



# ONE SQUARE FOOT AT A TIME

Newsletter of the Square Foot Gardening Foundation

Spring 2020

## LETTER FROM THE FOUNDATION



## Greetings, Square Foot Gardeners!

As we write this letter to you, our readers, we are entering what promises to be uncertain times. The one thing that's constant is gardening. From starting seeds to creating compost and harvesting fresh vegetables, gardening is a fun way to connect us with nature, add balance to our lives, and contribute to the health and wellness of our families and ourselves.

But we are certain of one thing: we will get through this—together.

Stay well, stay rested, garden, and keep the faith.

Happy Gardening!  
Laura & Steve Bartholomew

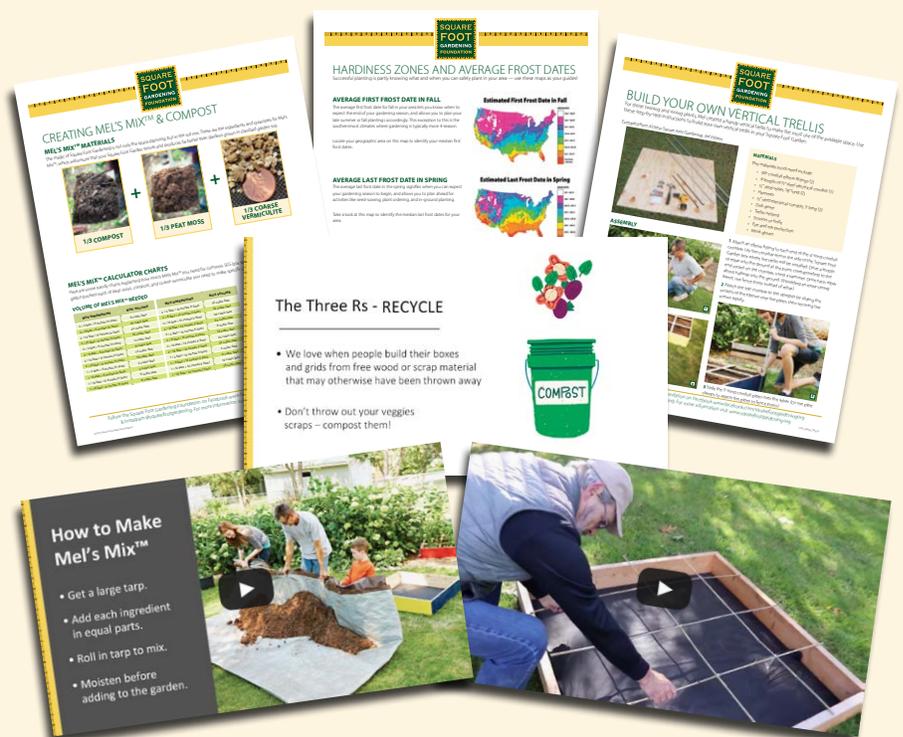
## COMING SOON: LEARN TO SQUARE FOOT GARDEN — ONLINE!

We've been hard at work creating a brand-new Certified Instructor program, and the new version of this popular program is divided into levels so that, no matter what you hope to learn and do with your Square Foot Garden, there's an opportunity for you.

The Level 1 Introductory SFG Course: Learn How To Square Foot Garden will be open for registration in mid-May. In it, you'll learn the basics of Square Foot Gardening so that you can get growing right now.

If you're interested in becoming a Square Foot Gardening Certified Instructor and teaching others how to Square Foot Garden, you'll want to complete the Level 2 Intermediate Certified Instructor Course, which will be available this summer.

[Click here](#) to sign up to be notified when the course is open.



