LETTER FROM THE FOUNDATION

Greetings, Gardeners!

We aren’t meteorologists, but…our winter forecast includes a 100% chance of garden daydreaming with occasional seed overbuying and scattered compost planning.

These bleak months, we’re all peering at our backyards and patios, imagining a cornucopia of tastes, colors and scents from our SFG beds.

We garden for so many reasons. We challenge ourselves to be more self-sufficient, eat healthier, and know what’s in (or on) our food. Gardening helps us reduce our carbon footprint. Getting outside is therapeutic, healthy (Vitamin D!) and entertaining to boot.

Putting in a vegetable garden lets us show the next generation where food comes from, too. It teaches kids patience, experimentation and to marvel at Mother Nature.

Right now, our SFG plans are on spreadsheets. But until we can bring them to life this spring, they’re the boost of “paper sunshine” we need this season.

Want some extra inspiration? Check out our fresh, new website with dozens of how-to blogs that will make your SFG even better this year at www.squarefootgardening.org.

Here’s to reaching YOUR personal best- this summer- in your Square Foot Garden.

Happy Gardening!

Laura & Steve Bartholomew

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CURL UP THIS WINTER WITH THESE GARDEN RESOURCES

Free Planting Chart Download

Grow Veggies Indoors

Certified SFG Instructor Kim Roman’s book from Creative Homeowner Press is a complete guide to vertical, container, and hydroponic gardening under your roof, with a foreword by Steve and Laura Bartholomew.

Pre-order on Amazon.
Tasty 2022 Seed Introductions

Check Out These New Varieties!

No matter what hemisphere you’re in, “armchair gardeners” have a favorite winter hobby: salivating over seed catalogs! Whether you’re a newbie just starting out, or an experienced grower with a nifty seed collection, we bet you’re on the hunt for some ooooh-worthy varieties. Read on!

**TOE-MAHTO, TOE-MAYTO - NEW ‘MATERS TO TRY**

With 13,000+ heirloom and hybrid varieties, there’s so many tomato choices for your SFG. Nurseries and big box stores offer just a fraction of those, so gardeners look to catalogs and online for unusual seeds. Here’s a few to try:

- **Marvel Stripe Bicolor / Renee’s Garden Organic Seeds.** This heirloom with climbing vines bears large sunny gold fruits shot through with rose-red, giving these indeterminate tomatoes a marbleized effect. Flavor is mild and sweet.

- **Black Strawberry Tomato / Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds.** These indeterminate little beauties offer balanced flavor, durability and big harvests. One-ounce fruits have a gem-like appearance with marbled blue, scarlet, and gold skin.

- **Banana Legs / Territorial Seed Company.** This low-acid variety is delicious in salads and sandwiches. These determinate plants produce 4 inch Roma-shaped fruits with a golden yellow skin and faint streaks of orange.

**READY, SET, SALAD!**

Is a garden complete without crunchy, cool greens? No wonder the National Garden Bureau named 2022 ‘The Year of the Salad Greens.’ They’re easy to grow, nutritious, and a year-round crop when shade coverings are used.

- **Granaat Chinese Cabbage / Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds.** This cool-weather, high-yield variety is perfect for small spaces due to its tall, skinny growth habit. Enjoy in stir fry, soup and kimchi!

- **Bokoboko Spinach / Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds.** Sun and heat? Bring it! Also known as waterleaf, this Ghana native is heat/drought tolerant (ideal temp is 80-100 degrees) and loves humidity. Edible stems and flowers, too.

**VERTICAL VEGGIES**

Don’t forget to think ‘up’ to make the most of your SFG grid. Here’s some perfect-for-the-trellis varieties to grow this year; read Chapter Six of *All New Square Foot Gardening, 3rd Edition* for instructions on how to build a trellis.

- **Honeynut Butternut Squash / Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds.** Sized right for one serving, these 4-5 inch mini butternuts are big on flavor and highly regarded by chefs. And smaller squash equals faster roasting time!

