

### Composting:

- By forming your bales into a “U” shape you can use the center section for composting organic matter throughout the growing season. When the bale has significantly decomposed, push it onto the compost pile to finish decomposing. By the next spring, the pile should be ready to use.

### Cold Frame:

- Form your bales into a “U” shape, one bale wide, with an opening on one end that can be easily rolled away for access.
- The bales will hold in warmth and protect young plants.
- For additional warmth and to create a mini-greenhouse, cover the top with clear plastic.
- **WARNING!** The plastic will trap heat and can quickly cook the plants. Remove the plastic on sunny days.



For more information about gardening, check your local library, or check out these web sites for information on gardening in western Washington.

- <http://gardening.wsu.edu> (answers to many gardening questions)
- <https://cru84.cahe.wsu.edu/> (access to many free Washington State University Extension gardening publications)
- Contact the Lewis County Master Gardeners at 740-1212 for answers to specific gardening questions.

## WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY



LEWIS COUNTY EXTENSION

### *Master Gardener Program*

351 NW North Street, Chehalis, WA 98532  
(360) 740-1212 <http://lewis-mg-mrc.org>

WSU Extension programs are available to all without discrimination. Non-compliance may be reported to the local WSU Extension Agent.

# Straw-bale Gardening

### Advantages of straw-bale gardening:

- Can be placed on top of hard, rocky soil, or heavy clay soil with poor drainage.
- Can be placed directly on a concrete patio or asphalt driveway (avoid placing on wooden decks or patios as they may be too heavy for the supports or rot the wood).
- Can be placed in an area that gets full sun during the day.
- Bales are approximately two feet high making them more accessible for the handicapped or people with bad backs
- When placed on poor soil, they will attract earthworms, improving the soil over time.
- Are easily removed at the end of the season or in the case of rental property.

### Bale preparation:

- Decide where to place the bales and in what configuration. Once bales are wet they are very heavy and difficult to move.
- If placing bales on top of grass or weeds, place 4 or 5 thicknesses of newsprint under the bale and extending out several inches to prevent grass and weeds from growing up into the sides of the bales.
- Place bales with cut side up and binding twine on the sides.
- Water the new bales thoroughly and keep them wet for 2-3 days. Keeping the bales moist is very important. The inside of the bales should start to warm up. You may want to add a little general purpose (10-10-10) fertilizer and water it in to speed things up.



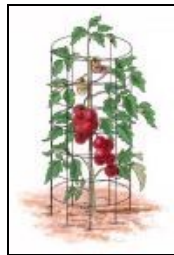
- If grass or weed seeds sprout, pull them out while they are still small. Small mushrooms may sprout also. They can be pulled or left on the bale (**DO NOT EAT THEM!**)
- When bale is comfortably warm to the touch, spread 2 - 3 inches of compost or purchased potting soil on top of bale and water well.

### Planting:

- Plant flower seeds or vegetables as directed on seed packet.
- Small transplants such as tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, etc. can be planted by pushing aside some of the soil and tucking the plant into the hole. Be sure to spread out roots then tamp soil lightly around the roots.



- Tall plants such as corn or large tomato plants are more difficult to grow in the bales because the straw is loose and can't provide strong root support. If you do plant in the bales, stake them securely. Some plants such as cherry tomatoes can be planted on the corner and allowed to trail over the edges.



- Additional space for climbing vines such as peas, beans or cucumbers can be created by making a simple trellis of two upright 2x2 boards pounded firmly into the ground at one end of the bale and winding twine between the two posts as illustrated.



- Plant annuals only as the bales will break down in one to two seasons.
- To make the bales more decorative, plant trailing flowers on the edges.

### Watering:

- Water the bales daily (preferably in the morning). Straw absorbs a lot of water and it is important not to let it dry out.



### Fertilizing:

- Fertilize once a week with a general purpose fertilizer (10 -10-10) or one formulated for vegetables.
- Dilute the fertilizer to 1/4 of the recommended strength.
- Always water well before and after applying fertilizer.

### Winter Gardening:

- Our mild climate allows you to grow many vegetables throughout the winter. Some of these include:



- \* Lettuce "Arctic King"
- \* Carrots "Merida"
- \* Leek "Giant Musselburgh"
- \* Green Onions "Winter White Bunching Onion"
- \* Kale "Winterbor"
- \* Cabbage "Tundra" and "January King"
- \* Cauliflower "Lundy", "Maystar" and "Needles"
- \* Beets "Flat of Egypt" and "Lutz Greenleaf"
- \* Parsnips "Javelin"
- \* Spinach "Bloomsdale Savoy" and "Tye"

- Plant winter vegetables from mid-summer through early fall depending on variety.
- Contact Territorial Seed Company for a "Winter Gardening catalog." Territorial Seed Company  
PO Box 158  
Cottage Grove, OR 97424-0061  
Phone 1-800-626-0866  
Web page: [www.territorialseed.com](http://www.territorialseed.com)
- Read PNW-548 from WSU Extension Publications for more information on winter gardening.  
<https://cru84.cahe.wsu.edu/>