

The Survival Foods And Gardening Section

MAKING & SELLING TIRE GARDENS

By Kurt Saxon

Raised beds are the best way to garden, for several reasons. First, the plants are closer together so there is little weeding and greater productivity. Since they are several inches off the ground there is less stooping. The drainage is better. You supply the soil so there are no rocks, and you don't have to dig or plow the garden. Raised beds are usually a series of small garden plots which can be put here and there wherever there is a few square feet of space.

The drawback is that they are expensive. Like with railroad ties, which are costly and waste a lot of space in wood. Even 1x10 wooden boards cost a lot and unless specially treated, they rot. Then there is all that sawing and carpentry getting them together.

Tires are the answer. A standard P235/75R15 tire has 4 square feet of growing space when you cut out the sides right up to the tread. It gives a bed 8 1/2 inches above the ground. A P215/75R15 is 6 3/4 inches above the ground and has less planting area so the P235/75R15 is your best choice.

If you are husky you can use a strong sharp hunting knife to saw around the treads in about five minutes. But first you must use a quarter-inch drill to make the starting hole.

Your saber-saw will need a wood cutting blade with 10 teeth to the inch. For faster cutting, grind both sides of the blade, leaving the teeth, but very thin. This will cut through tire rubber like butter. It's fun.

Many places selling tires will charge a customer a dollar a piece to dispose of them. They don't want them. They're free. Go to your Tire World or such in most towns, and take your pick from great piles. They'll bless you for taking them away.

Any business selling and mounting tires will have a stack in back you can have. Here you can take your pick of truck tires a foot and a half thick with ten square feet of space with the side cut out, to standards and compact tires, on down to little bitty tires from three-wheelers.

Compact tires make neat little beds which could be put on decks, porches, along walks, etc. They are perfect for herb gardens. A novel way would be to paint

them in pastel colors and letter them "Catnip," "Thyme," "Marjoram," "Parsley," "Chives," etc. Most homeowners seeing them would want a set. A profitable use for tires from three-wheelers would be hanging baskets. These are often expensive but those made from three-wheeler tires would cost almost nothing. To make one, cut out the side at the tread and drill four holes with an eighth inch drill a half inch down the tread. Then cut two strong wires; their length depending on your need. Push the end of one wire from the outside to the inside and back out the next hole. Do the same with the second wire and pull both wires taut. Then bring them together above the tire and twist them into a three-inch strand and bend it into a hook.

Cut a circle from one inch chicken wire to fit the bottom inside of the tire. Then layer the bottom with grass, straw or moss and fill the planter with soil. Now put in the plant and hang it up. These would be especially good for growing cherry tomatoes on your patio.

But we're mainly interested in real gardens. Say you have a regular garden space. You'd put P235/75R15 tires all around the fence. The spaces between the tires' curves and the fence would be filled with earth to plant more back there. Weeds in front could be dealt with by using any weedeater as the tires would not be harmed and the plants inside would not be in range. Actually, the walks between tires should be spread with wood chips or gravel to eliminate weeds altogether.

A good thing about the tires is that they will never disintegrate. So what makes them an environmental nuisance makes them perfect for a multi-lifetime garden. Once these are set up, they are permanent. They will never wear out in your grandchildren's lifetimes and are easy to maintain.

Of course, naked tires aren't very pretty. They should be painted, especially if you mean to sell them. I suggest grass-green in water-base exterior house paint. You can buy it cheaply in five-gallon containers. A standard tire will take under a cup if turned inside out. Turning the tires inside-out has five advantages. First is that the deep rooted plants can go deeper without being stopped by the rim. Second is that the tires gain an inch or more in height. third is that they are straight instead of rounded, making for slightly more space. Fourth, they save paint, as the treads take up much more paint than the smooth insides. Fifth, if you are selling tire gardens, you can pile them like rubber bands in you pickup, using up less space.

