



ONE SQUARE FOOT AT A TIME

Newsletter of the Square Foot Gardening Foundation

Winter 2020

LETTER FROM THE FOUNDATION



Greetings, Square Foot Gardeners!

We hope you've had the start to a truly happy New Year. The holiday

season brings with it many joys and an opportunity to reflect. Whether you make New Year's resolutions or not, we would like to encourage you to reflect upon *your* gifts and make this year one during which you share the joys and self-reliance of growing your own food. Of course, we believe that's best achieved through Square Foot Gardening, and who better to spread the word than you, our faithful friends?

Even if you are not a CI (Certified Instructor), you can spread the word through your family, your neighbors, your local schools, your local food resource agencies, or even further afield. Your passion and knowledge will be multiplied ten-fold. Maybe you can help plant and maintain a Square Foot giving garden at your area food bank. Fresh food is something that is in critically short supply at many food banks. Think of the impact that you, even as one person, can have to feed others.

To paraphrase the famous saying, "Give a person food and they will eat for a day; teach them how to grow food, and they will grow food for a lifetime." This is our mission, to solve world hunger, one square at a time. We hope you'll join us in 2020.

There's so much in our pages to read. We hope you enjoy it!

Happy Gardening!
Laura & Steve Bartholomew

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT SFG

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

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

**CLICK HERE
TO ORDER!**



LAUNCHING SOON!

CI Program Launching Soon!

We're hard at work creating a brand-new Certified Instructor Program. If you're interested in becoming a Square Foot Gardening Certified Instructor, please [click here](#) to sign up to be notified when we re-launch.



FEATURED CERTIFIED INSTRUCTOR



Sheryl Boddie

Sheryl Boddie

Sheryl Boddie came from something of a gardening family — she describes her father as a “farmboy” — so she’s always been interested in gardening and the natural world in general. Then about 10 years ago, she remembers coming across one of Mel Bartholomew’s Square Foot Gardening books, and in her words, “I was hooked.”

Career Pivot

But it wasn’t until she was laid off from her corporate job that she began looking to pivot her career in a new direction. She and her husband had moved to a 4-acre property just outside of Atlanta, GA, and she began thinking about how she might turn her love of gardening and her passion for Mel’s method into a new career. That prompted her to become a Certified Instructor, and what follows is an amazing (and inspiring!) domino effect that could never have been predicted.

Airbnb Experience

Sheryl and her husband decided to use the lower level of their home as an Airbnb rental, and because of their Square Foot Gardening boxes in their front yard and on the back deck, the garden became a major attraction. “People staying at an Airbnb often have the ability to cook their own meals,” she says, “so we try to send our renters a list of what edible plants are growing in the garden before they check in, and then encourage them to harvest from the garden before doing their meal planning.”

This “farm to fork” experience connects her renters not only with fresh food from the garden, but with a “new to them” way of gardening. And because of how her Airbnb renters took to the gardening experience, Sheryl decided to take things a step farther — with an artistic twist.

Connecting SFG with Art

“We thought it would be fun to offer Square Foot Gardening classes,” she says, “My husband makes the 1’x 1’ boxes out of reclaimed wood, and participants get to learn all about Square Foot Gardening and take a box home with them.”



But it wasn’t until they connected with a local art shop did things really start to take off. “We bring the boxes to the art shop, and participants get to paint their boxes any way they want,” Sheryl explains, “I bring in samples of compost and seeds, and everyone leaves with a decorated box plus their own samples, so they can get started with their own Square Foot Garden at home!”

Are you interested in becoming a Certified Instructor?

Please sign up to be notified when we launch the new program.



A Square Foot Gardening Marketing Genius is Born

For instructors who would love to share their passion for Square Foot Gardening with their communities but who aren’t sure how to market it, Sheryl has some effective tips that can energize their efforts.

“Start small and get advice,” she advises. Look up the small business development center in your city for help. It’s a free service, and they are there help you get your small business off the ground and will even assign an agent to you.”

From there, she always carries her Square Foot Gardening CI business cards with her and leaves them at coffee shops and other businesses. She networks with her area’s Chamber of Commerce and tourism bureau and connects in person with schools.



