

GROWING FOOD IN CONTAINERS

Its been a busy time with lots of interesting emails and phone calls from readers that have noticed unusual things in their gardens and skies. (let me know if you come across anything)

For now let us continue with the theme of growing some healthy food in containers.

Last week we talked about growing wheat grass with all the known minerals and elements so that maximum goodness for your health can be obtained by juicing the young grass or making green smoothies.

All fruit and vegetables have different benefits so if we grow a range of edible produce naturally (without man made fertilisers and chemicals) incorporated into the growing medium, all the known minerals and elements, we will have some very tasty produce which will help you and your family maintain very good health.

When growing in containers you have to consider root room so the depth of the container should be about 15 to 20 cm deep or more.

Any large plastic pots will do as well as using 20 litre plastic Jerry cans with the top cut off.

My favorite is polystyrene boxes which are used in the fish industry for transporting fish.

Once used they cannot be used again for that purpose so are either sold cheaply or given away by wholesale fish suppliers or supermarkets.

These boxes come with lids and can vary in size but there are two more common sizes that have good depth and ideal for planting a few plants in each one.

For instance you can have half a dozen lettuce or silver beet, 2 or 3 brassicas, a dozen dwarf bean plants, about 18 onions, 20 or more carrots, a pile of spring onions. Also about 8 strawberry plants.

For plants like Zucchini I prefer to use a 20 litre container which is also ideal for pumpkins, dwarf tomatoes, cucumbers, egg plant, capsicum and peppers.

The first thing to do with the polystyrene box is to drill a few drainage holes in the bottom.

For the growing medium use purchased compost that is not from re-cycled green waste (you do not want herbicide residuals in your food) Use either Daltons or Oderings compost as both are good value.

(There are likely others but I am not familiar with their brands and there are ones that can be a waste of money and be expensive as well)

Fill the box or your container two thirds full with the compost and then you can add the additional foods and minerals.

If you have chook manure then place a layer of that across the compost, an alternative would be

Sheep Manure Pellets or Yates Dynamic Lifter Plant food, add a sprinkling of blood & bone..

For minerals you add Rok Solid and Ocean Solids, a little BioPhos, Garden Lime, gypsum and dolomite. If you have a worm farm add some vermicasts and worms.

Then cover these with more compost up to about 15mm from rim.

This allows an area for watering.

You can now plant your seedlings or seeds.

Place the tray in a sunny situation and water (ideally with non chlorinated water)

If you do not have a filter on your hose tap to remove chlorine then fill a watering can with water and stand for 24 hours in a sunny position to aid in the removal of chlorine.

It is now a matter of keeping the medium moist while the plants are growing and about every two weeks spraying the foliage with Magic Botanic Liquid.

For those that have more room you can grow any fruit trees in containers ranging from about 50 litres to 100 litres. This means using plastic rubbish bins or plastic 200 litre drums cut in half.

Once again the same process for filling the container after drainage holes have been drilled.

Citrus are ideal for this; from limes to oranges you choose your favorites.

I have about a dozen different citrus growing in containers very nicely.

Feijoa self fertile types such as Unique are good value, in fact any fruit tree will do well enough as long as you root prune every 3 years.

Next week we will look at Raised Gardens.

Earth Soil Year is attracting attention and I received the following form the Internet this week.

'Generating three centimeters of top soil takes 1,000 years, and if current rates of degradation continue all of the world's top soil could be gone within 60 years, a senior UN official said on Friday.

About a third of the world's soil has already been degraded, Maria-Helena Semedo of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) told a forum marking World Soil Day.

The causes of soil destruction include chemical-heavy farming techniques, deforestation which increases erosion, and global warming. The earth under our feet is too often ignored by policymakers, experts said.

"Soils are the basis of life," said Semedo, FAO's deputy director general of natural resources. "Ninety five percent of our food comes from the soil."

Unless new approaches are adopted, the global amount of arable and productive land per person in 2050 will be only a quarter of the level in 1960, the FAO reported, due to growing populations and soil degradation.

Soils play a key role in absorbing carbon and filtering water, the FAO reported. Soil destruction creates a vicious cycle, in which less carbon is stored, the world gets hotter, and the land is further degraded.'

I wonder at the mentality of those people that tote 'Best Practice' as the excuse for farming and horticulture.

I remember some years ago a 'Soil Scientist' visited a friend of mine's Certified Organic Farm.

He was shown around fields of lush grass and saw healthy stock that never had a visit from a Vet unless they broke a leg.

After the 'Soil Scientist' found that no superphosphate or other chemicals were used on the farm his opinion was that within a couple of years there would be no more farm-able land as all nutrients (in his narrow view) would be used up. His reasoning was that left over fertilisers pre-organic was all that was left and would quickly run out.

Well here we are over 5 years later, has the farm become a desert waste as our 'Soil Scientist' predicted?

No in fact it is doing even better than ever much to the dismay of 'Best Practice, Soil Scientists' and their heavily funded fertiliser companies.

I believe that there are some good scientists that can see beyond the hype of the fertiliser companies just as there is some good Doctors that can see beyond that of pharmaceutical companies.

Here is a non gardening thought for the week, A sales person is employed by a pharmaceutical company given a few weeks sales training and then will go out and tell a fully qualified Doctor who has had many years of experience how to look after his patents? That came from a retired Doctor.