Turning the tires inside-out is easy if you know how. The first step is to step on one side of the tire, pushing it to the ground. Next, reach over and pull the other side of the tire up toward you. Then keeping your right foot in place, step around with your left foot and put it alongside your right foot from the other side. Now, keeping your left foot on the flattened edge of the tire, push the tire over and grasp the underside of the opposite side and pull. The tire will now be turned

inside-out.

If the tires are laid out against a fence or wall, there will be spaces between the curvatures of the tires and the backdrop. Instead of filling these spaces with something to prevent weeds, it is best to fill them with soil, as each space amounts to about a square foot of growing area. These can be planted with a few onions, carrots, beets, etc.

If the backdrop is a wire fence, cardboard or plastic can be put alongside the fence to keep the soil from going through. A ten-tire layout will have four one-foot square spaces between the curvatures. These spaces can also be planted with a pepper plant, an okra plant, an eggplant, etc.

Start with a basic ten-tire garden plot. Line them up in two rows with each tire separated a half inch from its neighbor. Fill the spaces between the tires with soil for more plants.

You could fill your own garden with these 40 square foot plots and use them as standards for your commercial enterprise. These would produce ever so much more than regular gardens.

For instance, one tomato plant, properly supported, fed and watered, would produce over 100 pounds of tomatoes. If you should have 10 such plants, that would be over 1,000 pounds. Sell them for 50 cents a pound and get \$500 for some pretty easy part-time work.

Tomatoes aren't seasonal, as most people believe. They die from frost. Keep them warm, feed them well and they'll live for years, producing and producing. A single tomato plant grown in a Japanese greenhouse produced 10,000 pounds.

For tomatoes, cucumbers and Golden or any other small squash, you should use cages. The reason for the cages is that the most productive tomato plants grow up and if not supported will sprawl and the tomatoes will rot on the ground. The cages allow them to grow upward and you just pick the tomatoes through the wire. The same goes for cucumbers and small squash.

For the cages, get a 150 foot, five foot high roll of six-inch concrete reinforcing wire from any building supply store. Cut it into three and one half foot lengths with lineman's pliers. If you don't have strong hands, use a saber-saw with a No. 24 metal cutting blade. Hold the wire so it doesn't shimmy and cut flush with the vertical wire. It should zip through the strands one after another. If you don't have electricity you can use a hacksaw and a metal-cutting blade.

Your 150 foot roll will give you 42 cages. I paid \$43.00 tax included, which made each cage cost only \$1.02 each.

A double use for the concrete reinforcing wire is for a portable cold frame over the tires in early spring and late fall. First bend the wire so it covers both sides of the tops of the tires. Then lay plastic over it and weight it on both sides and the ends. Of course, this is for your shorter plants.

The other use for the wire is for trellises. The concrete reinforcing wire is as sturdy as any trellis material you will need. Just cut the wire as for a cage. Then bend it slightly so it fits along the inside of the tire and fill the tire with soil. Now plant your beans or any climbing vegetable close to the wire and you have got the best trellis ever.

When you get your roll of wire, lay it down so the loose end is on the bottom. Jerk it so you have a few feet to work with. Count across seven squares and cut flush on the far side of the horizontal strand. Now you have three and a half feet and about two inches of vertical wire facing you.

Take a 6 inch length of 3/8 inch galvanized pipe and bend one inch of the wire back toward the roll, forming a neat hook. Then bend the whole thing toward the last horizontal strand and connect the hooks all along it. The cage won't be perfectly round and doesn't have to be. But bend it by pressing until it's at least neat.

It might take a few minutes to learn to pull a wire here, push a section there, press the cage somewhere else to get it pretty even and to get the hooks to stay in place up and down the horizontal wire.

While learning to do this you can practice swearing. Anyway, after about the third cage, you can cut the wire, bend the hooks and make the whole cage in ten minutes or less.

This concrete reinforcing wire is rusty. Concrete doesn't stick well to galvanized wire so I don't think you can get it galvanized and fencing wire isn't as strong. In your own garden you may not care, since there's never enough rust to really soil your hands as you pick. However, it looks better painted. Just cleaning your brush on the outside only take a little while and covers most of the rust.