"Don't just send an email to a school," she says. "Make up some flyers, go into the school office to introduce yourself and what you do, and ask them to place your flyers in the teachers' boxes." It's created a valuable opportunity to connect children (and their teachers) with gardening in general and with Square Foot Gardening in particular.

"Square Foot Gardening has a way of connecting the generations," Sheryl says. "Children learn how to grow food, millennials see this as a way of connecting in a cool way with the environment, and everyone gets to learn new, better, and more sustainable methods." It's a win-win for everyone.



A participant painting a "square-inch" garden in one of Sheryl's workshops.

INDOOR PROJECTS FOR OUTDOOR GARDENS

Oh, the weather outside is frightful!

Bet you sang along with that, didn't you? Well, for many of us, even if the weather isn't quite frightful, it's certainly nicer to be inside where it's warm, dry, and cozy! But nothing says you have to be idle while waiting for spring. Why not put this time to good use by making a garden project or two? You can easily do these at home with minimal and even found materials. Let's get started!



Make your own insect house!

Air-Bee-n-Bee

So you always wanted to host a little cozy bed-and-breakfast, right? Well, the hours can be killer for those, but an Air-Bee-n-Bee is great! It's a wonderful idea to provide a place for beneficial bees, especially in your garden, and this is a great project for parents and kids to do as a family project. Remember that this is really a nearly year-round home more than a temporary place to hang out, so using materials that won't fall apart in weather (cardboard, particleboard, and so on) is important.

Making the Box

You will need a wooden box, open on one side with an overhanging roof to shed rain. Smaller is better than larger (some bees are more solitary than others, and it's possible that really large bee houses could attract predators such as birds), but it should be a minimum of 8 inches deep. One idea is to repurpose a drawer from a wooden chest of drawers. Or, make one, say a box 12 inches x 12 inches and 8 inches deep. Exact dimensions (other than depth) don't matter too much. If you're making your own box, use *real, untreated wood*. Don't use particleboard as it will disintegrate (and is treated). Fencing lumber is often treated, too, so avoid that.

Affix the box to a sunny fence or wall (it should not be open to create a "wind tunnel" effect). If you don't have a fence or wall upon which to position the box, add a back.

Fill it with 7-inch-long blocks of wood or small logs (so they fit within the 8-inch depth of the house) into which you have drilled *small* holes. A variety of solitary bees will use these tunnels as nest sites.

Drilling the Tunnels

Inside the shell of the bee house, stack dry logs or sections of untreated timber, up to about 7 inches long to fit within the box. You can use found "logs" from your yard, or wood from building sites or building supply stores (which often

have scraps you can have for free). If you choose logs, make sure that they are not cracked or split, making it easier for pests or fungus spores to spread. It is usually safer to use blocks of untreated building timber.

Drill a selection of holes into them of varying diameters between **2mm and 10mm but no bigger**. The depth of the holes that you make depends ultimately on the length of your drill bits; most drill bits are fairly short. If you have longer drill bits, you can make the holes deeper, and the bees will still use them. Do not make a hole all the way through to the opposite side; bees prefer a closed-end tunnel.

The open ends of the holes should face outward and must be *smooth and free of splinters*, as should the entire length of the tunnel/cavity. This is very important. If necessary, use a countersinking drill bit or sandpaper to clean and smooth the entrance to each hole; bees will not enter holes with rough splintered wood around them, as this can easily damage their wings. Carefully clean away any sawdust as this will also put them off.

Siting the Bee House

Position the bee house in *full sun*, facing southeast or south, at least 3 feet off the ground, with no vegetation in front of it obscuring the entrances to the tunnels. Solitary bees rely on the sun's heat to warm them up in the morning, hence the need for a sunny site. Unlike bumblebees, they have no furry coats to keep themselves warm! If you site your bee house in the shade or hidden behind vegetation, it is unlikely to be used. A bee house must be *firmly fixed*, so that it does not swing or sway in the wind (so you should not hang it from a branch).

DIY: Plant Markers

Here's another fun indoor project to keep idle hands busy. Not only are plant markers attractive; they are practical. Sometimes, one new leaf looks like another, so it's good to remind yourself what you planted. Plus, it's fun to decorate your garden too. Nothing has to be fancy; in fact, upcycling and recycling materials is the way to go. Let's get started!



