



ONE SQUARE FOOT AT A TIME

Newsletter of the Square Foot Gardening Foundation

Winter 2021

LETTER FROM THE FOUNDATION

Happy New Year, Square Foot Gardeners!

Let us be among the first to wish you a Happy New Year 2021! And if there was ever a year we're glad to see end, it's got to be 2020. It has been challenging, to say the least, and we know there is more to come. But we also know that as gardeners, we have all learned to be resilient.



This word *resilience* made us think. We did a little research and found the following attributes of what makes a person resilient:

self-awareness, purpose, positive relationships, mindfulness, self-care

Wow! So many of these adjectives are how we'd describe Square Foot Gardeners.

Self-awareness? Check! It takes a certain amount of self-awareness just to be interested in Square Foot Gardening.

Purpose? Check! It is to help end hunger throughout the world by teaching self-reliance through Square Foot Gardening.

Positive relationships? Check! I'm sure you, like us, have made so many new friends being a Square Foot Gardener whether that's by being a CI or participating in a community garden or even through our online events, newsletters, and our social media.

Mindfulness? Check! This goes hand-in-hand with purpose, we'd say. And gardening itself is a form of meditation (mindfulness). We can all gain inner peace by planning and executing our Square Foot Garden. It forces us to hope for the future.

But what about self-care? Now, that's not one we can answer for you. But we have so much work ahead of us all that our wish for you in 2021 is to take care of yourself—so you can help take care of others. We are doing important work.

Happy Gardening!

Laura and Steve Bartholomew

The Square Foot Gardening Foundation

CI COURSE

Are You Interested in Becoming a Certified Instructor?

Certified Instructors are the backbone of our SFG mission. By teaching self-reliance and sustainability with the unique SFG method, we are changing the world. So—thank you!

The Square Foot Gardening Foundation welcomes everyone—even if you have never gardened before. Our 6-part course, including charts, handouts, and tutorial videos, will teach you how to grow fresh produce no matter where you live. It's all designed so you can study at your pace and on your timeline.

Level 1 is our Introductory SFG course to learn the basics. Anyone who wants to become a Certified Instructor must complete Level 1 first. Level 2 is our Intermediate Certified Instructor course that focuses on presentation tips, tools, and information a SFG'er needs in order to be able to teach others.

LET'S STAY IN TOUCH



"Like" Square Foot Gardening on Facebook



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Course topics include:

- What it means to be a Certified Instructor.
- How to create a fantastic SFG presentation.
- How to be a great presenter.
- How to handle the inevitable snafus during a live presentation (humor helps!).
- How to follow up after a presentation.
- How to market your events and presentations to reach the greatest number of interested people.
- How to start a SFG in your community or school.

Also included with the Level 2 course are numerous handouts, templates, tutorials, and how to's. Once you've completed the course, CIs will receive: An embossed certificated suitable for framing, business cards, pin, and a hat to identify you as a qualified Certified Instructor. You'll also have your own CI portal, where you can access our ongoing learning

You can purchase the Level 1 course separately, or bundle these two courses together for only \$119—and, in the process, become a Certified Instructor for Square Foot Gardening. Don't wait—put your knowledge to work helping spread the word about Square Foot Gardening. The world is waiting for you. **Sign up here!**

CIs are the core of our mission's success, so won't you join us? **Learn More**



FEATURED CERTIFIED INSTRUCTOR

Meet Diane O'Neill, Our First CI to Take Our New Online Course!



Diane, holding a white-flowering columbine that she raised from seed. She is in the middle of planting a woodland garden for the perimeter border of the P-Patch.

It's not a huge surprise that Diane O'Neill was the first person to go through the Square Foot Gardening Foundation's new Certified Instructor course—and complete her certification! This Seattle, WA, (Hardiness Zone 8a) resident is full of energy, focus, and determination. Did we also mention that she's also a retired CPA and a Zumba instructor?

