

Save on Food Costs - Grow a Garden!

by Phyllis Pugnetti

The number of US households that are involved in gardening has shown a dramatic increase each year since 2018. It's no surprise that during Covid the number of gardeners increased. It makes sense. People were stuck at home and bored—the garden beckoned us. It seems that upward trend will continue in 2023 as we see the cost of groceries getting more expensive at the grocery store.

There are many reasons to garden—for exercise, enjoyment, healthier food, and many more. But as the economy has worsened and inflation increases 76% of gardeners say they plan to enlarge their food gardens this year to save on food costs. This is a very normal response when people are worrying about food insecurity or struggling with their household budgets.

WILL A FOOD GARDEN PRODUCE ENOUGH FOOD TO FEED A FAMILY?

In uncertain times, many folks say, “I’ll plant a garden to feed my family.” That’s probably not realistic. A vegetable garden simply cannot provide all the food you need. Adults need about 2000 calories per day; but the body can only process 6 pounds of food each day, so on average you need 335 calories per pound of food. However, most vegetables only provide around 50-100 calories a pound. The average food garden in America only produces about 20% of the calories people need. There are some higher calorie vegetables—potatoes, parsnips, leeks, kale, winter squash, and garlic which have 250-350 calories a pound. Let’s face it, no one wants to eat those veggies for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, every day. People still need carbs, protein, and fat in their diet which can’t usually be grown in a home garden.



You can produce more food for your family if you learn to can, freeze, or dry some of your summer harvest. You also can grow and store some long keeper varieties like winter squash. This allows you to have stored food during the winter months. You can also grow a winter garden to have fresh lettuce and other salad greens, radishes, kale, mustard, carrots, beets, and turnips. It’s a treat to have fresh vegetables in cold weather. That’s also when ‘store bought’ produce is most expensive; so you can save a lot at the register during the cold months.

WHAT IF YOU DON’T LIKE VEGETABLES?

If you hated vegetables as a kid, maybe you just hated the way Mom cooked them! My mom made the worst, slimy, most disgusting eggplant, squash, and rhubarb. Yet today I like them all. Not surprisingly, I don’t use any of Mom’s recipes. You can also try growing one new vegetable each year. Get on the internet and look for interesting recipes. You might come to love some of those long-hated veggies. Then again you may hate them forever. In that case, admit defeat and grow the things you do like. Anything else is just a waste of time and garden space.

WILL A FOOD GARDEN REALLY SAVE MONEY?

The average household with a food garden will spend \$70 a year for seeds and garden supplies; but will reap \$600 worth of food. That's a \$530 return on your investment. With food costs skyrocketing you can expect even greater returns in 2023. If you decide to expand your garden, since you've already paid the initial costs for tools, irrigation, and other supplies, your return will be even higher. Generally, the more years you garden, the more money you'll save.

SAVE SEEDS FOR BIG SAVINGS!

Learning to save seeds can save you around \$30-\$50 each year and guarantees you will have the seeds that you want without worrying about shortages at the garden center. When you save seeds from one tomato, you'll have 250-350 seeds. Most commercial seed packets cost about \$3-5 per pack and only have 10-25 tomato seeds. Tomato seeds stored properly will last for 25 years easily. Seeds from lettuce, cucumbers, peppers, beans, and squash are also very abundant and easy to save, so for very little effort you can save a lot of money. If you want to learn more about seed saving, Master Gardeners Annual Seed Saving Class will be held on Saturday, February 11th from 8:30 am to Noon at Ahtanum Youth Park in the Red Barn. For more information or to register go to tinyurl.com/2023seeds.



Learning to save seeds can reduce your garden costs. **Master Gardeners Annual Seed Saving Class** will be held on Saturday, February 11th at the Ahtanum Youth Park in the Red Barn. Two classes are offered: Basic and Advanced. Those who complete the Basic Seed Saving Class are eligible to get seeds from the WSU Extension Yakima County Master Gardener Seed Library, and also to contribute seeds back to the Library.

In the **Basic Class** (8:30 – 10:15) you will learn all the important things to know and to do in order to save your own seeds. In particular, the more common and simpler seeds to save will be discussed in detail.

The **Advanced Class** (10:45 – 12 noon) will delve into other crops that are a bit more complex for saving seeds. Pre-requisite for taking this is completion of the Basic Class.

Tuition for each class is \$10.00 and is payable upon registration. If you have completed the Basic Class in the past, you need not take it over to attend the Advanced Class. For more information or to register go to tinyurl.com/2023seeds.