You might spray-paint the cages before bending them. After making the hooks, spray-paint the upwardly curved side with the nozzle on the most misty setting. Then put another on top and spray-paint it and so on. When the stack dries there won't be enough rusty spots to notice and certainly not enough to get a customer dirty.

With this raised bed system you can also have a greenhouse for each tire. The tire greenhouse is made of 6 ML greenhouse plastic ordered through any hardware store. An 8 x 100 foot roll costs about \$20 and makes 16 greenhouses for the

caged tires or 32 for those without cages.

This mini-greenhouse lets you begin your garden two months before the regular growing season. It also lets you keep growing two months after the first frost. That way you'll get three garden crops a year instead of two.



From "TIRE RECYCLING IS FUN"
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To make these mini-greenhouses, first roll out and cut four 6 foot lengths of plastic. Fold each over sideways and close the top and side with 2 inch wide masking tape, neatly so there is one inch on each side. Then run a hot iron slowly down the tape on the top and side, on both sides of the tape, being careful not to get the iron on the bare plastic. This will melt the plastic so there will be a permanent bond. To be sure, put staples every four inches along the tape.

Take your pipe and bend the wires protruding over the tops of the cages inward so they don't poke holes in the plastic.

The greenhouse will fit loosely over the cage and then over the tire. It can be raised as high as needed to

get at the bed and for picking and performs all the functions of any greenhouse. It is very stable around the cages since they are put in the tires before the soil is added.

The plastic is guaranteed for two years on a greenhouse. This is for year-round, all weather. These mini-greenhouses would be used only two months each in early spring and late fall. They wouldn't be subjected to the hot summer sun or the winter snow. Just using them when necessary and storing them in winter and summer, they could last twice as long.

Since 100 feet will make 16 six foot greenhouses or 32 four footers, they are indeed inexpensive. That's only \$1.25 for the caged tires and \$.63 each for the smaller ones. The smaller ones would be supported by two 2 1/2 foot sticks stuck in the sides of the tires.

So much for the basic tire garden.

Another use for the tires is in making compost. This is simply rotted organic matter such as weeds, garbage, manure and anything else that will break down. Compost is your basic soil conditioner. Gardening magazines show many designs for making composters. They usually involve a lot of wood frames, chicken wire and such and can run into money.

With tires, you can make excellent composters at no cost at all. Simply cut six standard tires at the treads, both sides. Put one down on the bare ground, unless you have a cement or board surface. Fill the first tire, then put on another. Keep filling and stacking until you've used up all your organic matter, and if you have more, ready another set of tires.

After a couple of weeks, lift off the top tire and lay it down beside the stack. Then shovel what was in the top tire into the one on the ground. Repeat with the next and so on. That's all there is to turning compost. In a few weeks, when it all has an earthy smell, it's ready to mix with soil.

Now for the economics of the tire garden.

If it's just for yourself and your family, you can just raise all the veggies you can eat and sell the surplus. Just charge 30% less than the stores and you'll sell all you can raise.

You could supply every restaurant for miles around. Organically grown fresh garden vegetable taste ever so much better than those trucked in from out-of-state. Tomatoes, alone, grown in real soil, locally, have a taste no industrial tomato factory can match. Organic Gardening has had several articles about people who make a good living growing nothing but tomatoes.

Say you have a fairly large garden space of 100x100 feet. For an initial investment of a few hundred dollars, you could lay out a couple of hundred tires which could compete with any wholesale seller of vegetables.

I'm not going to teach you how to garden. Your library has dozens of good books covering every step of the art. I might suggest, however, that you specialize in just three or four vegetables, get a reputation for quality and freshness and make an excellent living growing and selling them. But you might rather sell tire gardens themselves. Start with 10 tires, four cages (two for tomatoes, one for cucumbers and one for squash). Add the planting medium.