- **Golden Midget Watermelon / Sow Right Seeds.** These personal-size melons are 3-5 pounds on vigorous vines and are early producers, too. Did we say cute?

**BONUS: A PURPLE SPROUTING BROCCOLI**

- **Burgundy Broccoli from Botanical Interests.** With its stunning color and great flavor, this brassica likes warmer temps, too. After the main head is harvested, the plant produces lots of side shoots to extend your harvest. **

*Seed availability was “in stock” at time of publication. This article contains affiliate links; our writers may receive a commission for purchases made through these links.*
Improving on a Family Tradition

Elizabeth Fiorentino Williams

Challenge from Dad “Grows” a New CI in North Carolina

For Elizabeth, it was just a matter of time before she continued her family’s gardening tradition.

Her parents farmed 57 acres in upstate New York, raising livestock. “As a kid I was digging in the dirt, helping mom in the vegetable garden, gathering eggs, and exploring every corner of our farm with my siblings,” she shares. Even after the family moved to North Carolina in 1985, the Fiorentinos grew vegetables in their suburban front yard.

“But here’s what else I remember: constant weeding, harvests coming in all at once, and watering being a major chore,” she chuckles.

Decades later, those memories of inefficient, tedious gardening stuck with her. That’s why in 2012 a YouTube video on SFG caught her eye.

“SFG is what I’d been looking for - a way to grow a lot of vegetables in a small space without all the work I remember as a kid,” she says. Elizabeth bought the 2nd edition “All New Square Foot Gardening” book for $5 and was hooked on its simplicity and productivity.

Did she want to grow vegetables with the SFG method? Absolutely. “But there’s one thing I don’t have at home: sunshine!”

Living with her husband outside of Chapel Hill where she works in Duke University’s HR department, her dreams of an SFG garden had to go on pause, unfortunately.

That part of the state happens to be near the headquarters of PlantPure Communities, a plant-based education and advocacy nonprofit founded by Nelson Campbell.

With her interest in healthy eating, Elizabeth kept hearing about PlantPure Communities (PPC) and attended a local open house. She soon committed to a plant-based lifestyle and has been a vegan since 2017. “My husband’s diet is more traditional, but he enjoys many of the dishes I prepare,” she explains.

Around that same time she became more active with PPC as a local pod leader. She also started spending more time with her dad, a widower who was still planting old-fashioned row gardens every year. And that’s how SFG popped back in Elizabeth’s life.

PPC launched a Gardening Toolkit to pod leaders in 2018 that used the SFG method. Elizabeth pored over the materials. “It all came full circle. I pulled out that book I bought in 2012 and started pestering Dad to stop his antique garden ways and start using SFG.”

Elizabeth saw his dismay every year when his row garden had a poor yield, needed weeding all the time, and was often eaten by critters.

For ages she had been urging him: “Please try Square Foot Gardening. It’s a gamechanger, even for long-time gardeners like you.”

“But he said ‘no’ every year, despite frustrating results in the garden. I would leave my SFG book at his place, I asked him to make Mel’s Mix™. He would not budge.”

Then the pandemic happened and “Dad saw how important it was to more easily grow his own food.”

Continued on Page 4
Fiorentino Family Gardeners
Continued from Page 3

He gave Elizabeth a challenge in early 2021: Become a Certified SFG Instructor and he’d agree to garden ‘her’ way with a Square Foot Garden. She wasted no time! Elizabeth bought our Level 1 and 2 courses in late March, and by mid-April 2021 earned her certification.

With Elizabeth now a CI, Dad was on a mission. Together they built five SFG boxes, two elevated beds and made Mel’s Mix™. In went tomatoes, zucchini, peppers, eggplants, squash, radishes and salad greens; staggering their squares allowed them to harvest until Thanksgiving.

