



SURVIVAL GARDENING

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INTRODUCTION

Events happen in this world every single day that could cause you to have to find ways to care for your family without being able to buy what you need from the store. Natural disasters, epidemics and civil unrest are just a few examples of events that could cause the need for you to be more self-reliant than you ever thought would be necessary.

During such times, it will be the basics that will be most important. Providing food, water, warmth and shelter will be the goal. One thing that you can do to prepare for such an eventuality is to plant a survival garden. This guide offers tips about how to get started and also explains the importance of such a step.

WHO NEEDS A SURVIVAL GARDEN?

The answer to this is quite simple: anyone who eats. During a time of crisis, there *may* be assistance available (eventually) that can provide some basic food items such as rice or beans. The type of food that will be the hardest to come by will be fresh fruit and vegetables.

Obviously, you need a good supply of vegetables in order to eat the best possible diet. By having a survival garden as part of your emergency preparedness, you will be able to provide your family with fresh produce without having to rely on help from outside sources.

Of course, one option is to try and build a food stockpile that includes enough store bought canned vegetables to last your family for a while. This is a good idea, but if you have a survival vegetable garden, then you will have an ongoing source of food.

Another benefit is that the food that you grow, gather and can yourself will probably be much healthier than store bought canned goods. That is because you can control the amount of salt that is used and you will not have to worry about additives.

Also, with store bought food, you don't know how long the produce lingered before being canned. The longer the food sits on a shelf, the less nutritional value it will give to those who consume it.

A survival garden is one way to make sure that your family will be cared for during various types of emergency situations. If you start your garden now, you can eat some of each harvest, and store some for emergencies.



WHEN YOU MIGHT NEED IT

There are a number of situations that could cause fresh vegetables to be in short supply or make it difficult for you to get them. Some examples are below:

- Civil unrest or war – even if the unrest is in a different country, it can cause a shortage of some types of food by disrupting the transportation channels
- Flooding – Flooding can wreak havoc on crops pushing prices up and leaving grocers with less than their usual supply
- E. Coli or other outbreaks - When a National food contamination takes place, not only can you not buy that particular food, but trust in other similar foods is on the top of your mind



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- Epidemics – While an epidemic or pandemic may not cause vegetables to be in short supply, it can make obtaining them dangerous. One of the most important steps in staying healthy during such a time is minimizing your contact with the public. If you can avoid trips to the grocery store, you have a better chance of staying healthy. By having a good emergency food storage in place, including a garden, you can wait out the epidemic without making trips to the store.



As you can see, there are many good reasons to consider developing an emergency food storage and starting a survival garden. Doing so is easier than you might think. One of the biggest mistakes that many people make when it comes to survival gardens and other types of emergency preparedness is that they procrastinate.

Some think that a disaster will never touch their lives. Others know that it is possible, but are pretty sure it won't happen tomorrow. Therefore, they put off taking the steps that could potentially be the difference between life and death.

The time to start your emergency preparedness planning is TODAY. Start today and before you know it, you will have built an emergency stockpile and plan that can help your family survive.

GETTING STARTED

Obstacles

- Lack of Space – This is one of the most common reasons that people give for why they cannot start a garden. But the fact is that you don't really need that much space. Whether you choose to garden indoors or outdoors, you only need a small space.
- No Gardening Experience – For those who have never grown their own food, gardening can seem complicated and intimidating. It's not difficult, and you just need a very rudimentary understanding of the process to get started. Check a book out of the library, do some online research or visit a local garden center, many of which offer low-cost gardening classes.

INDOOR GARDENS

Many people associate gardens with the outdoors, but when it comes to a survival garden, keeping it indoors is a far superior option. With proper lighting, an indoor garden can often times grow more food and much faster than a standard outdoor garden.

Reasons to Keep Your Survival Garden Indoors

Control – When your garden is indoors, you can keep control of the garden rather than being at the mercy of variables that are outside of your control such as:

- Weather – Flooding, hurricanes and frost are all examples of weather that could destroy your gardening efforts.
- Pests – An indoor garden is far less susceptible to pests.



- **Theft** – One of the most important reasons to consider keeping your survival garden indoors is to prevent theft. In a situation where food is scarce, people will be willing to do just about anything to eat. That includes raiding your garden. Ideally, no one will even know that you have a survival garden. While it is possible to hide an outdoor garden, it is much easier to keep an indoor garden a secret and safe from those who would want to reap the benefits of your efforts.
- **Year-Round Gardening** – Another huge benefit of keeping your garden indoors is that you will not have to rely on the weather patterns. Instead, you will be able to create a controlled climate and grow your choice of vegetables all year long.



