the compressec peat moss and break up any lumps. (This is easiest to do by hand.) Add the vermiculite and you can then carefully mix the 3 ingredients with a rake or hoe being careful not to cut the plastic or tarp underneath. Or, an even easier way to mix, is to have 2 people - 1 on each corner of the tarp - pulling the ends of the tarp towards the pile. The ingredients will turn and roll as you do so. Then move to the other two sides and pull the tarp the other way. You keep working your way around the pile and if the tarp is big enough to start with, the pile should mix very quickly.

**12 cubic foot BATCH:**

If you just want to mix up half a batch to start with, you would add together just one 4 cubic foot bag of vermiculite, 1/2 of the 3.9 cubic foot bale of peat moss and enough of the compost mixture to equal 4 cubic feet. Make sure you have mixed all the bags of compost together so that you will have a well-blended compost.

**NOTE:** If the compost comes in bags that are measured in weight rather than cubic feet, just add in equal parts of the 3 ingredients. (For example, one shovel of vermiculite, one shovel of peat moss and one shovel of the blended compost – use anything to measure – a box, a wheelbarrow, etc. Or, just eyeball the amounts. It doesn't have to be exact.) One man recently wrote and pointed out that 12 five-gallon buckets equals 8 cubic feet. So, if you need to measure this is a good way to do it. Just use 4 five-gallon buckets full of each of the 3 ingredients and that will fill one 4x4 box.

If your compost is wet, you may need a little extra mixing to make sure the dry materials are evenly spaced about. Some people have wet down the dry materials before mixing in order to keep the dust down. However, that makes the mixture rather heavy and hard to maneuver. You can spray it lightly with a hose to keep down the dust.

Once it is all mixed, it can all be placed in your boxes. Make sure you have removed any weeds or grass that is growing under your box and then put down commercial weed barrier cloth, a layer of cardboard, or a thick layer of newspaper to keep weeds and grass from growing inside your box.

Any leftover material can be stored in plastic bags (reuse the bags the ingredients came in) for future use. It's always good to have some well-blended compost stored since you will be using a trowel full of this each time you replant a square. This will replenish the nutrients needed for healthy plant growth.

**IMPORTANT HINTS:** Make sure that the Mel's Mix is completely moist all the way to the bottom of the box before planting. It holds more water than you can imagine so take a hose to it and add a lot of water. Dig down and make sure it is wet. Also it is so important to use a well-blended compost made up from at least 4-5 ingredients.

# COMPOSTING

**What is it?**
The decomposition of any organic waste and plant material. Properly made, it has all of the nutrients your plants need.

**Why do it?**
It produces the best growing material you could have for your garden. It's natural, full of nutrients, organic, inexpensive, and made from ingredients readily available around the world.

**How to make it**
Make a pile of your ingredients using all the different possibilities available. Nature will do all the work. To speed the process, mix in a variety of materials chopped into small pieces. Turn the pile weekly to aerate, and keep it moist but not soggy. Compost will be ready in a month to a year depending on your climate.

**Enclosure**
Pile everything in a big pile or build an enclosure or bin to make it neat and efficient.

**Ingredients**
Any part of the plant (roots, stem, leaves, flowers, fruit) that was once growing in the ground, trees, sea, swamps, or mountains. It can be gathered while still growing, or salvaged as a by-product from a processing factory. Animal manure (but not from carnivores) is excellent when available. Usually the best and most readily available material is what nobody wants and has been thrown out. It's considered a waste or by-product from some process. Consider paper, cardboard, rice, wheat, or peanut hulls, tomato or bean vines, even weeds, vines, seaweed, sawdust, animal and human hair, or feathers. A good source of organic vegetable matter is the local market. Ask for any left over leaves and other vegetable and fruit debris.

**When is your compost ready to use?**
When it is uniform, dark brown, crumbly, and has a pleasant "earthy" smell.

# COMPOST BINS

**Location**
- Out of the way, yet easy to add material.

**Construction Materials**
- Wood or metal posts with wire fencing or lumber sides.
- Wood pallet sides

**Size**
- 3' x 3' x 3' minimum. (2m x 2m x 2m) (any smaller will not heat up enough)
- 4' x 4' x 4' maximum. (3m x 3m x 3m) (any larger will restrict air to middle.)

## MATERIALS TO ADD
- Residue from fruit and vegetable processing.
- Almost any weed, vine, or plant growth.
- Old flowers and leaves.
- Dried grass clippings, straw, hay.
- Corncobs and egg shells.
- Branches and bark (shredded).
- Coffee grounds.
- Old sod – upside down.
- Sawdust and wood shavings.

## DO *NOT* ADD
- Animal fat, bones, meat, skin
- Milk products
- Bread and baked goods
- Dog, cat or human manure.

## PROBLEMS
**Unpleasant odor.**
- Not enough air – turn every week.
- Wrong ingredients – remove any animal, dairy, or bakery products.
- Too wet - keep moist not soggy.

**Won't heat up**
- Too wet or too dry.
- Needs nitrogen type material (manure, grass clippings, weeds).