The tires cost nothing. The cages cost \$4.08. The planting medium (two parts soil to one part compost) may cost up to \$5.00 per tire, or considerably less. Paint, may be a dollar, and your materials cost is under \$60.00. Of course, there's labor. But if you have a couple of buddies, or make it a family business and sell the 10 tire complete gardens for \$250.00, you'd get about \$190.00 profit or more. Aside from processing, delivery and setup shouldn't take more than a couple of hours.

Marketing tire gardens is easy.

They would sell mainly to older people who couldn't go get the tires, cut them and fill them but would be delighted to plant, care for and harvest them. Most older people would shell out \$250.00 in a minute to insure a large portion of their food for the rest of their lives.

So even if you don't appreciate this idea, older people will. And there will be a market for all the tire gardens you can produce. But there are a lot of mature young people, too. Not all of them are physical enough to gather the materials for the gardens but would welcome them ready-made.

It's no trouble to get soil and compost. Look up "landscaping" in your Yellow Pages. They'll deliver soil at well under 50 cents a cubic foot, compost and whatever you need, by the truckload. If you just want to set up a tire garden for yourself, your local nursery and garden supply can sell you everything you need at a reasonable cost.

To run such a business, all you need is the simple, cheap and easily available equipment described in this article. You will also need a standard pickup truck, which you may already have. If you don't have one, get one. If you drive a car, trade it in for a pickup. If you're going into any kind of business involving hauling, you need a pickup, anyway.

Now to selling the service.

First you set up sample tire gardens, featuring all the ideas in this article and ideas you will come up with. You might even stock a supply of bedding plants, seeds, garden tools, etc., when you've become established. But with your sample gardens, it would be best to have them already started, plants and all. Then contact your local newspaper and they'll be glad to do a feature story.

Put an ad in the same issue saying, "**Come and see our tire gardens and let us set up one for you!**" People will start coming around and you'll have all the business you can handle from then on.

Don't be afraid others will compete with you. You'll have the jump on any competition if you do a good job, and people will choose you over the competition.

Be sure to order the tire recycling book. It will give you many more ideas for using tires both around your place and to make a good, low-overhead living.

TIRE GARDEN UPDATE

This short update will appear in THE SURVIVOR (formerly Shoestring Entrepreneur) Volume 9, Issue 3

By Kurt Saxon

I made a tire garden, as described in my article, "Making And Selling Tire Gardens", issue 2 of Shoestring Entrepreneur. It was very productive and easy to work.

However, my advice to leave the bottom side of the tire uncut was unwise. It didn't act as a reservoir. I had some of the tires taken up at the end of the season to replace some of the soil I had mixed improperly. I found the bottom rims root-bound.

Also, I had decided to have the tires turned inside-out and this can't be done unless both sides are cut out. Turning the tires inside-out has five advantages. First is that the deep-rooted plants can go deeper without being stopped by the rim. Second is that the tires gain an inch or more in height. Third is that they are straight instead of rounded, making for slightly more space. Fourth, they save paint, as the treads take up much more paint than the smooth insides. Fifth, if you are selling tire gardens, you can pile them like rubber bands in your pickup, using up less space.

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If the backdrop is a wire fence, cardboard or plastic can be put alongside the fence to keep the soil from going through. A ten-tire layout will have four one-foot square spaces between the curvatures. These spaces can also be planted with a pepper plant, an okra plant, an eggplant, etc.

Rather than use pliers to bend the projections from the tops of the reinforced

concrete wire cages and the hooks to connect the sides of the cages, I discovered a better tool. It is simply a six inch length of 3/8 inch outside diameter galvanized pipe from the hardware store. This is perfect. You simply put the pipe over the projection, the length you want, and bend. This is ever so much easier and quicker.

In regards to the plastic mini-greenhouses for caged plants, they are practical. However, ironing their edges is too uncertain in bonding the plastic. A better way is to put the masking tape on as instructed, then with a regular stapler, staple the masking tape and plastic about one inch in and three inches apart. This should hold it together in anything less than a tornado.

Also, you don't need to space the tires two inches apart to accommodate the bottom of the plastic. Just place any sort of weights, such as rocks, around the bottom, resting on the tire rim.

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