

ONE SQUARE FOOT AT A TIME

Newsletter of the Square Foot Gardening Foundation

Winter 2019

LETTER FROM THE FOUNDATION



Happy New Year!

We hope you're off to a great start in 2019. The snow is starting to fall regularly on Northern Square Foot

Gardens, while our Southern friends are still "growing strong." But wait—you can grow greens and other tasty veggies year-round, regardless of where you live. Just ask Certified Instructor Jim Teahan from Utah. He gave us the lowdown on winter gardening for our blog. [Click here](#) to read more.



You **can** Square Foot Garden all winter!

Back at SFG Headquarters, we're gearing up for a big year. We're once again partnering with PlantPure Communities with a \$15,000 grant for the "Get Growing" initiative to encourage their Pod leaders to bring Square Foot Gardening to their communities. You're going to want to keep your eyes peeled for info about the SFG photo contest open to the public. You could win a copy of the *All New Square Foot Gardening* book and other prizes.

We're also working on revising and relaunching our Certified Instructor course. If you'd like to be notified when it's available, [click here](#). And, finally, you'll notice we're sponsoring two Mother Earth News Fair events. One in Asheville, North Carolina, April 27-28 and one in Frederick, Maryland, June 1-2.

Have you been growing a Square Foot Garden at home, at your church, or with a community group? We'd love to see pictures! Email us at info@squarefootgardening.com.

Happy Gardening!

Laura & Steve Bartholomew

NOW AVAILABLE!

ANSFG Third Edition



Do you have your copy of the *All New Square Foot Gardening*, Third Edition? Don't wait!

Click here order!

With over 150 new photos and illustrations, this new edition makes it easier than ever to achieve nearly foolproof results in virtually any situation. Remember:

100% of the produce
20% of the water
5% of the work

You'll love the new info inside, including:

- Adding trellises and archways
- Substituting with new materials
- Adding automatic watering systems
- "Thinking Outside the Box" with creative configurations and shapes
- Square Foot Gardening in dense urban areas with little or no yard
- Square Foot Gardening with kids
- Protecting crops

SQUARE FOOT GARDENING AROUND THE GLOBE!

Destination: Kenya

By Kim Roman



It's silly, but I've wanted to go to Kenya since I was eight years old watching the TV show *Daktari*. At age fifty-nine, my dream came true on a church mission trip. Imagine my delight at the first meeting when the organizers announced that our building project would be

... a greenhouse and a raised bed! Kenya is moving from a pastoral (herding) to an agrarian (farming) society, so I knew SFG would be helpful.

The host organization, Convoy of Hope, asked if I'd be willing to teach a class. Yes!

We left Nairobi and headed out past the Great Rift Valley to a remote church in the village of Olgumi. The 75-kilometer (47-mile) trip took just three hours. After being greeted by the pastor, we were led to the work site. We waded through knee-high grass carrying a hoe, two shovels, and a very dull machete. Fourteen team members gamely, but awkwardly, set to work clearing an area for the greenhouse and the raised bed.

Several large blocks had been delivered to the church ahead of our arrival, so we were able to create a 4-foot x 4-foot raised bed and an attached 4-foot x 8-foot composting area.

We substituted cardboard for the landscape fabric, and I also knew going



Square Foot Gardening Certified Instructor Kim Roman works with residents in Olgumi to build Square Foot Gardening beds.

into the project there would be no peat moss or vermiculite. My intention was to grow in 100 percent compost, as Mel prescribed. I asked our Kenyan helpers, both of whom spoke good English, for a load of manure. They went off to joyfully return a short while later. They dumped in a wheelbarrow full of ... fine, silky, red sand! Our interpreter repeated the instructions and again they came back to dump a second load of this silky sand.

In my best round of charades ever, I pointed at some nearby goats and then at my butt. Soon five of us "muzungus," followed by the two young men, went to a nearby home where the owner allowed us to scoop up some well-rotted manure. (*Mzungu* is Swahili for "white people," but the word really denotes privilege rather than race as our African-American team members were also called "muzungu.")