Without question, an indoor garden is a superior choice. For all of the reasons listed above, consider keeping your survival garden indoors. If you want to garden outdoors, you can do that as well. But keep at least a portion of your survival garden indoors where you can have the control needed to get the most of your efforts in an emergency situation.

OUTDOOR GARDENS

As mentioned above, the best option for a survival garden is to grow it indoors. If you want to have your survival garden outdoors, there are some things you will need to consider.

Pests

Bugs are an issue for most gardeners. If pests destroy your survival garden, all of your hard work will have been in vain. More importantly, if you lose this source of food and an emergency takes place, your family could suffer.

Keep in mind that if you are in an emergency situation, you may not have access to the products that you need to keep your garden free of pests. For that reason, you should keep at least several months supply on hand.

Animals

Animals are another threat to your garden that you will need to deal with should you choose an outdoor garden. Deer, rabbits and other animals can consume your efforts in a very short period of time. You will need to install some sort of fencing or electronic deterrent to keep your garden safe.



Weather

When you have your survival garden indoors, you can grow what you want when you want. When you have an outdoor garden you are, obviously, at the mercy of the weather. Some parts of the country have very short growing periods.

If you choose to have an outdoor garden, you will need to become very familiar with the growing seasons in your area. Depending on where you live, there could be some vegetables that you will not be able to grow at all.

Also, one bad storm, flood, drought or other severe weather event could damage or destroy all of your hard work. This possibility is eliminated when you choose an indoor garden.



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Container Gardens

If you want to keep your garden outdoors, one option is to start a container garden. Rather than planting in the ground, you instead grow your vegetables in containers filled with nutrient rich soil. Some benefits include:

- No need to work the soil. You just fill the container with high quality soil and you're ready to go.
- Depending on the type of containers that you choose, it may be possible to move your garden if necessary.
- During bad weather, you can protect your garden by moving the plants indoors.
- You can choose the size of container. You can choose small pots or large trays. To make it easier to move larger containers, you can add wheels.
- Novice gardeners often find it easier to start with container gardens as the plants are easier to care for and control.

Tips for Keeping it Hidden

The above factors are an issue for all outdoor gardeners. There is another factor, however, that comes into play when you are dealing with a survival garden: how to keep it hidden. As mentioned above, when people are hungry, there is nothing that they won't do to feed their families. That is why you will need to take steps to keep your outdoor garden hidden as much as possible.

- Don't talk about it – The first step in protecting your garden is to not talk about it. When you tell people that you have a survival garden, you are inviting problems should an emergency arise. They will know where to go to find food and, when they are hungry, will have no problem paying you a visit.
- Disguise the fencing – Fencing is an obvious tell-tale sign of a garden. Try to disguise the fencing by planting bushes around it. That way, should someone see it, they will only see the bushes rather than a garden.
- Off the road – Obviously, the fewer people who know about the garden the better. That is why you should try to find a spot for your garden that cannot be seen from the road. For some, this might not be possible, but you should try to find a spot that is not easy for passerby to see.

TOP SECRET

Some feel guilty for wanting to keep their garden a secret. As was already mentioned, during difficult times, some people will do anything to feed their family. The point of your garden is to make sure that your own family has what they need.

That being said, there is no reason that you cannot share your bounty when a time of emergency comes around. You will, of course, always have that option. But by limiting the number of people that you tell about the garden, you will keep complete control over your food and will be able to share it as you see fit when the time comes.



HYDROPONICS AND AQUAPONICS

Many have realized the advantages of utilizing hydroponics when growing their survival gardens. Hydroponics is a system of gardening that eliminates the need for soil. Vegetables are instead grown in nutrient rich water. There are many benefits of using hydroponics.

- With no need for soil the cost of gardening is lowered
- It is much easier to control pests and disease
- It is simpler to maintain proper nutrition levels
- The water is reused, lowering the costs even further
- This is a good option for those interested in “green gardening” as no gases are released



Some choose to add aquaponics to their hydroponic gardening system.

Aquaponics is the use of aquatic animals (such as fish) to produce nutrients for the garden. Below is a short explanation of how such a system works.

- Aquatic animals are kept in tanks of water
- A system is put in place to catch biological matter
- A biofilter converts the matter into nutrients that are helpful for the plants

The entire above described aquaponic system rests below the hydroponic system to which the nutrients are channeled.