Stamped Metal – For the crafty set, this is fun. You can use knives (easiest) or flatten metal spoons (place spoon between two pieces of solid wood and hammer until the bowl of the spoon is flat enough to stamp). Then, just use a stamping kit to hammer out the plant name. This is especially pretty when you use knives or spoons of differing patterns, as long as they aren't buried too deep.

Or, if you have a can opener that removes lids *completely* and leaves edges that are *not sharp* (important!), then stamping metal can lids is another way to create a plant marker. Using the stamping kit, stamp out a plant's name

on metal can lids. You can even stamp out a recipe name that the plant will become (such as "pizza" for tomatoes), which is especially cute if you're growing theme gardens. Use pliers to pull the fork tines apart slightly so that you can place the metal can lid in place. Position the metal lid within the tines and stick that in the ground. Yard sales and places like Goodwill are good sources for inexpensive knives, spoons, and forks.

Painted Rocks – Look for rocks that have a flat side to make painting or stenciling easier. If you like the colors of the rock, just stencil the plant name. Otherwise, paint the entire rock using acrylic paints. You can write the plant name with a permanent marker (glitter pen, anyone?) The sky's the limit with this idea.

ModPodge Seed Packets – Many of you will remember ModPodge, but if you aren't familiar with it, it's a decoupage staple that's an all-in-one glue, sealer, and finish. It's often used to adhere paper to other objects. Take your actual seed packages (full of all that great growing information) and, using a popsicle-type stick, brush the ModPodge over the entire packet with the stick inside the package. Allow it to dry (standing up, if possible). The surface will be clear, so you can read the packet. If you want something more decorative, you can download (free) images of vintage seed packet art.

Popsicle Sticks – Of course, there's always the uncomplicated method of using a permanent marker to write a plant's name on popsicle sticks. Not much can be simpler than this.

Seed Shopping Strategies

We know, we know—it's *really* tempting to buy too many seeds, what with all those colors and amazing photos in the pretty spring gardening catalogs. It's like a siren song for gardeners. But remember, with the SFG method, you don't need to plant *extra* seeds; it's just not necessary. But what's an SFGer to do when the desire to plant different varieties is there, but you don't want to waste seeds? Here's an idea: start a seed library.

Seed Exchanges

These are growing in popularity, and even regular book libraries are hosting seed exchanges. A seed library (also called a seed exchange) is a way to share seeds (or even seedlings) so you can share a variety of seeds but only get the amount you need.

This would be a great thing to present to your local gardening groups, your neighborhood association, or to your local library. You can exchange seeds at a get-together or set up a self-serve collection point in an accessible public space. Even the Little Library boxes would be a great way to share seeds, though they aren't as weatherproof as other locations. A simple wooden box to hold the seeds or even a variety of baskets is about all you need. Ask each contributor to label an envelope with the seed name and variety if known, such as Tomato 'Yellow Pear'. Adding some growing instructions to duplicate a seed packet is a good idea (sun, water, soil

preferences, time to harvest). These can be printed on a home printer and taped or glued to the seed envelope, which can either be letter envelopes or small Kraft envelopes. If you want to open the seed library to the community, just post some notices on flyers or online (Facebook, Nextdoor.com, and so on). It's fine to start small because this is an idea that'll keep growing.



Seed Sources We Love

If you're not exchanging seeds via your seed library, then buy seeds from trusted sources. The quality and germination rates will be superior to others. Seed sources we like include Baker Creek, Johnny's Selected Seeds, The Seed Guy, and Renee's Garden Seeds. If you have a favorite source, let us know by sharing on our [Facebook page](#).

Seed Allocation - Garden Planning

Once you have a selection of seeds you want to plant this year, check their ultimate size and determine if you'll be planting 1, 4, 9, or 16 to a square. Take a look at this image to remind yourself of spacing. That is, is the plant Extra Large (1 plant per square), Large (4 plants per square), Medium (9 plants per square), or Small (16 plants per square)



The salad garden is planted with these vegetables, reading from top left: (1) Bibb lettuce × 4; (2) Red romaine lettuce × 4; (3) Beet × 9; (4) Arugula × 4; (5) Freckled lettuce × 4; (6) Broccoli rabe × 9; (7) Cauliflower × 1; (8) Sugar snap peas × 8; (9) Leaf lettuce × 4; (10) Cauliflower × 1; (11) Broccoli rabe × 9; (12) Sugar snap peas × 8; (13) Arugula × 4; (14) Red romaine lettuce × 4; (15) Radishes × 16; (16) Bibb lettuce × 4.