Luckily two of the women in our group don't have a sense of smell, so they volunteered to scoop the poop into the wheelbarrow. We dumped two loads of our precious cargo into the raised bed and mixed it with the silky sand.

I asked the Kenyans to gather six sticks about 1.2 meters long and three other sticks about 2 meters long for the grid. An instant later, two guys had left the church property with a machete. Within moments, there they were about a football field away climbing up a tall tree. One of the guys was hacking branches with the machete and the other gathered them up. Soon they returned with the grid and vertical structure materials.

The afternoon of the third work day, I was able to teach a gardening and a composting class. I knew composting will help the Kenyans clean up their environment by composting used napkins, paper, and food scraps.

Tips for SFG Mission Trips

- Be prepared: bring what you *need* (fewer clothes, not more).
- Be respectful: you're not there as the great savior; you are an equal, not a superior.
- Be resourceful: use what's easily available to the resident people.
- Learn a few words of the language: if nothing more, learn the words for "hello," "goodbye," "please," and "thank you."
- Be flexible: nothing ever works out as planned so just roll with it!

It took more than fifty years from the time that childhood "seed" was planted until I got to experience the beauty of Kenya. Instead of going there as a tourist, I had the privilege to learn much more about those wonderful people by serving them.



Moistening the equivalent of "Mel's Mix"™

The pastor who took us there had been to Kenya several times so he had some good advice for us. "What will we eat?" was the most common question. The answer? "Whatever those precious people put in front of us. They might be going without food so that they can feed us. They are proud and generous people. Don't insult them by turning down what they offer."

Mission trips to spread the word about SFG are important and I will always be thankful to Mel Bartholomew for giving me the knowledge to be of service to people by becoming an SFG Certified Instructor.



Discussing the grid!



Setting up a greenhouse.

SPRING PLANTING

What to Plant

It's here, what we've been awaiting since last fall, another opportunity to dig into our Square Foot Gardens and get our hands into the soil. What a relief that winter is (or nearly is) over for many of us. If you haven't already plotted out what you're going to grow this spring and summer, think about trying something completely new. There are lots of great new seed introductions each year. For example, the National Garden Bureau has named 2019 as the year of the snapdragon, dahlia, pumpkin, and *Salvia nemorosa*. Who knew? But what fun it would be to grow some with your vegetables and herbs.

New Introductions



There are also some great tomato introductions this year—take a look at this adorable yellow Fire Fly. Slightly larger than a cherry tomato, it's super sweet with a thin skin. This 2019 AAS Edible Winner is a "just right" in-between size. The fruits are super sweet, pale white to pale yellow, less than 1 inch in size and weighing about 1/2 oz. Delicate, translucent skins have a mild acid flavor that enhances their sweet taste. They're perfect for snacking and in salads. Indeterminate plants must be staked or caged as they grow upward to 5 to 6 feet and have good disease resistance.



Or this Golden Boy beet—which does not stain like red beets! Golden Boy is a stunning golden-orange fleshed beet with bright green leaves, uniform globes, and refined taproots. It's a deliciously mild beet with strong, upright stems; it's at its sweetest and most tender when it's young. And the greens are also tender and delicious.

Grow a Salad Bowl!



Spring means it's "salad season" for many gardeners. But a "salad" can cover quite a bit of ground (pun intended), and there's more in store for spring planting than lettuce. Here are some ideas of vegetables most SFG'ers can plant now:

- Arugula
- Beet
- Broccoli
- Carrot
- Cauliflower
- Lettuces
- Kale
- Mizuna (Mustard Greens)
- Peas
- Radish



QUICK TIPS

Know Your Zone and Frost Dates

The last frost date in spring and the first frost date in fall are critical dates. Ideally, write them down on your annual gardening calendar. These dates vary by your zone (you know your zone, right? If not, click [HERE](#)).

