

Gardening Articles for week ending 18th OCTOBER 2008
Written by Wally Richards.

LABOUR WEEKEND

With Labour Weekend fast approaching there will be more New Zealanders working away in their gardens than we have seen before, for many a long year.

The reason for this is likely two fold, financial and health.

In the last couple of years many new gardeners have appeared at garden shops looking to start off a vegetable garden because they are very concerned about what is in their food chain.

They want to grow as much food as possible that has nutritional goodness and not laced with chemical poisons. This makes good sense because as a gardener you determine what goes into the soil the plants are feeding on.

With the incredible upheaval in the world's financial domain we face a lot of uncertainties also, and to have a well stocked vegetable garden is one way to ensure that a ready source of food is at hand along with big savings.

The cost of vegetables and fruit purchased, will keep going up in price, otherwise the commercial growers will be out of business, as their chemical fertilisers and sprays prices are escalating out of sight.

Compound this with transport costs and we shall see many food lines slipping out of the reach of most people on a tighter budget.

We all need to become more self sufficient and look after our own health by growing and eating good wholesome fruit and vegetables which is home grown.

Garden centre owners have reported fantastic increases in the sale of vegetable seeds and plants along with fruit trees and herbs.

You do not even need a garden to grow vegetables and fruit trees as you can grow lots of things in containers.

I have written about this before and by using pots, buckets, polystyrene boxes and plastic rubbish tins (these are for fruit trees). For instance you all know about growing a spud in a bucket.

To grow in containers all you need to do is purchase a few bags of compost, some sheep manure pellets, maybe a bag of blood & bone and add these to the compost and plant up seeds or seedlings.

You can increase the goodness of the food by adding mineral rich products such as **Magic Botanic Liquid (MBL)** and **Rok Solid**.

You don't even have to use a lot of the sheep manure pellets, blood & bone and **Rok Solid** as a little placed in the planting hole will do nicely. After which you can spray the foliage of the plants with the **MBL** 2 weekly.

For those that have a nice sunny area where a vegetable garden could be started you don't even have to do any digging.

Mow down as low as possible any grass or weeds in the area. Make a surround that is at least 200mm tall. (the taller the better.)

If using treated timber cut the wood to the required size and paint all surfaces with acrylic paint giving a couple of coats to seal in the chemicals.

The garden should only be about a metre wide so that you can work from the sides and never have to walk on it.

When your surround is in place for the raised garden cover the bottom with cardboard or several sheets of newspaper.

Over this throw in grass clippings, food scraps, animal manures, prunings, leaves and anything organic including home made compost and spent potting mix from old

containers..

This will cheaply build up the base of the raised garden. When you have a layer about half full then sprinkle a good dose of **Rapid Lime** over the material.

Next layer another lot of wet newspaper and then with purchased compost place over the newspaper.

If you have animal manure such as chicken, cow or horse this can be incorporated into the top layer for extra goodness.

Finish off the top few centimeters with purchased compost. (This will be weed free)

Now you are ready to plant up as suggested with sheep pellets etc.

Corrugated iron with fence posts is ideal for a taller raised garden as the heat from the sun will warm the growing medium and speed up plant growth. A little more expense but well worth it in the long run.

What we have achieved from the above is a weed free garden (at the beginning anyway) with the cardboard or newspaper initially suppressing any weeds from coming through from below.

Worms love newspaper and cardboard so they will be attracted to your raised garden and provide further nutrients and keep the soil open.

It costs nothing to obtain animal manure and sea weed (if near the sea) and either of these (or both) can be placed in a plastic rubbish tin to about a third full and the filled with water to two thirds full and stirred.

The resulting liquid can be diluted 1 part to 10 parts water to spray or water over foliage of the plants for extra feeding.

Or a dilution of 1 part to 1 part water for watering over the compost (not the plants)

Some grass clippings can be added to the brew as well but not too much.

As plastic rubbish tins come with lids you can keep it sealed when not using.

With buying seeds look for the cheaper seeds as these are likely to be open pollinated ones which will give you better crops. The more expensive hybrid seeds are not so good as they have been bred in most cases to grow in a chemical environment. Some will actually fail in a natural soil.

When you grow a crop then let the best looking one go to seed. You will be able to collect more seed from one plant than you will know what to do with. These seeds are free and will greatly reduce future costs.

Labour Weekend is the traditional time to plant up gardens in New Zealand and an ideal time to get started for both new and experienced gardeners. (The later would already be well underway.)

CONVOLVULUS

In my new book, Wally's Green Tips for Gardeners, I give lots of gardening tips to overcome many common problems that can face gardeners through out all the seasons.

The book also gives lots of information and tips on growing vegetables which is ideal for both the experienced and the new novice gardener.

I avoided the use of chemical solutions in most of the information with the exception of one great tip on convolvulus that I heard about while giving a talk to a group of gardeners.

Convolvulus has the white roots which run through the soil and send up their foliage. It is relatively easy to lightly fork through the soil and remove the roots. Any bit left behind will grow and become a future problem. The worst aspect is that, it is a weed that keeps on invading from next door.

The solution that I was told about was to use a chemical herbicide that is systemic and

to place the herbicide into a suitable bowl or deeper tray and take the growing tips of the convolvulus and sit them into the herbicide.

As they are attached to the root system of the weed the herbicide is sucked up to translocate through that part of the root system next door and kill the weed.

As more shoots appear through the fence they are treated in a like manner till your problem is solved.

A great idea and even though I don't like the use of chemical weed killers this is a practical use of them.

Later you can drench your side of the fence's soil with **Magic Botanic Liquid** to clean up any residues in the soil.

Prior to hearing of this solution my recommendation had been to dig a trench down the fence line and line the fence side with sheets of steel or similar to make a barrier under ground.

Often this solution was not practical for many gardeners, and they would have to constantly deal to the problem when the foliage appeared.

Problems ring me at 0800 466464 (Palmerston North 3570606)