SEED-STARTING TIPS

Variety, Variety, Variety

We often talk about the economics of starting from seed (and there are many!), but we don't always talk about how much more planting variety you'll have at your fingertips if you start your own seedlings.

The big box stores, and even some garden centers, tend to stick to the tried-and-true varieties when spring comes. You can't really blame them; they stay in the middle lane in order to appeal to the largest possible number of consumers. But we are not limited to the tomato varieties 'Brandywine' or 'Beefsteak.' What if we want to grow a purple tomato? Or a yellow one? You can when you start your own seeds. And it's pretty straightforward. Here's a short list of tips to getting started.

Supplies Needed

You will need a few supplies, some of which you can repurpose from what you have at home, but these generally aren't expensive.

- Seeds from your favorite source. (We like Renee's Garden, Johnny's Seeds, Baker Creek, The Seed Guy—you probably have favorites too.) Try something new this year; really push the seed packet envelope.
- Seed-starting mix – this is *not* soil. It's a special blend with exceptional drainage of a sterile medium just for seed-starting.
- Containers – these can be peat pots that you buy or containers you repurpose (such as yogurt cups), but anything repurposed must have drainage holes punched in them. You can make pots out of newspaper too. Just fold a sheet of



newspaper (not a section with color) lengthwise. Wrap the newspaper around a cylinder; a juice can is good, leaving a "bottom" of about 2 inches. Fold the bottom up around the bottom of the can; once that's done, mash the can down against the folds to set the seams. Slide the can out and roll the top to make a rim or lip. Then, fill with mix and plant.

- Grow lights – pretty important as a good, stable light source is needed so that seedlings don't stretch out and get leggy.
- Fan – optional, but a gentle breeze helps "train" stronger stems.

Start Growing

Fill the seed-starting containers with the seed-starting mix and plant your seeds at the depth noted on the seed packets. Water lightly; misting is good. The seed-starting mix should be kept damp (like a wrung-out sponge) but *not wet*. Place in a warm location until the seeds germinate. On top of a refrigerator is the classic location—for good reason. Once the seeds sprout, move them to a cooler location (a garage can be used for this if the temperatures are in the mid-60s or a room that's a little cooler than the rest of the house). If you've used peat or newspaper pots, you can just plant them later, pot and all, but open up the bottoms so that it's easier for the roots to grow.

Grow Lights—Better than Ever

Grow lights are helpful for seed-starting because you can leave them on as much as needed, and they provide a consistent amount

of light. Most vegetable seedlings need 16 to 18 hours of light per day to get started, which is not available with natural light in late winter to early spring. Grow lights replicate outdoor light by using full spectrum bulbs, which provide a balance of cool and warm lights like the natural solar range. You want a good, stocky, sturdy seedling when it's time to transplant. Not only are grow lights great for seed-starting, but they are also good for houseplants as well, so you can consider them a year-round investment.



Grow lights are easier than ever to find. They're available in big box stores, virtually all garden centers, and online. You can even set up your own grow lights using regular shop lights and switch out the bulbs.

When to Begin Seed-Starting

The chart pictured, right, excerpted from *All New Square Foot Gardening, 3rd Edition*, is a helpful guide to spring planting. Take a look at it, pull out your calendar (digital or print), and start plotting your seed-starting.

SPRING INDOOR SEED-STARTING SCHEDULE

CROP	Weeks Before							Weeks After	
	12	10	8	6	4	2	0	2	4
Broccoli	🌱				🌱				
Cabbage	🌱				🌱				
Parsley	🌱				🌱				
Cauliflower		🌱			🌱				
Onions		🌱			🌱				
Eggplant				🌱					🌱
Peppers				🌱					🌱
Lettuce				🌱	🌱				
Swiss Chard				🌱	🌱				
Tomatoes				🌱				🌱	
Summer Squash						🌱			
Cucumbers							🌱	🌱	
Muskmelons							🌱	🌱	

🌱 = Indoor Growth, started with seeds 🌱 = Plants ready for transplanting

Planting the Garden: *Zip, Zap, Bing, Bing*

Then it's *zip, zap, bing, bing* to plant in the fluffy medium of Mel's Mix™. You can even use your fingers to create the planting hole. Spacing can be done very simply using a ruler and your fingers.