What advice does she have for new SFG gardeners? “Just get started! One thing I’ll do next year is harvest daily. I’d visit Dad weekly to harvest but that was not enough. This year I’ll be there more often to tend and pick. What a great chore to have!” ♫

Curious about a vegan lifestyle? Want to join a pod near you? Click here to learn more at the PlantPure Communities website.

“Becoming a Certified Instructor allowed me to shift my 91-year-old Dad to a method that was finally joyful, easy and productive after years of tedious row gardening. I love seeing him outside more. This will be the only way we garden going forward.”

- Elizabeth Fiorentino Williams

SFG WEBSITE HAS A NEW LOOK!

Makeover Alert!
If you haven’t visited our website lately, stop by to experience an easier-to-navigate redesign! Our blogs are now organized by topic to more easily find expert advice on Mel’s Mix™ and compost, seeds, pest control, specific vegetables and more. All downloads and videos are on one resource page, too. Enjoy! ♫

www.squarefootgardening.org
GRIDS: THE HALLMARK OF AN SFG GARDEN

Mel Bartholomew said: “If your garden box doesn’t have a grid, it’s not a Square Foot Garden.”

Every step Mel outlined (box, Mel’s Mix™, grid, spacing) in his revolutionary gardening method delivers the maximum productivity from a tiny growing area.

Imagine pulling into your local mall, looking for a parking spot but there are no painted spaces. Chaos! Could you play chess without squares on the board? Or Tic Tac Toe without lines?

A grid is what makes it possible to achieve an amazing harvest. We hear “Oh, I can estimate where things should go, I don’t need a grid.”

Mel said a grid keeps your garden organized for sequential planting PLUS maximizes squares for tightly-spaced plantings of seeds. It’s not until you put a grid on top of your SFG that the brain grasps you can grow **16 different** vegetables, herbs or flowers in that 4’ x 4’ raised bed!

Not a fan of light color grids? Try the **Garden in Minutes Garden Grid™ Watering System**, build your own irrigation grid (see page 174-5 in the **All New Square Foot Gardening 3rd Edition**, or buy inexpensive bamboo stakes at the local garden center or dollar store. ♦

**Check out tool-free grid ideas on page 7.**

**Read our blog** on why you need a grid for your SFG.

If you had a big unlined asphalt surface, sure, you could park cars on it. But you can’t maximize that space without lines!

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**SPRING INDOOR SEED STARTING SCHEDULE**

The “zero” is the last frost date in your zone; find it here https://davesgarden.com/guides/freeze-frost-dates/ Plug in that date at zero, pick the veggie on the chart you want to grow, walk back to its ideal seed starting week, and there’s your seed starting schedule.

**When to Begin Seed-Starting**

Our chart, from the **All New Square Foot Gardening 3rd Edition**, shows when gardeners should start their seeds indoors.

Many crops (peas, carrots, radishes) can be easily started outside, seeds directly sown into your SFG grids.

But if you’re in a cold climate and want to give your broccoli, peppers, tomatoes and other veggies a “head start” in a shorter growing season, try starting them indoors this winter. Happy germinating! ♦

**Read our blog** on buying and starting seeds indoors.
Coarse Vermiculite:
Your alternative for making Mel’s Mix™ this spring.

As of early 2022 there’s a shortage of A3 and A4 coarse vermiculite from sources like Uline, Farmtek and Greenhouse Megastore. Vendors are requiring bulk minimum orders or estimating availability in 120 days.

If you can’t find coarse grade for this year’s batch of Mel’s Mix™, gardeners can use either the super coarse grade OR replace the 1/3 vermiculite with that amount of extra compost.

DO USE SUPER COARSE GRADE as a substitute in your Mel’s Mix™. Or, make it with 1/3 peat moss, 2/3 compost.
DO NOT USE PERLITE as a substitute. It doesn’t hold moisture like vermiculite, it’s gritty, it floats to the top of your beds and its white color looks unnatural. Mel didn’t like it for those reasons.