Frost Dates

To clarify, a frost date is the average date of the first or last freeze that occurs in spring or fall. Note that local weather and geography (such as proximity to a heat sink such as a lake and/or elevation) may cause quite a bit of variation. The probability of frost occurring after the given spring dates and before the given fall dates is 30 percent. The dates are based upon research by the US government, and they can (and do) change over time. The following simplified chart is a guideline. (There are more hardiness zones than are listed here, but this focuses on where most people live.)

First Frost in Fall	
Zone	Date
3	September 1—30
4	September 1—30
5	September 30—October 30
6	September 30—October 30
7	September 30—October 30
8	October 30—November 30
9	November 30—December 30
10	November 30—December 30

Last Frost in Spring	
Zone	Date
3	May 1—May 31
4	May 1—May 31
5	March 30—April 30
6	March 30—April 30
7	March 30—April 30
8	February 22—March 30
9	January 30—February 28
10	January 30 (or earlier)

For a much more detailed listing, check out the dates on the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration \(NOAA\) site](#). Also, you can ask your neighbors and at your local garden centers; all gardening is local.

Florida Is a Horse of a Different Color

Hi there! You, in Florida—yep, we're talking to you. In your zones, you can get a big jump on most of us since the soil warms up much faster than most of the country. Of course, it will be hotter later in the year, but take advantage while you can.

North and Central Floridians—

you can plant Irish potatoes now, as well as continue to plant cool-season crops such as kale, broccoli, carrots, and lettuces. Come February, keep planting cool-season veggies in North Florida, but those in Central Florida can start to plant warm-season crops. Still, keep the frost cloth or other frost protection handy—just in case.

South Florida—time to get cracking if you haven't been planting. This is the latest you can plant Irish potatoes, beets, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, collards, kale, mustard greens, and turnips. But what a gorgeous Square Foot Garden you can plant. Next month in February will be the latest you should plant cantaloupes, cucumbers, eggplant, peppers, spinach, and tomatoes if you're expecting a late spring harvest. It's unlikely to happen but be ready with frost cloth in case of a late freeze.

Getting a Jump on the Season

For many gardeners, getting a jump on the season is one way to “cheat” a short growing season. If you have a favorite tomato whose days to maturity is 90 days, but you live in a region whose growing season is less than that, what are you going to do? Start the seeds indoors, that’s what. Then you can plant anytime that’s right for you and your super-local location.

Let’s say you want to get a head start on planting outside. You need a dome.

HOW TO BUILD A PROTECTIVE DOME

A very simple but functional dome support can be made with pieces of ordinary ½-inch PVC plumbing pipe arched from corner to corner of your Square Foot Garden box and secured in the center. This dome framework can support any type of cover. In the early spring, it can be covered with clear plastic to retain heat from the sun; in the late spring, it can be covered with cheesecloth to keep out egg-laying insects; and in the summer, it can be covered with shade cloth to provide shade for young, tender plants. In the fall, it can also protect late crops.

MATERIALS

The materials you will need include:

- ½" PVC pipe, 10' long (2)
- Zip tie
- Plastic sheeting or other covering of your choice

1, 2 Bend two lengths of PVC pipe from corner to corner in the Square Foot Garden box, inserting the ends deep into the ground. The bent pipes should form a tent-like frame over the box.

3 Secure the dome frame at the intersection of the bent pipes using a plastic zip tie.

4 Cover the dome frame with the covering of your choice. Thick, durable plastic sheeting as shown here can protect your plants from many things, including harmful weather and animal and insect pests.



In Mel's Words

Everyone loves corn—especially chipmunks, squirrels, and raccoons!

To keep them out and your harvest in, try this foolproof secret. Put one steel fence post in each corner of your 4 × 4 garden. Use tall metal 5- or 6-foot fence posts, and then, when the corn reaches 4 feet, run chicken wire with 1-inch openings around the outside, forming four walls. Next, add one more piece across the top at a height of about 4 feet. This will keep the critters out of the corn and prevent the crows from eating the seeds and seedlings when first planted.