## FEATURED CERTIFIED INSTRUCTOR WAYNE SCHIRNER



*Certified Instructor Wayne Schirner with his Square Foot Garden beds at home in Texas.*

### Wayne Schirner

It only takes a couple of minutes in talking with Certified Instructor Wayne Schirner to get that he's a "citizen scientist." His love of Square Foot Gardening and, in particular, Mel's Mix™ comes through clearly and enthusiastically — but his love of gardening didn't exactly have an equally enthusiastic beginning.

grandparents who were farmers and parents who were traditional row gardeners. He and his siblings were put to work early, as is often the case with farming families. "When I was five, I realized I didn't like to pull weeds," he says, "and when I was 15, I realized I really didn't like to dig." Fortunately for him, he discovered the Square Foot Gardening method that addresses both of his gardening woes.

Now living on over an acre in central Texas, Wayne not only loves to Square Foot Garden, but he's passionate about Mel's Mix™ and loves experimenting with soil and growing conditions. He first learned about Square Foot Gardening by watching Mel Bartholomew's television show on PBS and eagerly began gardening with the original method of simply using amended native soil. Because he was in the Army, Wayne moved around quite a bit over the years, but always made it a priority to get his Square Foot Garden

This Iowa native was the middle child of five siblings, with

Are you interested in becoming a Certified Instructor?

[Click here to be notified when registration is open.](#)

set up wherever he lived.

Around 2014, he started training as a Master Gardener, and that's when his interest in soil really took off. "A soil pH of 6.5–7 is really the best to grow veggies in," he explains, "and my soil was almost an 8." He realized no amount of amending that soil would overcome that — and that's when he took a second look at Square Foot Gardening, pouring over the newer edition of the book and learning about Mel's Mix™.

After he completed his Master Gardener training, he became an SFG Certified Instructor in 2015 and then embarked on an advanced training in vegetable gardening. His project for that training was to build and compare the growth and success of two 4' x 4' vegetable gardens — both of them using Mel's Mix™. The difference? One was 6" deep, and the other was 12" deep. He found that the yield was the same or better in the 6" Square Foot Garden bed, and this began his experimentation with side-by-side beds.

If you ever have the pleasure of talking with Wayne, be sure to ask him about the time he trialed tomatoes growing in an SFG bed and growing in a traditional raised bed. He'll give you more detail, but here's the scoop: He planted



*This is a photo of the 6" deep SFG filled with Mel's Mix™ on the left and the non-SFG on the right filled with 16" of amended topsoil. The back left corner in each bed has a tomato plant that is the same variety planted at the same time and irrigated the same. The front right corner in each bed has a pepper plant, again the same variety planted at the same time and irrigated the same. The SFG bed has only Mel's Mix™ made from fluffed peat moss, coarse vermiculite, and blended compost in equal volumes. The non-SFG has 12" of purchased top soil amended with 4 inches of blended compost and also a commercial organic fertilizer applied at the recommended rate for vegetables. Mel's Mix™ really does make a difference.*

tomatoes in a raised bed with 16" of topsoil and compost, and planted more tomatoes in an SFG bed with 6" of Mel's Mix™. You can probably guess which bed did better, but the results astounded even Wayne — the tomatoes grown in Mel's Mix™ took off, while the raised bed yielded *no tomatoes* at all.

"This is what I love about Mel's Mix™," Wayne says, "You can use it anywhere in the world regardless of the native soil, because Mel's Mix™ is standard across the board. It is more expensive to fill the beds at the beginning, but it really pays off in no time." To create his own Mel's Mix™, he sources his coarse vermiculite at a local feed store and makes his own compost at home, using plant-based ingredients such as leaves and grass combined with about 5% kitchen scraps. And it will likely come as a surprise to no one that Wayne did a soil test on both homemade compost and purchased/blended compost, finding that the homemade variety had more nutrients, less phosphorus, and a lower pH than commercially produced compost.

What drives Wayne Schirner, as you can see, is research. He is passionate about information supported by research and is eager to impart his findings to the scores of people who come to his Square Foot Gardening presentations. And he unabashedly urges folks to buy the *All New Square Foot Gardening, 3rd Edition* book, saying, "They need to get the book, read the book, and not simply look at the pictures."

