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GARDENING TO SURVIVE THE ECONOMICAL DOWN TURN

The worlds economic situation is in an upheaval and by the looks of things it is only going to get worse.

At this time in New Zealand things are not too bad as yet, so as we used to say, 'Make hay while the sun shines'.

There are two aspects to growing your own food to be more self-sufficient, these are the short term and the long term. For instance on the short term you can plant out a few lettuces and some silverbeet and be eating the maturing plants in a matter of weeks. On the other hand when we plant a young citrus or fruit tree we are looking at a few years before we can gather good harvests.

When I was a lad, I grew up with my grandparents and mother on a section that had an abundance of fruiting plants and vegetables along with chickens. With the eggs, vegetables and fruit we could have survived fairly well if the need arose. Money was tight also in those times, for our little family, but our outgoings for other food stuffs were minimal. Only a few items needed to be purchased such as flour, sugar, milk and butter etc. We did a lot of baking and preserving to utilize the abundance of produce available from the garden, all of which was nourished by chicken manure.

Back then there was no fridges or deep freezers, only a porous concrete container for keeping some perishable items cooler. (It was a concrete box with a concrete door measuring about 30 cm wide and 50cm tall, you placed water in the cavity at the top which would seep through the concrete and evaporate causing the interior to be cool.) Nothing was wasted on the principal of 'waste not, want not', left over, vegetable trimmings and weeds would go to the chickens and we would gain fresh eggs every day. A real treat would be to kill and roast a pullet for Xmas dinner or a special occasion. Because of limited room not everyone can have a small chook house and run, for half a dozen chickens but for anyone that do, they are a great investment to ensure you have food in times of need or to reduce your cost of food purchases.

The alternative for those that can't have chickens would be to install a worm farm to take care of your kitchen scraps and supply free worm casts and worm pee for fertilising your vegetable crops.

I have a combination of both, two worm farms and a dozen chickens that can free range part of the section. Both sources supply free, high quality organic material for the fruit trees and vegetable crops.

On the long term you can purchase fruit trees and fruiting plants and get them started for future harvests.

If and when times get really tough, then potential home buyers will be looking for established food gardens in preference to ornamental gardens, so you can be adding a lot of value to your section and home.

Raised gardens are far better than the old method of digging up garden plots for vegetable production.

A raised garden can be made from concrete blocks, timber or roofing iron. A raised garden never gets walked on; instead you just tend it from the sides which remove the need for tilling the soil.

Weeds are not such a problem either as the higher the raised garden, the less chance of weed seeds blowing in. What weeds that do come up, are simply cut off just below ground level while small, then left laying on the soil to decompose.

My recent book, '[Wallys Green Tips for Gardeners](#)' gives the information about building raised gardens.

On the short term aspect anyone can grow a few vegetables that are quick to mature and great for your health and wallet. Any container that is between 18 to 30cm deep is sufficient to grow most crops, the length and width will determine how many can be grown.

For instance; polystyrene boxes that are often given away free from supermarket fish departments are ideal for a whole range of vegetables. Drill some holes in the base for drainage and fill them with a purchased compost that is friable and weed free. Here is what I do; I fill to about half full the box, with compost and then place a layer of animal manure such as chook manure or alternatively blood & bone with sheep manure pellets. For additional minerals I then sprinkle a little [Rok Solid](#) mineral dust and [Ocean Solids](#). This is then covered with more compost to within about 20mm to the top rim of the box. If you have any worms place a few into the mix as these will also supply extra food and keep the mix open.

Now it is ready to sow seeds or plant seedlings. You can get 6 lettuces in a tray at nice spacing or 8 silverbeet plants, 10-12 spinach, about the same number of dwarf bean seeds, about 20 or more beetroot seeds, numerous carrot or parsley seeds, a good crop of onion seed, a lot of spring onion seeds, a number of yams, 6 medium or mini size cabbages, or other brassicas and half a dozen strawberry plants.

Then in tubs of about 20 litres, one dwarf type tomato plant, one zuchinni, two staked cucumbers, half a dozen staked climbing beans, a couple of pumpkins, 4 sweet corn seeds. (Every type as suggested in separate 20 litre containers.) Plant most in a double row halfway between the sides and the middle.

Buckets can be used to grow potatoes at one seed per bucket.

Larger containers such as 40 to 100 litres can be used to grow tall type tomato plants such as Beefsteak.

Also plastic rubbish tins of 75 to 100 litres are ideal for a range of fruit trees including all citrus, Fejioa Unique, a tamarillo and most other fruiting trees or bushes.

200 litre plastic or steel drums can be cut in half to provide two 100 litre containers or cut down the middle, long ways, to give a good size planting bed.

Plastic children's paddling pools are also ideal and often don't cost much from plastic shops.

Once you get your plants up and away, a two weekly spray of [Magic Botanic Liquid](#) (MBL) will make for healthier plants and bigger crops.

Having your own vegetables fresh straight out of the garden will not only save you money but it will greatly improve your diet.

Commercially grown vegetables lack goodness and carry chemical residues from all the chemicals used in their growth. The commercial produce is also becoming much more expensive to buy because the cost of fertilisers, chemical sprays and transport have all increased markedly.

They are not fresh as we are lead to believe, in most cases they are at least a couple of days old from harvest to supermarket shelves.

Vegetables and fruit grown naturally in your own back yard and picked for the table as required will make a healthy difference to your body.

You can be self sufficient to a degree and if one day the supermarket does not open its doors, you can fall back on what you have stored and grown. Better to be safe than sorry.

Problems ring me at 0800 466464 (Palmerston North 3570606)