

# How to grow a straw bale garden

A vegetable garden planted in bales of straw can produce good-looking, healthy plants without weeds

By Kent Rogers

A straw bale garden is especially convenient for people who don't have a large plot of ground to till, or who are physically unable to do a lot of kneeling, bending, raking and hoeing. I have learned that any type of straw or hay bale will work. Pine straw will not work. Bales that are tightly packed work best.

Use bales with regular twine if you can, because the twine will rot along with the bale. Synthetic twine does not rot but will be OK. Shop around for bale prices.

Arrange your bales in rows so they can help hold each other together. Orienting the bales with strings on the ground works best.



*A wide variety of vegetables (except top-heavy ones like corn), fruits and flowers can be planted in conditioned straw bales.*



*A layer of nursery mix, garden soil or compost on top creates a planting medium for seedlings and seeds.*

If you make more than one row of bales, put them wide enough apart so your lawnmower can get between them. And because you'll be watering them, place bales where the water will drain away.

You can use seeds if you add some potting mix on top of the bales for germination. I transplant my vegetables directly into the bales.

It takes at least 10 days to prepare your bales.

Water the bales thoroughly for the first few days. Keep them moist from here on out.

In warm weather the bales will go through an internal heat process as decomposition starts. Once the inside of the bales doesn't feel warm to your hands you're ready to transplant.

I recommend some sort of liquid fertilizer. I use liquid Miracle Gro as needed.

You can set your bales out and start preparing them any time. The earlier the better as the bales will soften up more over time and make transplanting easier.

To transplant your veggies into the bales, use a trowel to help make a crack in the bale for each plant. Place the plant down to its first leaf. I like adding some potting mix to chink the crack around the plant. Close the crack back together.


How many plants per bale? Try 2 or 3 tomato plants, 3 peppers, 2 sets of squash, up to 4 cucumber sets, and 3 or 4 okra plants per bale.

Be prepared to stake or trellis any plant with a stalk. I recommend using a tall trellis for tomatoes. Tomatoes can easily get 8 feet tall.

I don't recommend corn with this method. They will get too top heavy.

The bales may start to sprout, but that is no problem. I give my bales a "haircut" every so often with a knife.

I don't have nearly the worms, bugs, or other pests as a traditional garden. But you can use pesticides or fungicides as needed.

At season's end you can use the bales for mulch, or bust them up and set new bales on them next year. 

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**For additional information and a lot more photos**

Visit Kent's online bale gardening thread at:

[www.4042.com/4042forums/showthread.php?t=12405](http://www.4042.com/4042forums/showthread.php?t=12405).