

Wally's Weekly News 3rd October 2009  
Written by Wally Richards.

## BASIC GARDENING

With lots of people trying their hand at gardening for the first time, either last season or for this new season it is timely to give a few tips on how to garden and have the best results.

There is nothing worse for new gardeners who put in the effort and money then end up with poor results.

It is very disheartening and can lead to some people quitting thinking they do not have the 'Green Fingers.'

**Raised Gardens** or container growing is the easiest way to garden by far. You do not have to worry about existing soil conditions and the hundreds of weeds that are going to happen when you cultivate the earth.

For vegetable plots raised gardens are the way to go and the higher the better. (450mm and up to 600mm.)

In my latest book, **Wally's Gardening and Health** I explain in detail how to make a fantastic raised garden that is going to give you excellent results with little effort and low cost.

If you have an old vegetable garden or a lawn area that you want to make into a good garden then this is how I would go about it.

The area should be very sunny and away from existing trees and shrubs by about a metre or more from their drip line. (That's the area which their foliage reaches to.) If you make your garden too close to trees and shrubs then they will rob your plants of moisture and food then grow much bigger.

Firstly mow down the grass or weeds as low as possible then cover the desired plot with a few thicknesses of cardboard or old woolen type mats or carpet. Wet these down.

You can make a surround out of timber, concrete blocks etc. If using treated timber give it a couple of coats of acrylic paint all over once cut to size, to seal in the chemicals.

The raised garden can be as long as you want but the width should not be greater than what you can comfortably work the garden from the sides without ever having to walk on the area.

Now you want about sufficient purchased compost (weed free) to create a layer of about 18cm to 30cm. If you have access to animal manure or chook manure a good layer of this can be placed over the cardboard first along with kitchen scraps. Animal manure may have weed seeds in it so after this layer you cover it with several thicknesses of newspaper and wet that down also.

Purchase a number of bags of compost to which you will add blood & bone, sheep manure pellets, and or **Bio Boost**. This same mix is what you would use for containers growing vegetables, flowers, fruit trees or ornamentals. Do not use potting mix or shrub type mixes, they are expensive when compared to compost and do not give the same good results.

Spread this over the area to the desired height. The plot should be fairly free of weeds using this method, any weed seeds that should be blown onto it can be removed as soon as they germinate.

If you have made a long raised garden then you can progressively start at one end with

the compost mix and do the rest as your budget allows. Make sure any area not covered with compost has the cardboard down to prevent weed invasion.

Do not allow any weeds or grass to grow around the outside of the raised garden and a simple way to prevent this is to place a sheet of plastic or weedmat about 30cm wide or wider around the raised garden and cover with bark or gravel. This makes a neat job and a good walk area.

Now you are ready to plant or sow. Check the potential heights of any crop you plan to grow and grow the smaller ones on the front facing the sun and the tallest to the rear, so plants do not shade each other.

If you are growing from seed then for smaller seeds sieve some compost over the existing compost to create a finer layer. Place or sprinkle the seeds over this fine layer and then sprinkle **Rok Solid** (rock dust) over the seeds and wet it down with **Magic Botanic Liquid** (MBL) mixed at 20mls to a litre of water.

Now sieve a little more compost over to cover nicely the seeds. Lightly water and keep the area moist but not wet. (If it rains wait till it dries down nicely before adding more moisture)

A light watering every day when the area becomes dryish is ideal.

If you wish to grow some plants by purchasing seedlings then only buy seedlings that are in punnets or cell packs to prevent club root disease getting established in your plot.

When you are buying vegetable seedlings look for the ones that are still on the small size. (This does not apply to any types that are fruiting such as tomatoes, capsicums, pumpkin etc).

Non fruiting ones such as lettuce, silverbeet etc or what we call foliage vegetables should be avoided if they are fairly big in their punnets as they may have had a check in growth and later turn to seed before maturing. If the seedlings are very small you can grow them on at home in a sunny sheltered spot till they are large enough to handle.

Once they are of a nice size plunge the whole container into a bucket of water with **MBL** added.

Wait till the bubbles stop and then lift to drain. This allows you to remove the plants from a cell pack with little root damage or to carefully pull apart the plants from a punnet pack. Make a planting hole and sprinkle a little **Rok Solid** into the base of the hole and then plant the seedling.

Make sure that you observe the width that the plants will grow to so you do not plant them too close.

Finish off by watering them in with **MBL** added to the water.

You can also protect the seedlings from birds, slugs, snails and chilling winds by placing a clear plastic two litre bottles over each seedling with the bottom cut off and the cap removed. Even the 2 litre plastic milk bottles can be used in this manner but not as good as the clear plastic ones.

**Neem Tree Granules** can be sprinkled around plants to assist in pest insect control.

Now here is an interesting thing which concerns the new pest, potato and tomato psyllid that ruined many crops last season. I have spoken to two gardeners that used **Neem Tree Granules** with either tomatoes or potatoes and not had any problems with the plants thus treated but on untreated plants they were a dismal failure.

That is very interesting and backs my theory that using the granules and maybe also spraying with **Neem Tree Oil**, the pest would not be able to damage the crops

significantly.

In both cases they had part of their crop unprotected which means that they unintentionally had control plants which were affected proving the treated ones were protected.

So my advice to gardeners is to place **Neem Tree Granules** in the planting hole and sprinkle the same on the soil surface especially if you are anywhere else but the lower South Island.

In areas where potatoes or tomatoes are grown commercially, extra sprays of **Neem Tree Oil** would likely be a must, especially later in the season when the psyllid populations build up.

Without this prevention you are likely to have failures.

Another source told me that they tried the chemical sprays last season and still had crop losses.

The anti-feedent aspects of the **Neem** is likely the best treatment for the least damage.

Problems ring me at 0800 466464 (Palmerston North 3570606)