

Keyhole Gardens - An Answer to Drought and Back Ache

Billie Nicholson

Photos by Vicky Garrett

Two of the biggest objections to gardening are finding a reliable source of water and avoiding the back ache from bending over. Vicky Garrett, from Pensacola, FL, shared her latest gardening project: a keyhole garden. This type of planting bed is successful in drought areas like southern Africa. [Dr. Deb Tolman](#), a creative landscape architect and researcher on African survival strategies has been teaching how to set these up in drought plagued Texas.

The ultimate raised-bed planter, the keyhole garden, is designed as a four foot high, six foot diameter circle, with an access slot opening to the center. Viewed from above, it looks like a keyhole. A wire cylinder in the center is an open composting basket into which kitchen and yard waste can be added, providing continuous moisture and nourishment.

The entire thing, including the soil, can be built from recycled materials and requires less water than a ground level garden. Two types of material are needed for the soil: brown and green matter. Brown matter, including old telephone books, newspapers and cardboard, add carbon to the soil. You can also add dry, yellow or brown leaves and brown grass, sawdust, dryer lint, straw, wood ash (a little), and old fabric of 100% cotton, wool or silk. Green items, which add nitrogen, include any uncooked kitchen waste, egg shells, fruit rinds, coffee grinds and tea bags, freshly cut green grass and leaves, and dry manure from horse stalls or cow barns - not vet clinics. Just pile it in.

Keyhole gardens can survive prolonged dry spells, take a bite out of your grocery bill, recycle and help back aches. Dr. Tolman's link above is to plans and instructions. Give this garden technique a try and share your results.



Ask Billie

Our Question and Answer column, covering topics of interest to our readers.

Keith N. from **GA** asked:

How can we recycle cardboard at home?

Answer: If you compost, put it in your compost pile. It can also be used to line garden beds or as mulch for weed control. Earthworms LOVE it! If you are planning a new gardening area, put cardboard down now and cover it with leaves. By the time you are ready to plant, the worms will have worked their magic. Brown paper bags can be used this way also.



What is your Most Burning Question about Food Storage or Emergency Preparedness? Send your questions to editor@sunoven.com



Billie
Nicholson



Get Details about the New
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3 Essential Oils for Your First-Aid Kit

Essential oils are concentrated extracts from plants containing aromatic compounds with a distinctive scent, or essence. They are generally extracted by steam distillation, mechanical expression, or solvent extraction. They are used in perfumes, cosmetics, soaps and other products from flavoring drinks to household cleaning products. Interest in essential oils has revived in recent years in aromatherapy, and may be considered useful in emergency “No Doctor” situations. Three oils listed here are both powerful and versatile for first aid, to treat flu and cold, and to create a peaceful atmosphere in your home. Consider adding these to your emergency kit for all natural treatments that work and do no harm.

Tea Tree Oil - an essential oil extracted from the Melaleuca tree, is a potent antimicrobial, fungicide, antiviral, expectorant and sweat inducer. It can also be used to repel insects and aid in wound healing. Don't swallow tea tree oil, but you can use it as a diluted mouth rinse or gargle.

Lavender Oil - is an essential oil extracted from lavender flowers. A complex mixture of several phytochemicals, this oil has been used in perfume and in aromatherapy. It aids relaxation and is a stress reducer. It is an antiseptic and pain reliever, when applied to minor burns and insect bites or stings. Everyone should have this oil because it helps the body to adapt to stress or imbalances. Lavender is safe for use on young children.

Peppermint Oil - this plant has been cultivated since ancient times and has been found in Egyptian tombs as far back as 1000 BC. It is highly regarded for soothing digestion; may improve taste and smell when inhaled and may improve concentration and mental acuity. Remember that pure essential oils are very concentrated. Use only a few drops. Be sure to consult your doctor before changing any medications.

Thanks to Nurse [Angela Brooks](#) and [BeWell Buzz](#) for this information.