Wayne's final piece of advice? "Get into Mel's Mix™. It's like Goldilocks — not too much, not too little...it's just right."

## WHY USE GRIDS?

### Grids Make Mini Gardens!

When you think about it, each square foot is essentially a "mini" garden (created by the grid) that you can plant and replant as you harvest throughout the seasons. It is such an efficient way to garden, simplifying planting and care and maximizing yield.

The key to SFG success is the grid, which transforms visualizing the square foot sections into tangible squares. Grids are crucial to keeping your Square Foot Garden organized for planting and harvesting; without a grid, a Square Foot Garden is just a raised bed. There are many options for creating grids, including bamboo poles, pieces of wood lath, "rip cut" lumber, 1" cedar slats, repurposed blinds, PVC pipes, and even metal rebar (though these can get hot in the sun).

#### Here's how to build a grid. You'll need:

Saw  
¼ × 1½ × 50" cedar slats (6)  
Drill with ¼" twist bit  
¼ × 1" bolts with washers and nuts (9)  
1" exterior screws (12)



1. Cut slat pieces to length, then position them across the top of the Square Foot Garden box so that they form grid squares that are 1 × 1-inch in size. Drill ¼-inch holes at the intersections of the lattice pieces.
2. Next, secure a bolt into each hole and secure it with a washer and nut.
3. Drill ⅛-inch pilot holes at the ends of each lattice piece, down into the box sides.
4. Secure the lattice strips to the box with screws driven down through the holes.



Grids and the mini gardens they create encourage a "natural" crop rotation as you replant each square after harvesting. For example, you can begin in spring with a root vegetable, followed by a fruiting crop (such as tomatoes), and end with a fall/wintertime leafy green. As soon as you harvest one, you're ready to plant the next crop with just a new trowel full of compost added to keep the mix nutritious.

## SFG GARDEN PLANNING TIPS



### What Should I Plant?

Looking through the seed catalogs or wandering the aisles of the garden shop are wonderfully fun things to do. But they're probably not the best ways to pick what grow in your SFG. Why? Because we're distracted by the beautiful colors and descriptive language and think we're going to eat it—when maybe we aren't. So, take a look at which fruits and vegetables you're actually eating. Make a list—

even taking a look at recent grocery receipts to see what you bought—and come up with your favorites. If you don't like the flavor of eggplant or zucchini or—gasp, tomatoes—then don't plant them.

### How Much Is Enough?

Square Foot Gardening is so productive that it's easy for newcomers to plant more than they can use—even if they have friends and neighbors who can use any excess. Plus, everyone differs in terms of how much they'll eat. Here are some basic rules of thumb for each adult:

- One 4x4 SFG box (16 square feet) will supply enough produce to make a salad for one adult every day of the growing season.
- Two 4x4 SFG boxes (32 square feet) means you'll supply the daily supper vegetables for that person for each day of the growing season.
- Three 4x4 SFG boxes (48 square feet) will supply enough extra vegetables to be used for preserving, special crops, showing off, or giving away.

Depending on the size of the vegetable—small, medium, large, or even extra-large—you can even intensify the amount you plant in your garden because you can plant more of the smaller vegetables in each square.



- Extra-large: 1 plant per square. Examples include broccoli, cabbage, tomatoes, and peppers.



- Large: 4 plants per grid square. Examples include leaf lettuce and Swiss chard.