Then, as the corn grows, it will grow right through the top of the wire, which will support the tall corn stalks when the wind blows—at the same time, keeping the raccoons and chipmunks from getting in before the corn can be harvested. You can easily tie the horizontal top wire with temporary bows so that you can undo a few and still reach in. Because it is chicken wire, make sure you wear a long-sleeved shirt when you reach in so you don't get scratched. You'll be able to water easily either by hand or using a long-handled wand and shut-off valve on the end of your hose.

The Dome

The dome is a tool that Mel absolutely stood by. Here is an excerpt from *All New Square Foot Gardening*, Third Edition, pages 112-113.

When you have the dome ready, you'll need something to put over it to keep your plants nice and warm. The most well-known type of protection is probably a **frost cloth**. (Frost cloth is a woven polypropylene material that can protect against frost and is permeable. The reason frost cloth is better than a blanket or a sheet is its breathability. Even if you forget to remove the cloth on the next sunny, above-freezing day, your veggies should still be OK.)

Want to go lower tech than the dome? Unless you have lots of empty buckets hanging around, this will only work for a few plants, but simply inverting a bucket over the seedling will also help protect it from frost. Another option is mulch—straw is good—but it might be a bit labor intensive for you.

Are you interested in becoming a Certified Instructor?

Please sign up to be notified when we're launching the new program this spring!

FEATURED CERTIFIED INSTRUCTOR

Meet Emilio Panasci



Emilio Panasci, left, with Steve Bartholomew

with the YMCA and the local farmers market.

Emilio Panasci has a passion for growing plants and communities. He has been working with community gardens and farmers market projects for eight years, and about three years ago, he, along with East Orange YMCA, began to build a community garden and to initiate garden and food programming. The city of East Orange, New Jersey, also partnered

with the YMCA and the local farmers market. Their philosophy: people learn to grow their own food with gardens and students can visit and learn gardening basics. They are creating food access by creating food markets. Many projects are based on building these new markets and helping small farmers put themselves out there to the urban community.

During the summers Emilio teaches at the YMCA and develops special programs. He connected with SFG Certified Instructor Bob Markey through the YMCA alliance network in New Jersey. Emilio says, "Once we learned what Square Foot Gardening is, we thought it would be the perfect fit for our new garden and curriculum and a way to approach the YMCA campers."

The first year of operation was 2017. Emilio became certified and SFG was made a part of the summer camp experience. This past summer in 2018, they refined their program a bit more as they now had more experience and knew what to expect. And the program expanded! Another young counselor who had prior gardening experience was hired to assist.

"We have used Square Foot Gardening with about 200 urban summer campers each summer," Emilio says. They come to the garden two times per week, for 45



Program participants sample vegetables from their gardens.

minutes each session, for 8 weeks. The campers get into *everything*, from the basic Square Foot Gardening principles to harvesting to tasting to garden art." And the kids learned a lot.

This is an urban area with little green space. Children do live in homes, but they don't all have access to backyards and open spaces. At the start, many of the kids are a little timid; vegetables, plants, and bees and even outdoor settings are new for them. Generally, just being outside and bugs are problems.

But the kids' attitudes have changed toward food. They're much more likely to try new things after they've participated in the program for a year.

The teachers also noticed from summer to summer that repeat students retain a lot of their outdoor knowledge. They help the newer students not to be afraid of things, and they ask questions that are more advanced from the previous year. Campers seem to be calmer when they are outside too. Emilio and the other instructors help the kids establish a comfort level with being outside in the garden, and with plants and the ecosystem specifically. A secondary benefit to the program is that it helps kids understand healthy food choices. And they're really happy the program does that.

The Square Foot Gardening program ties well into other things going on at the YMCA as well. For example, there's a hydroponics program in winter. The Y has various partners, and they give cooking demonstrations and teach healthy lifestyles. Teaching the SFG method is a good resource to show campers how produce comes from farm to table. The instructors bring the kids out to the farmers' market to see how food is sold and visit the produce stands to see the cultural aspects of growing food too.