"I got Mel Bartholomew's very first book about Square Foot Gardening," she says, "and I've been doing it ever since! I love that it's so fun, requires less work, and that harvesting is so much easier." These days, Diane and her husband, Michael, are the leaders of the Giving Garden P-Patch in Seattle—and understanding what that means requires a little history lesson.

The term "P-Patch" is unique to the Seattle, Washington, area and refers to the Picardo family, on whose property the area's first community garden was created back in the 1970s. The Picardos first leased part of their small farm property for the community garden, then sold it to the city of Seattle—and the P-Patch Program was officially born. By 1993 this program was the country's largest community gardening program, and today, it oversees nearly 90 P-Patches around the city.

Diane gardens at the P-Patch located within Kirke Park, which consists of four city lots acquired from an old church (*kirke* means "church" in Norwegian). There's a park and playground in one part of the park, and the P-Patch in another—and within the P-Patch is the Giving Garden, which is 100 percent Square Foot Gardening.

Not surprisingly, Diane reports that some of the other gardeners in the P-Patch have donated parts of their plots to be used in the Giving Garden, evidence of Diane's infectious enthusiasm and passion for growing food not only in the SFG Method, but also for donating to an area food bank.



Neatly planted grids are sure to produce an abundant harvest.

"The Giving Garden has eight SFG beds, made possible by a grant from the SFG Foundation," Diane explains, "and this year we grew five times the amount of food we grew last year!"

Diane asked the food bank what kinds of food they would love to have more of, and interestingly, they reported back: *fresh herbs*. So Diane and her crew of volunteers got busy planting and growing chives, garlic, rosemary, sage, oregano, and basil.

"We also use a compost called Zoo Doo," she says. "It's composted animal manure from our local zoo, and it's so popular that the zoo developed a lottery system to determine who gets it." Knowing how difficult it is to obtain Zoo Doo, Diane instead simply asked the zoo for a donation—and she received an entire truckload, ready to be incorporated into Mel's Mix™!

Lesson #1: If you don't ask, you don't get.

Diane says that although COVID-19 has affected how they do things at the P-Patch, they've simply adjusted to accommodate social distancing, which is easier since all the activities are outside. She has a great group of volunteers who plant, weed, water, harvest, and deliver all the produce to the food bank, as well deliver as a number of donations for supplies and materials from various community businesses.

Lesson #2: Focus on collaborative efforts in a large program like this one.

Once Diane starts talking about SFGing, she readily shares a number of tips ranging from where she gets supplies to how she lines her beds to which new plants she's trying right now. Conversation with Diane sounds something like this: "Oh, you *have* to try . . ." or, "You are going to *love* . . ." and, "Do you have a source for XYZ? Oh, I've got a place for you. . . ."

"The Greenhouse Megastore is where we order our coarse vermiculite," she says excitedly. "If you order more than two of the 4-cubic-foot bags, you'll get a volume discount, and if you order more than \$100 of material, *your shipping is free!*" This is exactly the kind of tip that Mel himself would love—where to buy the best material and save money in the process.

Are you interested in becoming a Certified Instructor?

Please visit
www.squarefootgardening.com
to learn more!

She also lines the bottoms of her SFG beds with cardboard rather than weed barrier fabric—readily available, inexpensive, and effective.

Lesson #3: Experiment to learn what works best in your SFG—it's how Mel himself created SFG in the very beginning and evolved it over the years.

"And I believe success breeds success," Diane states. "When you try SFGing and you see how much of a difference it can make, how successful your garden is, you just want to keep going and doing more." To that end, she is growing two new foods this year that she's very excited about—French sorrel and celery leaf. She adds the lemony-tasting French sorrel to her salad greens and uses the celery leaf both in soups and salads.

Passion, energy, and resourcefulness—these are qualities that Diane O'Neill has in spades, and they're what make her such an effective SFG practitioner and now, Certified Instructor.

Welcome to the SFG CI family, Diane—we can't wait to see what you do next!



Once the lettuce is harvested, the crimson clover cover crop will continue to grow and eventually be integrated or mixed in to nourish the soil in this 2' wide SFG.