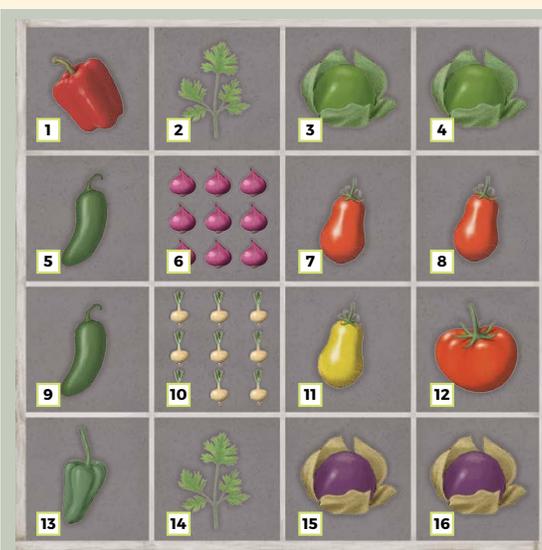
- Medium: 9 plants per grid square. Examples include beans, beets, and peas.



- Small: 16 plants per grid square. Examples include carrots, radishes, and onions.

Would you like to learn more?

**Then check out this blog post to learn how you can design a SFG for a continuous harvest.**



The salsa garden is planted with these vegetables, reading from top left: 1 Red bell pepper x 1, 2 Cilantro x 1, 3 Green tomatillo x 1, 4 Green tomatillo x 1, 5 Jalapeno pepper x 1, 6 Purple onion x 9, 7 Pear tomato x 1, 8 Pear tomato x 1, 9 Jalapeno pepper x 1, 10 White onion x 9, 11 Yellow pear tomato x 1, 12 Beefsteak tomato x 1, 13 Ancho pepper x 1, 14 Cilantro x 1, 15 Purple tomatillo x 1, 16 Purple tomatillo x 1

### In Mel's Words.

It's always inspirational to hear our founder Mel Bartholomew speak about SFG. In this 3-minute YouTube video, Mel describes the importance of considering the size of the final produce (not the seed) when planning your SFG. Once you identify them as small, medium, or large, you're ready to plan your SFG. It will surely inspire you to zip! zap!



In Mel's Words...

### How Many Per Square?

Once you know how many SFG boxes you'll plant and have a list, start simple and easy. Sketch out what you can grow in the size of your SFG; don't worry, you don't have to be an artist.

## SFG QUICK TIPS

### Use Many Sources of Compost



Mel's Mix™ is one of the key components to a Square Foot Garden. And you'll remember that Mel's Mix™ is 33% compost, which is a significant percentage. Ideally, you will use your own compost, which is mixed from a large variety of sources. But most people will buy commercial compost. If you do, buy several kinds. *Why is that* you may ask? Bagged commercial compost is nearly always the byproduct of one industry. It could be mushroom farming, cattle ranching, cotton milling, the lumber industry, soybean production—you get the idea. This means it could have too much/ too little of the nutrients you want in your Mel's Mix™. The solution is to use your own compost or buy a variety—as many as you can find—of compost materials and mix them together. This is probably the most practical for many gardeners, and it's perfectly okay to do this. Then, just measure one-third of this combined compost when you're making your Mel's Mix™.

### Prevent Pests



Into every life a little rain must fall—or pests must fly. While it's true that healthy plants are the best defense against pests, it's inevitable that some may visit. But you do have options. Using chemicals is a personal choice... but there are physical barriers that work very well, too.

