

Thinking Ahead

World Food Day, October 16, seemed to have come and gone without a lot of fanfare, possibly because every day is food day for most of us. Undeniably there is more current interest in what is good for us, where it comes from, how to eat well and not break the budget, than there was a decade or so ago. This adds up to more home gardens. The reason you are seeing more fall crops growing in more raised beds as you walk or drive around your neighborhood is quite simple. They work!

For lots of vegetables in a small space raised beds are ideal. You save on water, soil amendments, time. They can be built low to the ground or if you wish them to be more reachable, they can be raised by mounding up earth to form a berm. They can also be elevated on legs, constructed with a solid bottom perforated for drainage and covered with screenwire to prevent the soil washing out.

Some come as kits with wood or plastic sides or they can be built of cinder blocks. One of my neighbors has beds surrounded by what appears to be boulders. If you use cinder blocks or concrete or even bricks laid with mortar, you will be raising the pH as water leaches the alkali into the soil. This may be detrimental to acid-loving plants like azaleas or gardenias but vegetables prefer less acid soil, as you know from all the advice to add lime.

If your planting plans are not sufficiently firm for venturing into the unknown of raised beds or square foot gardening, it may be well to start a small vegetable patch in what is now just a sunny spot in your lawn. If you do it now, you will not have to dig up the sod, either now or next spring. A four by eight foot patch is enough to start with: after all, you are not planting corn that needs a lot of space! Once you decide on the sunniest spot, cut the grass as low as your mower permits.

Begin by measuring and staking the corners, tying a string guide to the stakes. The next step is to take a sharp spade and cut into the lawn along your string. Make a sharp deep cut and wobble the spade back and forth as you want to discourage grass roots from reclaiming your garden spot. Next spread an inch or two layer of compost or manure over the plot followed by an overlapped layer of plain cardboard (avoid the slick paper-covered kind). You can use eight or ten sheets of newspaper instead but either needs a good soaking. Finally cover your bed with about three inches of wood mulch. If we have a dry winter, soak your patch occasionally to encourage the decomposition. By spring, you will have a lovely loamy place to plant your vegetables.

Great News for the Bay!

The feature article in the October issue of the Bay Journal celebrates Oyster Seed Holding on Gwynn's Island, a truly inspiring story. The partnership of marine scientist Mike Congrove and Deltaville waterman Rufus Ruark, Jr. has succeeded in jump-starting the Chesapeake's oyster aquaculture industry. Great story!

The Bay Journal is essential reading for anyone fascinated by this supremely important estuary. The monthly paper has no crime or scandal but a treasure trove of the history of boats and the men who worked them, community efforts to build a sustainable economy amid beautiful surroundings.

Whether you are interested in eels or mussels or farming, or notes for naturalists, you will find researched articles to fill in the gaps since you left school. Some stories are offbeat such as the one about evidence of prescription drugs in our area waters. Each issue has stories to intrigue everyone from old-time residents to children looking for ideas for school projects.

It is valuable and it is free! If you would like to be added to the mailing list, send a note to Bay Journal, P.O. Box 222, Jacobus, Pa. 17407-0222. Of course a donation is not required, but you may wish to fiscally encourage the fine work that the journal does?

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