

Wally's Weekly News 21<sup>st</sup> March 2009  
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#### GARDENING FOR A DEPRESSION.

Gardening, or more to the point, growing as much as you can of your own vegetables and fruit is one answer to off set times when your dollar has to stretch further than it can.

Most readers around their 60's will remember growing up at a time when our parents were very conscious of hard times and in many cases we will still have memories of big vegetable gardens, fruit trees, chickens in their runs, baking, bottling, preserves and jam making. No waste, every thing was used and the expression of the day was, 'Waste not, Want not'.

There was always ample greens to cook with bottled fruit for desert, eggs or porridge for breakfast.

The savings made on these basic food items, from ones own backyard, meant extra pennies to buy the other commodities one could not produce.

Killing a chicken for Xmas or another special occasion was a luxury as the chooks were more valuable in egg production than in meat. We even knew our neighbours and everyone would share their surpluses in the street where they lived or with friends. This is a far cry from how things have changed over the last 60 odd years. We knew the difference between Wants and Needs, with wants placed on the back burner. Likely the economic situation will bring about some sort of revival of those hard times.

I was prompted to reflecting about my past childhood as a result of an email received this week from an American web site where a blog was posted which read:

"I eat all natural foods and I'm still active and healthy at age 86...Last week I planted 3 more dwarf fruit trees so I now have 12 of various kinds. I COOK my food and don't eat out of a box. I home can, dry, and freeze my surplus summer foods. Just like your great-grandmother used to do. I grow a small vegetable garden and also a medicinal herb garden. Everything is organic. I've studied herbs for some years. I grew up during the Depression of the 30s and I can do it again. People can be surprised how many things they can do without when it comes down to food. But we NEED the small organic farmers."

An excellent blog and one we should reflect on.

At this time of the year it is your last chance to get a crop of greens in for winter, if you leave it too late then the plants will not reach maturity and in the spring may go to seed. The best vegetables to grow would be silverbeet, spinach, broad beans and winter lettuce. Next would be members of the brassica family such as cabbages etc.

There are two ways you can go about this, in containers or in raised gardens.

The containers I prefer are the polystyrene boxes you can obtain cheaply at the fish departments of supermarkets or fish wholesalers. Drill a few holes in the bottom for drainage and fill with a mixture of 80% compost and 20% top soil. Mix these in a wheel barrow or on a plastic tarp and add some garden lime, sheep manure pellets and any animal manure than you can obtain. Blood & bone can also be included.

Fill the box to about two thirds full with the mix and if you have any earth worms place them into the mix. Cover with a couple of sheets of newspaper and wet that down. This is to create a weed barrier for any weed seeds that might be in the soil or home made compost used, besides worms love the newspaper. Now fill the box to near the rim with

purchased compost which will be weed free.

Now you can plant your seedlings or seeds into this top layer of compost.

I am endeavouring to keep the cost of doing this as low as possible but would recommend that you purchase a bottle of **Magic Botanic Liquid (MBL)** and water that over the freshly planted seeds/plants.

Then about every two weeks spray the plants with the same. It makes a big difference in the quality and maturity times of your crops.

Place the container in a nice sunny position and if you have chlorinated water then fill your watering can and any buckets with the chlorinated water and leave for 24 hours to remove the chlorine, before using it to water the plants. (If you do not have chlorinated water on tap forget this step.)

You can plant about 6 brassicas, or 6 lettuce, or 8 silverbeet or about 12 spinach to a box. Lots of carrot seeds for thinning later and about 10 broad bean seeds.

If you like greater variety in your cooking look for winter growing Asian vegetable seeds in seed stands or in a mail order such as Kings Seeds.

You can have lots of these boxes growing different crops in your back yard, they look neat and if you need to place them on a lawn area then lay down a sheet of black plastic film over the cut grass to sit the boxes on. It will likely kill the grass over time but that means less mowing and it is better to have a full tummy than have a brilliant looking lawn.

Now to the raised bed situation as an alternative.

If your back yard is fairly full with lawns and established plants then you will likely have to use a sunny part of your lawn to place your raised gardens. Mow the lawn as low as possible in the area where you will construct the raised garden.

Build a surround with any suitable materials such as wood, bricks, concrete blocks etc. If using tanalised wood, paint the wood all over with two coats of acrylic paint to seal in the chemicals.

Place cardboard over the mowed lawn at the base of the raised garden to prevent any weeds or grass growing up. Now you can follow the instructions above as I suggested with for the containers to fill the raised garden.

When constructing the raised garden make sure you place it so that you can work the garden from all sides which means you will never have to walk on the mix and remove the problem of compacting.

If you use concrete blocks then the cavity in the blocks can also be filled with mix as above and smaller plants such as lettuce or herbs can be planted in the cavity.

Remember if the depression becomes very bad for you, every bit of space to grow is vital.

Next if you have the room and means, then construct a small chicken house and run.

Chickens can be feed kitchen scraps, weeds as well as some chicken food to give you a supply of both eggs and chicken manure for your gardens.

Collect the chicken manure and place into a large bucket or container and fill three quarters with non chlorinated water, stir and then the liquid manure can be used to feed the soil in your gardens.

Dilute 1:10 with non chlorinated water and water this over your gardens.

A little of the **MBL** can be added to this as well.

For those gardeners that wish to increase the nutritional value of their crops then products such as **Rok Solid, Ocean Solids and BioPhos** can be applied to the gardens at the

prescribed rates on the jars.

If you are new to gardening you will have successes and failures to start with, but the key is to ask questions of experienced gardeners for tips so that in time with experience, you will learn and have many more successes than failures.

Problems ring me at 0800 466464 (Palmerston North 3570606)