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Time to Refresh Your Herbs



When was the last time you checked the “best if used by” date on your spices and herbs? Another way to tell if they are past their prime is to look at the color. Are they green or have they changed to gray or brown? Crush a pinch between your fingers, taste and smell it. If the aroma is weak and the flavor is flat, the herb or spice should be replaced. Dated commercially packaged foods sold in the US represent the manufacturer's estimate of how long the product will remain at peak quality. Usually the dried spice or herb will still be safe to consume after that date, although it will have lost potency.

Growing your own herbs can be fun and easy. Drying them in your Sun Oven® with the door ajar will give you the opportunity to replace your old seasonings with tasty ones using solar power. Place the herb branches on racks in the Sun Oven® to dry in an warm place, but not in direct sun. Once dried, pick off the leaves. Store the dried herbs in a clean glass jar, tightly capped, out of direct sunlight and away from heat and humidity. They should last at least a year.

Pressure Canning Tips

Sharon Peterson

Our Sun Oven® friend, Sharon Peterson, shares pressure canning food preservation techniques with us this month. Her website: SimplyCanning.com has step by step instructions as well as recipes. Be sure to refer to it before starting your pressure canning project.

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1. Pressure canning is a preservation process that is required when preserving low acid foods like meat and vegetables. Pressure canners and pressure cookers are not the same. Pressure canners have a dial and a weighted gauge to maintain a specific pressure allowing water to boil at 250°F, almost 40°F higher than in conventional pots. This higher temperature and pressure destroy microorganisms that can cause botulism (food poisoning). Pressure cookers are used to cook food faster under pressure, but the pressure may not consistent.
Only use pressure canners for food preservation.
2. Be sure to check canner seals or gaskets for cracks. Replace any that are faulty. Good gaskets hold pressure during processing. Check jar tops for smooth, unchipped rims for a perfect seal.
3. Always start with freshly picked, high quality food. Fresher means better flavor and texture.
4. No need to pre-sterilize jars. Start with clean jars, run them in the dishwasher and leave them there until ready to fill.
5. Jars do not need to be covered with water in the pressure canner, usually three quarts, depending on canner size, will do. Use a rack. Heat water but don't boil while filling jars.
6. To soften seals, place sealing lids in pan covering with water and bring to just below boiling.
7. After filling jars, wipe jar rims with clean cloth to remove any spills. Add lids and rings. When all the jars are filled, place them in the canner on the rack.
8. Secure the canner lid, leaving the vent open. When a plume of steam is exhausting thorough the vent, set the timer for ten minutes, allowing the canner to vent for that amount of time. Then close the vent. Steam will build until it reaches the desired pressure (see the instructions for your produce). When the pressure is reached and the gauge "rocks", start the timing process. Adjust the heat to make sure the pressure is maintained and monitor the gauge to assure constant correct pressure.
9. When the time is complete, turn off the heat and allow the pressure to drop to zero. Don't rush this process. When pressure is down, remove the weight or open the petcock. Leave it alone for ten minutes.
10. Open the lid so the underside is turned away from you to avoid a face full of hot steam. This could really burn. Using a jar lifter, remove the jars to a cooling rack or folded towel to cool, do not push jar lids as the true sealing test is a self sealed jar. After 24 hours, test for sealing, label and store in a cool, dark place.



11. If you notice a failed seal immediately after processing, simply enjoy the food right away. Refrigerate it until ready to use.
12. Storing jars without the screw bands is a good idea. The lid will not come off if the food is properly sealed.
13. When you take food out of storage and it looks suspicious, just
Throw it out!

Otherwise, admire your hard work and know that you have made progress in preparing every needful thing.

Emergency Escape Plan

Each family member must know what to do in case a fire breaks out in the home. Unless a small fire can be easily controlled, fire fighting should be left to professional firefighters. Family members should concentrate on escaping to safety. To make sure this happens, make a home escape plan and practice it so often that even youngsters in your family know it by heart. [Make your plan.](#)

Most fires occur between 8 PM and 8 AM. Deaths from home fires occur most frequently between midnight and 4 AM, when most people are asleep. More than 6,500 people die each year from fire - more than half are children and senior citizens.

Smoke filling the home is a dangerous situation. Family members may not be able to see very well, get dizzy and disoriented and become trapped.