IN THE KITCHEN WITH SFG

Summer certainly has its bounty of produce, but we *love* wintertime cooking. It's a great way to stay connected to your garden all year-round. Try these recipes for something new.

Sweet Potato Pancakes

How sweet it is! Sweet potatoes may have been one of your SFG squares. If so, you'll be delighted by this recipe for sweet potato pancakes—great for breakfast, lunch, or dinner! If you didn't grow them this past year, maybe it's something to think about for 2021. [Check out this link for some growing tips.](#)



Ingredients

- 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ cups all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon baking soda
- 2 tablespoons packed brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon Kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon ground nutmeg
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon ground ginger
- 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup buttermilk
- 2 small sweet potatoes, roasted, peeled, and the flesh puréed until smooth (about $\frac{3}{4}$ cup)
- 2 large eggs
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- Butter
- Toasted pecans (if desired)
- Maple syrup (if desired)

Directions

1. In a large bowl, whisk the flour, baking powder, baking soda, brown sugar, salt, cinnamon, nutmeg, and ginger.
2. In a separate bowl, whisk the buttermilk and sweet potato purée; add the eggs and vanilla.
3. Add the buttermilk mixture to the flour mixture and stir with a wooden spoon until just combined.
4. Melt some butter in a large nonstick skillet or griddle over medium heat. When the butter is foamy, reduce the heat to medium-low and ladle a scant $\frac{1}{2}$ cup pancake batter into the skillet. Cook until bubbles start to form in the batter and the pancake is golden underneath, about 3 minutes. Flip it over and cook the other side until golden, another 3 minutes.
5. Repeat with the remaining batter. Serve with more butter and the pecans and maple syrup if desired.



Brussels Sprouts with Bacon and Walnuts

This recipe will convert *anyone* who thinks they don't like Brussels sprouts. Guaranteed. The number of servings is impossible to estimate—you'll probably eat more than just one serving!

Ingredients

- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ pounds Brussels sprouts, trimmed and thinly sliced (they should be shredded)
- 3 slices bacon, chopped
- 2 shallots, peeled and chopped
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped walnuts
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup chicken broth
- Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper

Directions

1. In a large, high-sided skillet over medium heat, combine the Brussels sprouts and bacon. Cook until the bacon is crisp, and the fat is rendered. Remove the bacon with a slotted spoon to a paper towel-lined plate and reserve. Transfer the Brussels sprouts to a bowl.
2. Add the shallots to the hot pan and sauté until tender, about 3 minutes. Add Brussels sprouts, stirring to coat evenly. Season with the salt and pepper. Sauté the sprouts, tossing until they're bright green and crisp-tender, about 3 minutes.
3. Stir in the walnuts and cook 1 minute more to toast. Add the chicken broth, stirring until the liquid is reduced and the Brussels sprouts are soft. Stir in the cooked bacon. Serve hot.

KID'S CORNER

It's wonderful to share an activity with your kids, especially Square Foot Gardening. These are two really fun things that will interest kids of all ages!

Seed Germination—Let's Experiment!



Choose 2 to 3 different types of spring veggie seeds and plant them in cups that you've filled with Mel's Mix™. It's fun to see which one germinates (sprouts) first, second, and third! Take notes and pictures of what you see every day (a phone camera is fine).

Match the Seed Game—*It's almost seed-starting time!*













Let's see if you can match the veggie to the seed from which it grew. Download and print this PDF. Now, draw lines from the grown-up veggie to its seed. Try it! [Download Here](#)

SQUARE FOOT GARDENING

Draw a line from the vegetable to the seed that it grows from.

Match the Seeds!

Let's test your seed knowledge!

 1	 2	 3	 4	 5	 6
 A	 B	 C	 D	 E	 F

(Parents, when your child is done, help them check their answers! Answer Code: 1-E, 2-D, 3-B, 4-F, 5-A, 6-C.)

BOOK EXCERPT

No-Waste Kitchen Gardening: Regrow Your Leftover Greens, Stalks, Seeds, and More

If you've ever wondered, *Gee, can I grow another stalk of celery from this scrap?* then wonder no more.