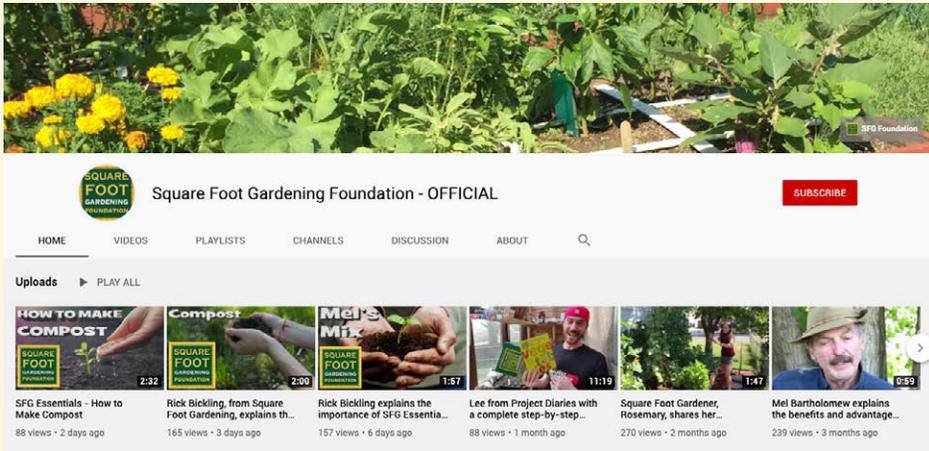
- Wire mesh poultry netting – can be used for large predators, such as raccoons)
- Floating row covers – these are clothlike, fine mesh materials that “float” over emerging plants
- Crushed eggshells – these can be sprinkled around plants to deter slugs
- Wire cage – wire cages around individual plants keep animals such as deer, raccoons, and even cats from nibbling on your harvest
- Chicken wire – install it under your boxes to keep digging animals like gophers at bay.

### Water with a Bucket of Sun-Warmed Water



Do you like cold showers? Probably not. Imagine, then, how they feel to plants. That's why we recommend you keep water on hand to dip out—a cup at a time—when you're watering plants (versus using a hose). There is less waste because each plant gets the exact amount of water it needs, where it needs it. And your plants will thank you!

The sun provides free energy, and that warmed-up water is much easier for plant roots to take up than cold water, making your entire watering routine more efficient. Use a 5-gallon bucket (galvanized or plastic from the home improvement store) — they're easy to find, and you probably already have one laying around somewhere!



The saying goes, A picture is worth a thousand words We agree. Did you know that Square Foot Gardening Foundation has a YouTube channel? It's full of helpful videos you can watch when you have questions on techniques or how-tos. [Click here to check it out and subscribe.](#)

## How to Plant a Square Foot Garden



Presented by Project Diaries, this cheery video shows you step-by-step how to plant a Square Foot Garden while simultaneously answering some of the more frequent questions.

## Square Foot Gardening Essentials

We're excited to announce a new video series with Rick Bickling, the "How Do Gardener." To start, learn about Mel's Mix™ and why it's such an important part of Square Foot Gardening, all about compost, and how to make your own compost.

### Learn About Mel's Mix™



### Learn About Compost



### Learn How to Make Your Own Compost



### All About Vermiculite



# Arugula

First, a pun: If plants could drive, what would their car horn sound like? Arugula!

Arugula is a somewhat lesser-known green that's got a lot to offer. Like other greens, you can usually harvest 2 crops (or more!) per growing season—what a benefit. It's super nutritious, too, with ½ cup providing the following according to the USDA/FDA:

Calories: 2.5	Protein: 0.3g
Fat: 0.1 g.	Vitamin K: 27.7% of FDA daily value (DV)
Sodium: 0 mg.	Calcium: 3.2% of FDA DV
Carbohydrates: 0.4g	Vitamin C: 2.5% of FDA DV
Fiber: 0.2g	
Sugars: 0.2g	

This versatile herb-y green has a flavor that's considered somewhat "peppery," but that makes it an excellent counterpart to rich cheeses and meats. Wait—did someone say "pizza"?

## Arugula and Prosciutto Pizza

### Ingredients

- 1 pound prepared pizza dough, at room temperature
- All-purpose flour, for dusting
- Cornmeal, for dusting
- 4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 clove garlic, grated
- 1/2 teaspoon chopped fresh rosemary
- Kosher salt and fresh-ground pepper
- 1/2 cup part-skim ricotta
- 1 cup shredded mozzarella cheese
- 4 cups baby arugula
- 1 small shallot, thinly sliced
- Juice of 1/2 lemon
- 3 ounces thinly sliced prosciutto
- Shaved parmesan cheese, for topping

### Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 450 degrees F. Place a pizza stone or upside-down baking sheet in the oven. Roll out the dough on a lightly floured surface into a 12-inch round. Transfer to a cornmeal-dusted pizza peel or another upside-down baking sheet; slide the dough onto the hot pizza stone or baking sheet. Bake 8 minutes. Meanwhile, combine 2 tablespoons olive oil in a bowl with the garlic, rosemary, and salt and pepper to taste.
2. Remove the pizza crust from the oven, brush with the olive oil mixture, and top with the ricotta and mozzarella cheeses. Bake until the cheese is golden and bubbly, about 6 more minutes.
3. Toss the arugula and shallot in a large bowl with the lemon juice, 2 tablespoons olive oil, and salt and pepper to taste. Top the pizza with the arugula salad, prosciutto, and shaved parmesan. Cut into slices and enjoy!

Did you know pesto can be made with virtually any herb or green? It can be a delicious alternative, and it's fun to try new combinations.



## Arugula Pesto

### Ingredients

- 6 cups arugula
- ½ cup + 1 1/2 to 2 1/2 tablespoons freshly grated Parmesan cheese\*
- ¼ cup Pecorino cheese
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 clove garlic (chopped)
- 2 tablespoons pine nuts
- ½ cup + 1 to 2 tablespoons olive oil

In a food processor or blender, combine the arugula, Parmesan and pecorino cheeses, salt, garlic, pine nuts, and ¼ cup olive oil. Blend on medium speed until everything starts to combine; add ¼ cup olive oil. Blend for approximately 30 seconds, then add 1 or 2 tablespoons olive oil until you reach the desired thickness. Use it on top of cooked pasta, sprinkle with grated Parmesan cheese. *Did you make too much? Arugula Pesto can be refrigerated for up to 3 days or frozen.*



## FEATURED SQUARE FOOT GARDENS

Let's take a walk with Rosemary Fotheringham in her beautiful Square Foot Gardens in Washington state.

THE "BEFORE":  
NEGLECTED  
FROM  
PREVIOUS  
RENTERS



A  
FLOURISHING  
GARDEN!



GARDEN BEDS  
BUILT, READY  
FOR TRELLISES  
AND PLANTING

WE'D LOVE TO SEE  
YOUR GARDENS!

Email us at  
[info@squarefootgardening.org](mailto:info@squarefootgardening.org)

Take a look at these dramatic Before/After shots—wow! What a difference from wasted space to productive gardening.

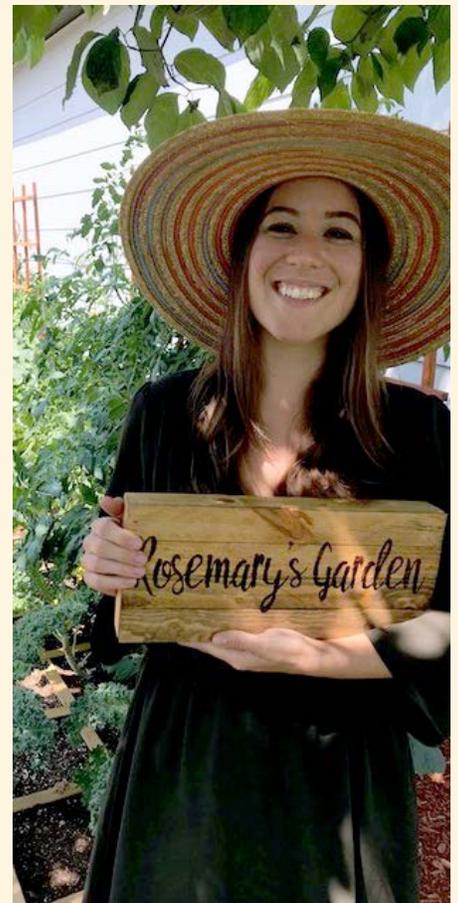
"Here's My Square Foot Garden" video shared by Rosemary on how she got started. What a star!