Emilio says that the, "Square Foot Gardening method works with new gardeners. I don't have a horticultural background, and a lot of people who are working with students could be all over the place with what they know and don't know. Even [though we have] instructors with Master Gardener training, it is most useful for the teacher to have a guidelines. ... How do you approach it? How do you boil down the information? How do you make gardening a fun game for kids and keep their perspective in mind?"

Emilio gravitated toward the SFG method because of its simplicity and geometry. And, no matter where new teachers come from, they can pick up the curriculum. Even if one doesn't always say exactly the right thing, an instructor will be on the same page with the students by following the method. Its strength is in the beginner side of it. Plus, there's enough flexibility so you can do something different if you need it. For example, one week the campers can study compost, including an examination of worms and learning the background of composting.

Emilio works with Bob Markey, who provides a weekly overview and readings and notes where each location should be in the garden. This works well because three different YMCAs teach the method on similar timelines of an 8- to 9-week course.

Together, they're making a difference in the lives of many children around New Jersey!



Kids learn about vegetables at the local farmers' market.



Plentiful harvest of carrots.



Harvesting the Square Foot Garden at the end of the season.



Fall offerings at the farmers market.

Asian Cucumber Salad



This is great for potlucks because it's still tasty and safe at room temperature. It is a quick, refreshing salad that can even be put together after you get home from work or running errands. Once you have cucumbers at picking size, you can use your own from your SFG.

- 2 tablespoons rice wine vinegar
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1 tablespoon sesame oil
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- Pinch red pepper flakes
- Salt to taste
- 3 large cucumbers, peeled and seeded
- 3 green onions, sliced
- ¼ cup unsalted roasted peanuts, chopped (optional)

Combine the vinegar, soy sauce, sugar, oils, pepper flakes, and salt in a medium bowl. Stir until the sugar dissolves. Add the cucumbers and green onions; mix well. Let it marinate for 1 hour, either at room temperature or in the refrigerator. Sprinkle with the peanuts when you're ready to serve. Makes 4 to 6 servings.

Sautéed Greens



This garlicky, spicy side dish is great for using up all the "little bits" of greens you have.

- 1 pound mixed greens (any greens will work, including beet tops and arugula)
- 3 garlic cloves, peeled and chopped
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil plus more for drizzling
- 1 hot pepper, minced, or ½ teaspoon red pepper flakes
- Salt and fresh-ground black pepper

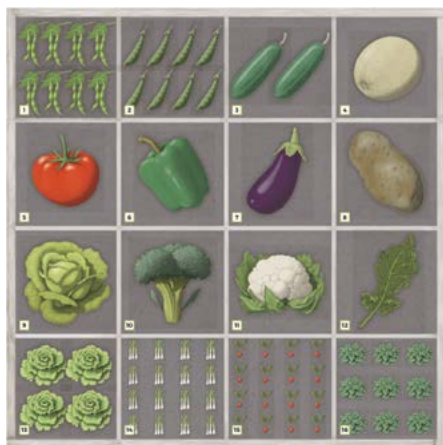
Cook the greens in boiling salted water for 5 minutes, or until tender. Drain thoroughly. Squeeze any remaining water from the cooked greens; chop if desired. Sauté the garlic in a medium-sized pan in the ¼ cup olive oil over medium heat for 1 minute. Add the cooked greens and a little water to the pan. Increase the heat to high and cook, stirring, for 3 to 4 minutes or until the water has evaporated. Drizzle with more olive oil and season with the salt and pepper. Makes 3 to 4 servings.

Waste Not, Want Not: Reducing Food Waste

Food waste in America is epidemic. Not only are tons of potentially usable food products thrown out to rot—literally—but the amount of chemicals in the form of fertilizer and pesticides released into the environment cannot be ignored. However there are ways that you can combat this.

