

'Sack Gardens'

'Sack Gardening' is a creative approach used in Africa for growing vegetables in areas where soil, water, and space are at a premium. African grandmothers, who are raising children orphaned by HIV/AIDS, have discovered that sack gardens using large food-aid sacks can be set up close to home, even in slum areas, to provide the much needed nutrition for their families. Grandmothers also sell the extra fresh produce to generate income towards school fees, health care and housing etc. Several of the community projects supported by the Stephen Lewis Foundation are teaching this agricultural technique.

On the rocky Bruce Peninsula, we need to experiment with various gardening methods if we want to have a sustainable food supply.

Raised and container gardening are wise options on the Peninsula -- given little topsoil, much shade from all our trees, unpredictable rainfalls and an animal population that is always hungry. This can be a family project. Small hands can easily help with every stage.

Materials needed:



A large grain sack



A large juice or coffee can [48 oz.] with the top and bottom removed to make a cylinder



Stones [about 1-3" in size] for a central watering column



Mixture of well-draining topsoil and composted material [add other soil improvement materials such as blood/bone meal as required]



4 wood stakes [the height of the sack] and nylon twine to wrap around the stakes to support sack when it is filled with soil

Start by finding a good spot for your sack, sheltered, sunny and close to a water supply [such as rain barrels]

Extra Tips:



Start seeds indoors several weeks before planting. Toilet paper or paper towel rolls cut in 3" lengths with tape across one end create compostable containers that can be directly planted into the sack. Seedlings do better than seeds in the sides of the sack. Seeds can be planted on the top of the sacks.

How to Plant in 6 Easy Steps:



1. Roll down the edges of the sack almost all the way. Add a few inches of soil over the bottom. Place your hollow can in the middle and fill the can with stones. Build up the soil around the outside of the can until it is level with the top of the can.



2. Raise the can [but don't remove it yet!], so there is only a small layer of stones at the bottom. Fill the can again with stones and again build up the soil around the outside to the top of can. Repeat this process until the sack is filled with soil and there is a column of stones down the middle. Remove the can.



3. Hammer in 3 or 4 stakes around the outside of the sack to support it and wind some twine around the stakes and then around the sack as added support.



4. Carefully cut small slits shaped like an inverted 'T' [about 2" in diameter and height] in the sides of the sack, where you'll insert the seedlings. There is likely space for 3-5 plants per side. Stagger the slits up the side of sack to allow for growth room. The seedlings should be inserted into the slits *in their containers*, as they should not have their roots exposed.

5. Decide where you are going to plant.... Then plant your seedlings gently into these slits.
 - Things like lettuce and spinach might be best higher up in the sack [as rabbits love lettuce!], while climbers like tomatoes should be planted in the bottom slits and allowed to grow up the outside without interfering with anything above them.
 - On the top of the sack you can plant things like beets, carrots and peppers.
 - Herbs and greens such a basil, cilantro, swiss chard, kale and onions do well in any slit.
 - Why not try a variety of herbs, spinach, radishes experiment!
6. Water well after planting then only as the soil seems dry [maybe two or three times weekly depending on rainfall]



A co-operative project of:

Bruce Peninsula Grandparent Connection
St. Edmunds Public School
Bruce Peninsula Environment Group
Transition Peninsula