Extra-large plants are sown right in the middle of the square. This ensures a minimal amount of overlap into the neighboring squares.



For medium-sized vegetables calling for 9 plants per square, divide the square into thirds in both directions and scribe lines in the soil with your finger. Mark the center of each section to mark nine planting spots.



For large vegetables, divide the square into four equal sections and poke a hole with your finger in the center of each divided section. These will be your planting spots.



For small vegetables calling for 16 plants per grid square, just divide the grid into quarters, then poke 4 holes in each section to mark planting spots.

IN MEL'S WORDS

Watch Mel talk seed conservation



Mel Demonstrates Zip, Zap, Bing, Bing

See Mel's preferred planting technique in action with the man himself!



SFG QUICK TIPS

High Value Spring Veggies



Who doesn't like to get more bang for their buck? It's practically bred into us to be as efficient as possible, and growing vegetables is no exception. Planting high-value spring veggies makes perfect sense when you're feeding people. Value can mean different things, but a quick and easy harvest is chief among them. That means many greens are high-value veggies, as well as root crops (radishes, anyone). It can also refer to the actual cost of growing specific vegetables. What costs the least to grow? Again, greens predominate. Here's a little "equation" to help you figure out what is "high value."

Some of the early high-value spring vegetables include:

Spinach - plant early in spring

Mustard greens - relatively fast-growing

Radish - quick to mature

Leaf lettuce - as long as temperatures remain cool, lettuces will grow

Radicchio - early spring planting needed

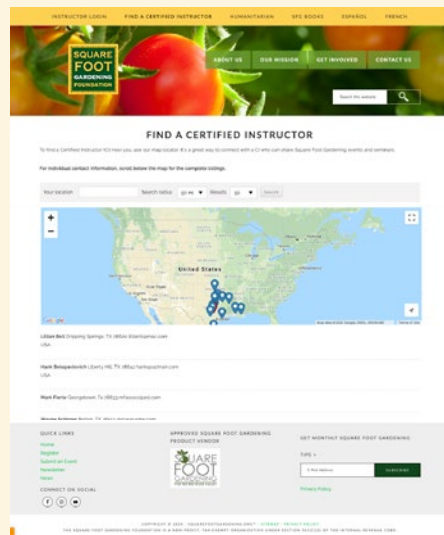
Herbs - some do need a little warmth and drier conditions than some of us have in spring

Leek - plant in spring; harvest in late summer

Turnip - must plant early in spring if you didn't plant in fall

Learn more about which veggies are the highest value to grow by reading our book ***Square Foot Gardening High-Value Veggies: Homegrown Produce Ranked by Value.***

Get Help: Find a Certified Instructor Near You



If you're new to Square Foot Gardening—or even if you're not—it might be helpful to **locate a Certified Instructor (CI) near you** to use as a resource.

CIs receive updates and new information from the SFG Foundation that could be helpful to you. They'll also be able to share their knowledge as experienced Square Foot Gardeners as well as the experiences of those whom they've taught and consulted with. Our Certified Instructors are ready, willing, and able to help further our mission.



CI Shannon Ditz works with Huron County Master Gardeners and other volunteers to create a huge community garden of SFGs.

Location! Location! Location!



When you are starting your Square Foot Garden, consider its location in relation to your home. Of course, it's more important to site where the best sun exposure is, but siting it as close to the house as possible means you'll be more likely to visit the garden daily. If your Square Foot Garden is close to the house, deck, or patio, you'll be able to keep an eye on it. Having the boxes near sidewalks or other traffic paths also makes it easier to tend them and will simplify harvesting produce. Ideally, your SFG boxes should be visible from inside the house. Consider the rooms you use the most, and if suitable garden spots are available within view of those rooms, use them. Keeping an eye on things is not only for your pleasure but for the garden's protection. You'll be able to spot problems like feeding deer or neighborhood pets *before* they can wreak havoc.