We're happy to feature *No-Waste Kitchen Gardening: Regrow Your Leftover Greens, Stalks, Seeds, and More* by Katie Elzer-Peters in this issue. It's right up our SFG alley as it features ways to be more efficient in your growing (who does that sound like?). *No-Waste Kitchen Gardening* gives you the instruction and tips you'll need to grow and re-propagate produce from food "waste." You'll be amazed at how much you can re-grow. Cut back on your food waste, cultivate your own food easily, and maybe even share gardening with a new generation



with this cool garden technique. Here's one to try now:

How to Regrow Celery

You will need a cup or bowl and a sharp knife.

1. Fill a glass or bowl with about an inch of water.
2. Prepare the celery by cutting off the top cleanly about 3 inches above the bottom of the bunch. The center is where the plant will regrow.
3. Place the plant in the water. Make sure that no more than 1 inch of the bottom of the plant is covered.
4. Set the cup or bowl in an area of bright, indirect light. The more light, the longer your regrowing celery will last and the greener the new stalks will be.

5. Change the water every few days. With celery, this is an especially necessary step as the water will grow cloudy and smelly if you leave it alone.
6. Tear off any stalk remnants that are rotting to keep the plant tidy while you enjoy the new stalks.

Order your own copy [here](#).



SFG IN THE COMMUNITY

Why I Teach

Karla Hailer teaches at a private school, Cornerstone Academy, which is located about halfway between Worcester and Boston, Massachusetts. Karla shares why gardening is important for children as the ultimate STEAM activity. (The following has been edited for clarity and length.)

As a kid, I was fascinated by gardens, but gardening was a concept for me, not an action. I discovered Square Foot Gardening when I worked at Borders, but I never really got around to it as a busy mom. Every so often we would grow a few tomatoes and herbs, but I never really "gardened."

I went into teaching about a decade ago and have been working at a small, private K-6 school on 3 wooded acres. I have the freedom to teach without the demands of high-stakes tests hanging over my head. I love teaching in my looped classroom of fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade students. A couple of years ago I had a student who wanted to be a contractor but who hated math with a passion. [The student] struggled with division, didn't understand a lot of the basic concepts contractors need, and resisted any help. I gave him a contractor's project. I needed 16 square feet of gardening space to support a Three Sisters garden and only had a budget of \$100. The assignment: design the most cost-efficient raised bed garden he could and calculate costs down to the organic seeds and soil.

He designed our 4x4 garden, searched various costs for wood and so forth, and then a miracle happened: he began converting square feet to cubic meters for soil

volume! Once he had all his numbers, I told him he needed to summarize and break down the project to convince the principal to allow us to put it in. When the project was finished and we had our first seeds in, he said, "Division is kind of fun. I wish I figured that out earlier."



Students add Mel's Mix™ to their new SFG.

Here's another teachable moment.

Due to the pandemic, our little garden was fallow last spring. When our school returned to in-person teaching in the fall, I wanted a cool-weather crop of fast-growing plants to start for my plant unit in science. First, we had to weed the rogue grasses that had moved into our box. To keep the kids from “yanking” out parts of the weeds, I offered a homework pass to the group that pulled the longest root without breaking it. We examined those roots to learn how they have a main root and send off small runners to establish themselves, we used iNaturalist to look at the plant to determine what had moved into the box, and so on. My students were fascinated. Once the box was clear and I had mixed in a little compost, we set our grid again and planted Tokyo turnips, watermelon radishes, Dragon carrots, and Rouge d’Hiver and Cimarron lettuces.

In New England, frost sometimes comes as early as September, sometimes as late as December. This meant adding an engineering component. The kids looked up how to protect our garden by utilizing leftover PVC, plastic sheeting, and whatever else we had on hand from building partitions for in-person learning. We talked about designs: would a greenhouse be better than a row cover? What about a cold frame vs. a hoop tunnel? The students debated thicknesses of plastic sheeting and whether opaque or clear sheeting would be better. They collaborated in groups until they figured it was best to do a simple hoop house with what we had. Of course, the big question was, if we bend a piece of PVC over rebar, will the tension have it “spring” into the woods or stay? They were surprised that it stayed! As one of them said. “I don’t like vegetables, but I’ll try these because I grew them.”