With a successful aquaponic and hydroponic gardening system in place, you can achieve two goals:

1. Lower the cost of gardening
2. Reap a healthy harvest
3. Grow more food in less time
4. Have control over where you place your garden (i.e. open sheds, back porch, basement with lights)

When you use these systems, you eliminate the cost of soil, nutrients and cut down on the amount of water that is needed. When planting a survival garden, cost is an issue for many. While there is some upfront cost to set up these systems, the expenses over the long term will be greatly reduced.



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DEALING WITH DEAD SOIL

Unless you choose to use hydroponics for your gardening, you will need healthy soil. One of the main reasons that gardens fail to thrive is that the soil is not full of the required nutrients. If you are dealing with dead soil, it is possible to turn that hard, useless dirt into a fertile breeding ground for your garden.

The best way to revitalize dead soil is by adding organic matter to it. When properly done, this can easily change useless soil into very healthy soil. Below are the steps to follow to properly add organic matter to your soil.

- Churn up the soil, going to a depth of between six and eight inches
- Break up the soil and turn it
- Add about four to six inches of organic matter, for example peat moss or compost. You can purchase organic matter from a nursery or gardening center or you can make your own compost
- After adding the organic material, turn and chop the soil until the old soil and the organic matter are well-blended

A very common mistake made by those who are trying to revitalize soil is that they only add a thin layer of organic matter. The problem with that is that an inch or two of organic matter is simply not enough to change the composition of the soil.

A general rule is that you should aim to create a mix that is close to 50% of the old soil and 50% of the organic matter. If you do this properly, you will be surprised at the beautiful soil that can be created from dry, dead soil.



GRAY WATER TIPS

Using gray water in your survival garden is one way to reduce the amount of your fresh water that is needed, which could be important during an emergency situation. Gray water is water that is leftover from other uses such as from:

- Shower and bathtubs
- Kitchen sinks
- Bathroom sinks
- Washing machines
- Dishwashers

Gray water does NOT include toilet water or any other type of water that is likely to contain fecal matter or other waste from humans or animals. It is also important to note that not all gray water is the same. Some is better for use in gardening than others, so if you have a choice, use gray water in the following order:

1. Showers or tubs
2. Bathroom sink
3. Washing machine
4. Kitchen sink
5. Dishwasher



In general, the gray water from showers or tubs is less likely to contain potentially harmful material than the gray water from a dishwasher. There are some other things to keep in mind if you plan to use gray water in your garden. Below are some of the most important tips.

- Obviously, fresh water is better than gray water. If it is feasible to use fresh water for gardens that include food items, that is the best choice. In this case, it is still fine to use gray water for plants that are strictly ornamental in nature.
- When using gray water for vegetable gardens, make every effort to rotate between fresh water and gray water, rather than using gray water every time you water your garden.
- Never use gray water on seedlings or young plants. These immature plants may not be able to withstand the gray water and damage can result.
- When using gray water, do not pour it onto a small area. Instead, apply it to a broad area.
- Try to apply gray water only to a spot that will not result in runoff.
- If you wash diapers in the washing machine, then do not use the gray water from the washing machine in your garden.
- Be sure to test the Ph levels in your soil. If you notice a buildup of salt, then reduce the amount of gray water that you are using.

The use of gray water is a great way to reserve more of your fresh water for drinking and other purposes, but be sure to apply the gray water properly to avoid damage to your garden.

GATHERING AND STORING

If you have a proper survival garden, then you will need to learn some methods of gathering and storing your food. Below are three of the most popular methods.

Canning

Canning is one of the best ways to store the produce from your garden. The reason this method is preferred is that it is easy, inexpensive, healthy and, unlike freezing, does not require electricity for the food to remain edible.

If you have never canned vegetables before, consider taking a class offered at your local farmer's market or nursery center. You can also find most of the information that you need online. Many are surprised to learn just how simple it is to can produce. Below is very general outline of the steps.

1. Gather produce and plan to can right away. The longer that fresh produce sits the more of the nutrients that are lost. Ideally, you will can the vegetables the same day that you gather them.
2. Sterilize the jars and the lids.





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3. Chop the produce and fill the jars. Do not fill the jars to the very top. This is because the produce is going to expand during the canning process, so you need to leave room for that.
4. Pour in enough boiling water to completely cover the vegetables.
5. Use a clean cloth to remove any excess moisture from the exterior of the jars and put a lid over the mouth of the jar.
6. Preheat the water in a large pan or pressure cooker. The desired temperature will vary based on the type of produce being canned.
7. Place the jars in the water.
8. Remove the jars and place on an even surface. Allow the jars to cool for about a day.

The cooling process will cause a seal to form. This seal will keep out air and preserve the vegetables until you are ready to enjoy them. If canned properly, the produce will be good for more than a year.