One really simple way is 100 percent within your control, which is to plant only what you think your household can eat. Why grow five tomato plants if you're growing for a household of two? If you're not planning to give it away or preserve it, it will just go to waste. And that helps no one. So think about your immediate needs for the season and plant accordingly.

It helps to start with the knowledge of the amount of produce one 4x4 Square Foot Garden can produce and go from there. For example, the schematic below shows just how much a single 4x4 square foot bed can produce. Wow! Do you need that much? It's fine if you do and will eat it, but it's also OK to cut back a little bit.



The Square Foot Gardening method is ideally suited to planning the right number of vegetables, herbs, and flowers you need. Take advantage of that.

Another of the best ways to reduce food waste is to start by preparing the right amount of food for meals. Luckily for us all, there's a handy way to estimate food needs per person. This website – <https://www.savethefood.com/planning> – a feature of the Natural Resources Defense Council, provides tons of helpful tools. For example, the tool called "The Guest-imator" allows you to predict how much food to prepare by asking a series of simple questions, such as the number of guests, the size of their appetites, how much (if any) leftovers you want, the type of cuisine. What a great idea! It takes the guesswork out of food prep the way SFG takes the guesswork out of planting. The Guest-imator, plus recipes and an online community, make Save the Food.com a great resource for SFG'ers.

SAVETHEFOOD.COM

UPCOMING EVENTS

New Jersey



Learn how you can make a raised bed with hoop covers just like Don has created here.

Don Kanerr will be teaching an SFG class for the Midland Park, New Jersey, Continuing Education Program. Come learn and make some new SFG friends.

Date:

Wednesday, March 13, 2019,
at 7 p.m.

Place:

Midland Park High School, 250
Prospect Street, Midland Park,
NJ 07432

Register:

Call 201-444-2030
Details are also shown on Don's

website:

www.organicfarmerdon.com

Maryland



Kim Roman teaching about Square Foot Gardening.

Square Foot Gardening Certified Instructor Kim Roman will give a seminar titled "Gardening In Small Spaces" – an introduction to the All New SFG Third Edition book.

Date:

Saturday, March 2, 2019, at 4 p.m.

Place:

Maryland State Fairgrounds at the
Home & Garden Theater
(adjacent to the Garden Cafe)

Price:

Free with the price of admission.
(Free admission for active military,
police & fire employees with ID.)
Visit her at booth #1013 anytime
before or after the seminar.

FEATURED SQUARE FOOT GARDEN

S. Jeff Cold, Orem, Utah

"I love to start and give away tomato plants to work friends and neighbors. Also included is a picture of our eight SFG boxes we actually relocated from our old residence in Orem. This picture is about early June 2018 in Zone 5b. The vinyl boxes were \$60 each new. I make Mel's Mix™ all the time it seems. At our old place we used bark mulch between the boxes, but this time we had sand leftover from a front yard project, so we used that over weed barrier between the boxes. It looks better and is a joy to kneel on. We commandeered a sprinkler zone in the back yard for the boxes and added a noodle head in the center of each box. From there, we used drippers or micro-sprinklers. A gentle curving cement curb was put in to separate the garden from the back yard."



LET'S STAY IN TOUCH



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We've made our first donation to the Semper Fi Fund on behalf of everyone who has purchased Elevated Square Foot Garden Beds.

Here's more about Semper Fi and their great work.

The Semper Fi Fund provides immediate financial assistance and lifetime support to combat wounded, critically ill, and catastrophically injured members of all branches of the U.S. Armed Forces and their families. They deliver the resources these individuals need during recovery and transition back to their communities, working to ensure no one is left behind. The Semper Fi Fund has been working with wounded service members since 2004, and the Fund's streamlined structure keeps overhead very low: just 6%. They are also one of three veteran charities to receive an "A+" rating from Charity Watch and a "Four Star" rating from Charity Navigator.

Interested in purchasing a bed?

Here's the link.