And that is why we teach.



















Adding a PVC hoop supported the protective row cover.

SPRING PLANT-A-PALOOZA

If gardening were a series of rock concerts, then springtime would be our Bonnaroo. And now is the perfect time to brush up on your SFG skills, before the start of the big show. Although it's certainly tempting to buy lots of seeds now (those seed catalogs are really enticing), try to avoid buying so much that you'll overplant. Only purchase seed for what you and your family will eat in the quantity that you will need (both for fresh and for preserving, however).

It's All about Spacing

Do you need to refresh yourself on the plant spacing skills? That's a good idea for everyone. Take a look at this Plant Spacing Chart to guide you on the number of plants per grid you can plant. We can plant many vegetables very intensively—it's all about mature sizes of Small, Medium, Large, and Extra Large vegetables.

EXTRA LARGE (1)	LARGE (4)	MEDIUM (9)	SMALL (16)
 Broccoli	 Leaf Lettuce	 Bush Bean	 Carrot
 Cabbage	 Swiss Chard	 Spinach	 Radish
 Pepper	 Marigold	 Beet	 Onion
 Tomato	 Leaf Lettuce	 Spinach	 Radish

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

Another helpful chart is the SFG Spring Indoor Seed-Starting Schedule when you're deciding what to plant this year. If you'd like to download some charts to help you get the most out of the season (maybe even carry them with you if you're seed shopping in person) then [click on this link](#). In addition to our Plant Spacing Charts, we've included a blank planting chart for you to complete for your own SFG.



And if you love to listen to Mel Bartholomew talk about SFG, we've got plenty of videos for you to enjoy. This one is where he talks about how the SFG method conserves seeds!

[See It Here.](#)

WHAT IN THE HECK IS A TOP HAT?

And why would you need one?
(Most SFGers do, even if they don't know it yet!)

Top hats are removable (meaning, temporary) 1'x 1'x 6" "boxes" that are placed on top of a square in the SFG grid in order to add depth. You can use a top hat when you need more soil depth for root crops such as carrots, onions, scallions, potatoes, and leeks. Adding top hats mean you won't have to build your entire SFG deeper to accommodate just a few plants.

Just place them on top of a square, add more Mel's Mix™, and plant as usual. The root veggie will then have room to grow up! And best of all, you can build your own or buy one ready-made from Square Foot Gardening for the Red River Valley; visit <https://www.sfgrrv.com/product-page/top-hat-box-for-carrots-leeks-potatoes>.



Our friends from FamiFarm in Vietnam have several top hats in their SFG. Check out other inspiring FamiFarm images in the "Featured SFG" section of this newsletter.

THREE QUICK TIPS

You've noticed those "quick start" guides that sometimes come with appliances, right? Their purpose is to put you a little further ahead in the process so you can get things underway quickly, knowing that you will come back to more detailed explanations when they're needed. So in that spirit, we offer these three tips to kickstart your spring planting.

- 1. Check your hardiness zone.** First and last frost dates are keys to successful planting in your area. Hop on over to The Old Farmer's Almanac at www.almanac.com/gardening/frostdates and pop in your zip code to find your dates. Or visit here www.burpee.com/findgrowzone to determine your growing zone. With this information, you'll better know what you can plant and when! If you haven't checked your hardiness zone in a while, try checking it now—it may have changed.
- 2. Revitalize your SFG beds.** Before spring planting gets too hectic, wake up your SFG beds by unwrapping them (if you had to wrap them this past winter). Add some fresh compost and check your grids..... NOTE: (we only suggest adding Mels Mix™ if mix levels are low, otherwise it's just compost in spring). Now, compare this to traditional row gardening. For that you might have to:
 - a. Clear up any debris.
 - b. Break up the soil to loosen it for planting.
 - c. Check the pH levels in case they've changed
 - d. Add topdressings and amendments to feed your plants.
 - e. Weed at some point (blech!).
 - f. Repair any paths.
 - g. Set up any trellising or stakes.
 - h. And more.....