(Modern) Potato-Leek Soup



There aren't many things more comforting on a cold winter's day than a bowl of potato soup. Most recipes are fairly high in fat since they are cream- or milk-based. But this recipe uses vegetable broth and coconut milk to lighten up the base and provide a healthier option. And after our holiday season, who doesn't want to be more health-conscious... until the next holiday.

- 3 leeks (white and light green parts only), cleaned and chopped
- 2 teaspoons olive oil
- 1 small white onion, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 4 cups low-sodium vegetable broth
- 4 medium potatoes, peeled (Yukons are good but use what you have)
- 2 celery stalks, chopped
- ½ teaspoon dried thyme or 2 teaspoons fresh, finely chopped
- ½ teaspoon dried rosemary or 2 teaspoons fresh, finely chopped
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- ½ cup coconut (or regular) milk

In a large pot over medium heat, add the leeks, olive oil, and onion; cook 5 minutes or until softened. Add the garlic and cook for 1 more minute. Add the vegetable broth, potatoes, and celery; bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer, covered, for 30 to 40 minutes or until vegetables are tender.

Add the thyme, rosemary, salt, and pepper. Using an immersion blender or food processor (working in batches), blend the soup until it's smooth. (If you like a "rustic" texture, then purée just part of the vegetables.)

Add milk to soup; simmer uncovered for 5 more minutes or until the soup has thickened. Enjoy!

Sautéed Greens



Any greens—including kale, mustard, arugula, chard, beet greens—can be used in this recipe. It's perfect year-round, but it's especially good in the winter as a garlicky, spicy side dish.

- 1 pound mixed greens, cleaned
- Salt
- 3 garlic cloves, peeled and chopped
- ¼ cup olive oil plus more for drizzling
- 1 hot pepper, minced, or ½ teaspoon red pepper flakes

Cook the greens in boiling salted water to cover for 5 minutes or until tender. Drain. Squeeze the water from the greens; chop them if desired and set aside.

Sauté the garlic in the ¼ cup olive oil in a medium skillet over medium heat for 1 minute. Add the hot pepper and sauté for 1 minute. Add the greens and a little bit more water to the skillet. Increase the heat to high and cook, stirring for 3 to 4 minutes until the water evaporates. Drizzle with more olive oil to taste and season with more salt.

FEATURED SQUARE FOOT GARDENS



Photo credit: Wendy Gibson

When Wendy Gibson shared this picture of her grandson Ruebin Zane Begoon, we immediately asked if we could feature him in the newsletter. This is one great gardener! He gardens at his grandma's family farm where they raise mini-bulls for rodeo and keep horses for riding. The garden is right by his house. Wendy says, "He really enjoyed puttering around the garden with me this summer. I gave him one 4x4' bed for his cabbage and its marigold companions. It was his first solo gardening adventure."

His green thumb and 15.4 pound cabbage won him a \$1,000 scholarship. Congratulations, Ruebin. Keep growing!



SFG ON THE ROAD!



The Square Foot Garden Foundation is pleased to be a 2020 sponsor and partner with the Mother Earth News Fairs for all four events. In 2020, the Mother Earth News Fairs will be exhibiting in Belton, Texas (February 15-16); in Nashville, Tennessee (May 16-17); at Polyface Farm in Swoope, Virginia (July 17-18); and in Seven Springs, Pennsylvania (September 25-27).

Each event includes money-saving hacks, health-boosting remedies, and environmental strategies. It's all here through presentations, hands-on workshops, and a marketplace filled with innovative resources and products. These fairs are ideal destinations to visit with like-minded enthusiasts from across the country and across a range of fields.

CI Wayne Schirner will be presenting at the Texas event, and CI Kim Roman will be presenting at the Polyface Farm event. Come out and visit with us personally!



An Inspirational Visit with CI Wayne Burleson

We (Laura and Steve) had the pleasure of meeting up with CI Wayne Burleson during the 2019 National Heirloom Expo in Santa Rosa, California. Let's hear what Wayne has to say:



SFG in Guatemala

Cultiva International, a nonprofit based in Guatemala, has embraced the Square Foot Gardening method to help empower women and other individuals to grow their own food, and thus improve their nutrition, and to become more self-sufficient. In this video Greg Jensen explains what's the same about Square Foot Gardening in Guatemala and what's different. Thanks Greg!



Let's Stay in Touch



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