
Layouts That Work

We cannot overemphasize the importance of planting only as large a garden as you can comfortably maintain. Beginning gardeners can sometimes overplant and become overwhelmed with the weeding, pest control and watering needs. (This would be less apt to happen if the *students* are allowed to handle as many of these tasks as possible!) A small but beautifully maintained set of beds is of much greater value than a large, unkempt lot. Monitor your successes and failures and expand your garden as your confidence and level of experience build.

An ample number of pathways is critical. Although they mean extra work during site preparation, they will provide lots of angles from which to view and work plots. Impress upon children and volunteers the need to stay out of the beds to minimize soil compaction and plant destruction. Paths are sometimes weed-free due simply to traffic. Use sheets of newspaper or a weed barrier product covered with several inches of mulch, dried grass, wood chips or crushed stone to minimize the weeds.

Invest some time on mapping out the garden with your committee and cadre of volunteers. The sun's path and your bed's orientation (North-South or East-West) will influence crop placement. You won't want a tall crop to completely shade a low-growing vegetable for the entire day. Locate tall plants so they will provide shade during summer afternoons. (See Chapter 5 for a diagram of the sun's path.) Have some general idea of where types of plants might go, but be careful not to take the selection of plant materials away from the children themselves. Some of your best discussions will arise from the simple question, "What are we going to plant?" Allow yourself to think in terms of plant clusters or "square foot gardening" for your garden's design.



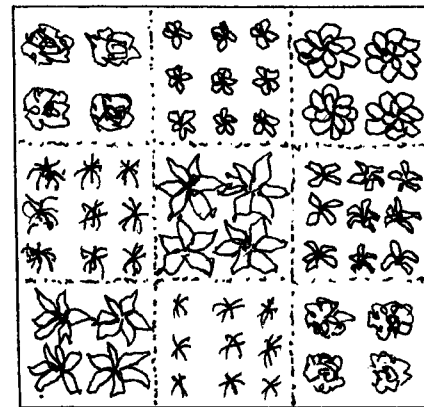
Square Foot Gardening

Mel Bartholomew developed square foot gardening, which is a method of planting in adjacent squares rather than in traditional long rows. Each square is 12 inches by 12 inches, thus the name, "square foot gardening." Bartholomew recommends that these one-foot squares be grouped into larger 4-foot by 4-foot blocks of 16 total squares (four down and four across), each containing a different vegetable, flower or herb. To accommodate children's smaller reach, we recommend modifying this to 3-foot by 3-foot blocks with nine total squares. This block allows easy access to each square without stepping on the soil. These blocks become permanent planting beds that are never compacted by foot traffic, allowing the soil to retain its light, crumbly quality.

The number of seeds sowed per square depends upon the variety, how much space the mature plant will require and the space needed between plants. For example, a large plant such as a pepper would be set alone in the middle of a square. Another square could accommodate 12 smaller plants, such as carrots or scallions, that require only three inches of growing room. Even larger plants, such as eggplants or tomatoes, might need two to four squares. Plants that sprawl over a large area, such as zucchini or cucumbers, can be trained to grow vertically on sturdy supports.



SQUARE FOOT
GARDEN
3' X 3'



Because there is no wasted space between long rows, advocates of square foot gardening claim the same harvests as do gardeners using the row method, but use only 20 percent of the total space. This translates into considerable dollar savings in water, soil amendments, fertilizer and labor. Bartholomew's book detailing the specifics of square foot gardening, including spacing for plants and basic layouts, is listed in Appendix B.

Design Elements

- ☺ Lots of paths, to keep children and adults from walking on the beds.
- ☺ Paths should be three- to four-foot wide to accommodate most equipment and wheelchairs.
- ☺ Individual plots for classrooms. Consider beds that are no wider than the reach of two children (three feet), with paths on all sides, to provide maximum accessibility. Large common areas for crops needing lots of room (pumpkins).
- ☺ Determine North-South or East-West bed orientation for solar exposure.
- ☺ Interactive areas for sunflower houses, sweet pea teepees and other fun ideas.
- ☺ Demonstration garden to try out new plants, "show how" and to inspire participants.
- ☺ Raised beds with perches or block walls to sit on.
- ☺ Perennial bed for artichokes or asparagus.
- ☺ Separate herb garden which is lovely to behold but whose occupants can quickly overtake vegetable beds.
- ☺ Compost bins and space for wood chips and mulch.
- ☺ Shady area for discussion, painting and writing.
- ☺ Picnic tables, logs and hay bales to sit on.
- ☺ A bench or work area for potting, holding harvests and crafting.
- ☺ Existing fencing or barriers.
- ☺ Tool shed.
- ☺ Watering system.