Freezing

Freezing is a very simple option for storing your vegetables.

- After gathering your veggies, wash thoroughly and allow to dry completely
- Cut the vegetables however you would like
- Place in freezer bags and remove as much air as possible. If you have a FoodSaver or similar device, this is ideal. If not, then do your best to remove as much of the air as you can.
- Place bags in freezer.

If the temperature in the freezer remains at least 0° then the vegetables will be good indefinitely. However, there are some obvious problems with storing food in a freezer for survival reasons.

- Power outage – If you store much of your emergency food in the freezer and the power goes out then you're in trouble. Even if you have a backup generator, it may not be possible to keep the generator operational for the long term.
- Evacuation – Should you need to evacuate it will be much easier to bring along canned vegetables than it will be to bring frozen goods.

It's fine to freeze some produce for your own short term use, but for survival purposes, you should choose another method of storing the items.

Pickling

The process of pickling is very similar to canning. The difference is that you use a brine instead of water. There are many recipes for brines. Some create a sweet taste, others a sour taste. It is fun to experiment with brines to find which recipe works best for each type of vegetable.

Just as there are many brine recipes, there are also several methods of canning. Some create a product that will last for about a month. Others create a product that will be good for years.

If you have never done any pickling, you can find instructions online or sign up for a class at a farmer's market. For many people, pickles can be a sort of comfort food – a bit of a luxury – during an emergency situation.

Because they are easy to make and store so well, pickled items are a wonderful way to utilize some of the items from your survival garden.



LONG TERM STORAGE SEEDS

Long term storage seeds are an important part of any survival garden. Some think these seeds are only for those who do not already have a thriving garden, but that is not the case. Imagine if you did have a healthy garden, but then a manmade or natural disaster destroyed it. You would be in the exact same boat as those who never started a survival garden.

While your garden would be destroyed, if you had long term storage seeds on hand, you would be able to start again. Had you relied only on your already thriving garden for food and seeds for the next crop, you would be in trouble.

Long term storage seeds are typically sold sealed in a #10 can. They can be purchased from emergency preparedness Web sites. Some garden sites may also have a small selection of these seeds.

As is the case with all of emergency preparedness planning, it is about thinking of what could go wrong and that trying to put a plan in place to deal with each contingency. A survival garden is a layer of protection. Keeping survival seeds on hand is another layer. In the end, the more layers of protection that you have, the better off you will be when an actual emergency occurs.

USING WHAT YOU GROW

There is no doubt that a survival garden is a good idea. If you are serious about emergency preparedness, then this should certainly be part of your overall plan. If you have not gardened before, then you might make a mistake that is common to many aspects of emergency planning: Not using what you grow/store.

Yes, the purpose of the garden is for emergencies, and you should certainly be canning or otherwise preserving a good portion of each harvest. You should also be using some of what you grow. Even though the canned goods will last for a year or more, you should still rotate the items through rather than keeping every single can for an emergency.

One reason for this is that you should get used to using all of the items in your emergency supplies. Also, if you just continue to stockpile for 20 years, then much of your food is going to go to waste. There is no benefit to such waste.

Practice incorporating your self-canned goods in with other items that you keep in your stockpile. Have practice drills where you only eat from your emergency supplies for a set period of time. These are ways not only to help rotate your stock, but to ensure that you are comfortable with using the items that you keep should you have no other option.

You should make your survival garden a family affair. Start teaching your children when they are young the importance of being self-reliant. This is a seed that you can plant in your children that will benefit them for the rest of their lives.

Aside from that, making your survival garden a family project is a way to bring the family together to do something that doesn't involve a screen.

Finally, studies show that children are more likely to eat vegetables if they helped to grow them. If you have a fussy eater, this may be one way to get him or her to eat healthier foods.

Even if you have never planted a seed before, a survival garden is a project that you can start this weekend that could make a huge positive impact on your family should various types of disasters occur. If money is an issue, then you can still start a simple garden for a very small investment.



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Many people think that disasters only happen to others. While you can hope and pray that a serious disaster does not touch your life, it is still a good idea to hope for the best, but to plan for the worst. A survival garden is just one part of your overall survival preparedness, but it is an important part.

The long term sustainability of such a garden make it a “must have” for anyone who is serious about survival planning.

RESOURCES

<http://www.all-things-emergency-prepared.com/survival-garden.html>

http://beprepared.com/product.asp_Q_pn_E_FG%20S200_A_name_E_Garden%20Seeds

<http://www.thesurvivalpodcast.com/episode-634-container-gardening-for-the-modern-survivalist>

<http://homeharvest.com/lightingmain.htm>



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