VIDEO: Rick Bickling, the “How Do Gardener,” reviews the wide range of materials available to build your SFG bed. He shares the pros, cons and costs of each. Click here to watch Rick’s video

Square Foot Garden Material Choices
- Untreated Lumber
- Hardwood
- Cedar
- Composite Deck Board
- Metal
- Brick
- Stone
- Concrete Block
- Logs
- Kits

JOIN OUR FACEBOOK GROUP
Are you part of our Facebook community of SFG gardeners? Learn from this helpful bunch of 64,000 expert AND new gardeners who share photos, tips, and encouragement. We’re all here to get you growing this year!
This is a private group; you must answer a few questions before being admitted so we know you’re not a spammer or a “bot.”
See you in the SFG Group soon!
Apply today to join the Official SFG Facebook Group

Do you garden in the Southern Hemisphere?

We’ve got you covered! Here’s our Summer issues with in-season tips. Enjoy your SFG harvest!

Summer 2019 Newsletter
School gardens, herbs, crop rotation, when to harvest.
Summer 2020 Newsletter
Harvesting, fall crop planning.
Summer 2021 Newsletter
Mulch, shade cloth, planting schedule for fall crops.

www.squarefootgardening.org #squarefootgardening
GARDENER TYSON ASKED:
Is there a cheaper alternative for ingredients of Mel's Mix™? Vermiculite is hard to come by and also expensive! I'm a new gardener and on a budget.

WE ANSWER:
The cost of Mel's Mix™ is far outweighed by how long it lasts. Yes, it’s expensive at first if you’re starting a huge garden, but the cost is amortized over the 10 or so years you’ll be using it. You just top off with compost each year, and will never need to buy fertilizer. Make your first SFG a SMALL 4’ x 4’ bed to economize!

Here’s what gardeners say about Mel’s Mix™: Maggie shares: “The vermiculite is a key ingredient. Don’t skimp on it.” Jimmie states: “Once your Mel’s Mix™ is in, that’s it. I’m going into my fourth season and can wiggle my hand down to bottom of the bed – try that with soil or dirt!” Watch our video of Rick Rickling, the “How Do Gardener,” sharing a quick tutorial on Mel's Mix™.

QUICK TIPS

Wooden Yardstick Grids
Stumped on a tool-free wooden grid for your SFG? Problem solved! With a handful of twist ties and cheap wood yardsticks from your local hardware store, you have a “prominent and permanent” grid to customize - then easily take apart for winter storage. To extend a yardstick so it reaches across the bed, use twist ties or clear packing tape to secure one ruler to the one below it. Old venetian blind slats and bamboo stakes work the same way!

Start Seeds in TP Tubes
Save those cardboard toilet and paper towel tubes! Upcycle these biodegradable cylinders in a few easy steps: 1) Fold the tube flat. 2) To make four flaps, cut 1-inch slits on the fold lines, then 2 more slits halfway across the first two flaps. 3) Open tube and fold the four flaps up to create a “cup.” 4) Fill with moist Mel’s Mix™ or vermiculite. Tuck them into a plastic tray or glass casserole dish (metal rusts); when tightly packed they’ll stay standing.

Zone + Frost Date Finder
You’ve probably heard gardeners talk about their "Zone." If you don’t know your USDA Plant Hardiness Zone, find it here by adding your zip code: https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/
As shown on the map below, zones are wide swaths. Your zone tells you WHAT you can plant, but not WHEN. For that, you’ll need your First and Last Freeze/Frost Date. Just add your zip code to this website and you’re set: https://davesgarden.com/guides/freeze-frost-dates/
With your last frost date, you can use our Spring Indoor Seed Starting Chart (on page 5) and other gardening resources. The “0” equals your last frost date. Just grab a calendar and work backward and forward to find when to plant by seed or transplant.

GET SOCIAL WITH US - CLICK ICONS TO FOLLOW + LIKE ♥