Important rule: get out quickly.

Install smoke detectors and change batteries twice a year so family members can be alerted to smoke or fire before it is too late. Family members should decide on an escape route, a normal exit and an alternate exit through a door or window from each bedroom. Practice opening the window and become familiar with how it works. In a dark, smoke filled room, this needs to be habit.



Smoke and heat rise, so the best place to find fresher, cooler air is near the floor. Family members should know that if they are caught in a smoke filled

building, they should drop on hands and knees and crawl to the nearest exit. Feel all closed doors for heat before opening them. **If it is hot, don't open it.** Go to the alternate exit.

Practice what to do if you're trapped. Since doors hold back smoke and firefighters are adept at rescue, the chances of survival are excellent. Close doors between you and the smoke. Stuff cracks and cover vents to keep smoke from your area. If you have a phone, call in your exact location to the fire department. Wait at a window and signal with a flashlight or something visible.

Pick a meeting place a safe distance from the house. This should be something that is stationary and will not be moved. Everyone should meet there in the event of a fire. This will prevent family members from wandering around the neighborhood looking for one another or being tempted to go back into the house. One there, one person can go to a neighbor's to call 9-1-1. If anyone is missing, give that information to the fire department immediately and tell them the probable location of the missing person. **Do not re-enter the burning building.**

Make special provisions for infants, young children, disabled or the elderly who may need additional help when escaping. These should be included in the escape plan and discussed. Children often hide in a closet or under the bed when frightened. Encourage them to exit outside. Do not allow them to hide. Make sure they practice opening the window, descending a ladder or lowering themselves to the ground through a window. Teach sliding out feet first, holding on with two hands and bending the knees when landing on the ground. If you take a child with you, lower them first before you exit. They may panic and not follow. Practice speaking the fire department phone number, the family name and street address into the telephone.

Remember, planning ahead and practicing an escape plan could save your family in case of a fire. *Thanks to the Fire Safety Council.*

Honoring Nelson Mandela

The life of Nelson Mandela is one of the most inspirational stories of recent times. His example offers valuable lessons on the importance of personal resistance to evil, and the redemptive power of forgiveness.

In 2004 Nelson Mandela took the time to visit a [Sun Oven project](#). He came to participate in the dedication of the first solar powered bakery in Eastern Cape, South Africa. The project established a model solar powered Sun-Bakery in the rural community of Willowvale, to bake bread and generate income for HIV positive women. He expressed a personal interest in the project and heartfelt concern for the community. His warmth and gentleness won the hearts of everyone he came in contact with. He has been loved by many.



Eastern Cape, South Africa

Cynthia Campher, Director of the Women's Advise Centre, and Paul Munsen, President of SUN OVENS International, Inc. serve sun-baked chicken to Nelson Mandela.



Paul Munsen explains solar cooking to Nelson Mandela and other participants.

Solar Peach Crumble from the [Solar Oven Chef](#)



These inexpensive metal mugs can be found in the camping department and are a great addition to your Sun Oven. Celebrate the patriotic holidays with peach crumble!

Preparation

Set Sun Oven out to preheat.

Single Serving Sun Oven Peach Crumble

Ingredients

For the Filling:

4 peaches, cut into thin wedges
1/4 cup sugar
1 TBS fresh lemon juice
1 tsp corn starch

For the Topping:

1/4 cup brown sugar, packed
1/4 cup all purpose flour
1 cup muesli (Bob's Red Mill is my favorite)
1/4 cup cold butter

Spray 4 metal mugs or 4 ramekins with cooking spray; set aside.

In a medium bowl, toss the peaches with the sugar, lemon juice, and corn starch. Divide evenly among the prepared mugs.

In another bowl, whisk together the brown sugar, flour and muesli. Blend in the butter with your fingertips until mixture resembles a coarse meal. Divide the topping evenly over the peaches in the mugs. Arrange the mugs on a rimmed baking sheet and bake until the filling is bubbling and the topping is golden, 45 minutes to 1 hour. Cool on a rack for 10 minutes. Serve with ice cream or whipped cream and celebrate!

Makes 4 servings.