She even has a sign! There are 3 SFG boxes in Rosemary's garden, including a 6x3 Canning SFG, a 6x3 Soup SFG, and a 3x3 Herb SFG. Rosemary intends for the 3x3 garden to become her niece's garden when her niece is old enough. Growing food—it's a family thing!

Rosemary's SFG boxes are bursting with neatly tended squares. Notice the trellises too.

Nothing beats eating food you grow yourself—right in the garden.



**In this issue, we also share photos from several SFGers:**

Notice how Barbara Bossman has used marigolds as companion plants to fight pests. And we spy a beehive too!



Thanks to Dallas Baker for showing off this fantastic arched trellis. That will be gorgeous when covered with vining vegetables.



We love how Sharon Ashbury has not only used a grid but is using this "mesh" to help her plants stand upright.



*Certified Instructor Pam Molnar's Garden*

Here are some pictures of my "Farmacy." My garden (consisting of over 130 squares) over the approximate 12 years I have had it has expanded and improved upon in many ways. It has been a hands-on garden for gardening education as shown in the picture of just one of the classes I hosted.

We have added hubcap art for more color and to entertain and attract the grandkids—as if the soil wasn't enough. I've grown just about everything and in many different varieties. Several years ago, I discovered that in the hottest months here in South Florida I could turn it into a beautiful flower garden that attracts tons of butterflies of all kinds, making this space useful year-round. I hope you enjoy the pictures of my sanctuary as much as I like how therapeutic it is for me.



## WORLD SQUARE FOOT GARDENING DAY



Send us your photos and you could win this elevated bed!

### Photo Contests\*

Email photos to [info@squarefootgardening.org](mailto:info@squarefootgardening.org). Photos are due by the deadline of June 15, 2020. Remember: each must show the SFG grid.

- We'll be giving away two 4x4 beds with the irrigation built right in.
- We'll be giving away two elevated beds. These wheelchair-accessible beds are constructed out of pine with a steel bottom layer to ensure a long product lifespan. A light water sealant protects it from the elements; you can paint, stain, or leave it to weather naturally. Plus—a Square Foot Garden grid is included.

### Randomly Selected Drawings\*

We'll be giving away four Beginner Square Foot Gardening Courses. We'll be giving away two Aaron's Homestead Products Trellises.

[Click Here](#) to Enter

### Teacher Grants

We'll be giving away four grants to teachers—each with a value of \$2,000! Please email us at [info@squarefootgardening.org](mailto:info@squarefootgardening.org) for grant paperwork.

\*Contest for 4' x 4' beds, elevated beds, and trellises open to entrants in the United States only. Course open to global entrants.



Send us your photos & you could win this raised bed with built-in irrigation.

Be there—and be “Square”! Join your fellow SFGers on June 28, 2020 for World Square Foot Gardening Day!!

It's a 24-hour online celebration of all things Square Foot Gardening on our [Facebook Page](#)

- Videos
- Giveaways
- Contests
- And more!

Here's just a little of what you'll find on June 28.

## SFG BLOG SPOT



We're always adding new blog posts with Square Foot Gardening info.

### Bagged vs. Homemade Compost

You know that compost is one-third of Mel's Mix™, but do you know the difference between homemade and bagged compost? Learn the ins and outs of this important part of Square Foot Gardening.

[Read More](#)

### How to Make Your Own Compost

Compost is the “duct tape” of Square Foot Gardening—it fixes everything! And it's never too late to start your own compost pile. Learn the hows and whys in this blog post.

[Read More](#)

### Get Kids Involved in Square Foot Gardening

Summer is a great time to involve kids with their own Square Foot Gardens. It's something founder Mel Bartholomew supported from the beginning. You can introduce children to the joys (and responsibilities) of gardening too. Take a look here to learn more.

[Read More](#)

## Let's Stay in Touch



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