- 3. Review your garden journal from last year.** Do you remember what worked and what didn't? If you've been keeping a journal, then refresh your memory by rereading last year's notes. If you haven't been keeping a journal, then you can start one anytime. You can also check out our SFG Forum to ask your questions. Many seasoned SFGers love to share their experiences! Visit www.squarefootforumotion.com.



GET A JUMP ON THE SEASON: SMALL-SPACE COMPOSTING



We know you're itching to plant—but what if you can't? For most of us, it's still too early. So what can you do now? Compost. Or, more accurately, prepare a compost pile. You can even plan to experiment by comparing homemade compost vs. store-bought compost for this next growing season—take notes! If you find the homemade compost is infinitely better, then you know what your next projects will be.



Luckily, you don't need lots of space. But don't make it too cozy! Compost needs air in order to, well, compost. The minimum area is 3'x 3'. There are lots of plans available online (although, honestly, you can just create an open-sided bin) or you can use a hand-cranked composter. Any of these "work" as long as they—work!



Check out these videos on composting by our buddy Rick Bickling! You can also subscribe to our [YouTube channel](#) so you never miss a new video.

How to Make Compost

The Importance of Compost in Mel's Mix™

FEATURED SFG: VIETNAM'S FAMIFARM



Even though we know Square Foot Gardening is an international movement, it's always great to see how far we've spread around the world. In this issue, we feature FamiFarm, located in Hanoi, Vietnam. Our friends there have been SFGers for years, creating beautiful wooden beds complete with top hats and trellises. They've also been busy—creating Square Foot Gardens on balconies, rooftops, and in other more challenging locations, proving SFG can be successful everywhere. Thank you, FamiFarm, for your gorgeous, tidy, and inspiring gardens.

CREATE YOUR OWN TEA GARDEN

One of many fun things about SFG is that you can create a theme garden, such as a pizza garden, in which you'd grow tomatoes, onions, peppers, herbs—all the produce one might use to create a pizza. Well today, we're going to talk about a tea garden! What? You're thinking you can't grow tea? Well, you can especially if we're talking an *herbal* tea garden. Why pay for chamomile tea bags, for example, when you can grow herbs for tea in your own SFG?

Herbs are perfect for Square Foot Gardens. Several are even perennials so you can maintain it from year to year. These herbs are ideal: mints, rosemary, lavender, lemon balm, chamomile, calendula, echinacea, stevia. In some teas you can use fresh leaves, mint, for example, but most herbal leaves need to be dried. Once you harvest the leaves and dry them, you can steep them in hot water for a single-blend tea or combine them to create your own signature blends.

And remember — while many herbs behave and stay within their own SFG square, others are a bit more unruly. Mint and lemon balm, for example, have a tendency to take over a garden, so it's best to either plant them in pots and sink them into the Mel's Mix™ in your SFG, or simply leave them as potted plants nearby.



ALWAYS FAITHFUL: SEMPER FI

Certified Instructor Brian Fuder's motto for his business is: "Keep Those Fingers Dirty!" Brian's business, Square Foot Gardening for the Red River Valley, is based in Moorhead, MN. Visit www.sfgrv.com.

In addition to serving SFG as a CI, Brian builds elevated SFG beds like this one, a 3' x 3' elevated garden that's ideal for anyone with mobility concerns. And this is a pay-it-forward effort: Brian donates the proceeds from these to the Square Foot Gardening Foundation, which, in turn, matches those donations and donates all to the **Semper Fi Fund**.



The Semper Fi Fund, one of the most highly rated charities according to Charity Navigator, provides urgently needed resources and support for combat-wounded, critically ill, and catastrophically injured members of the U.S. Armed Forces and their families.

SFG gives a huge shout-out to Brian and to all our veterans. Thank you for your service.