



How to Grow a Straw Bale Garden

Straw bale gardens are a growing fad among urban gardeners and others looking for a challenging way to raise plants away from natural soil. Using straw and compost rather than soil as beds for plants, straw bale gardens can be planted almost anywhere and are easy to design and manipulate. Plants are simply placed into the bales, a little bit of soil is added, and a garden begins to grow. Because they are not regenerative, straw bales need to be replaced every year; the maintenance required to maintain a healthy straw bale garden is also greater than that of a natural soil garden. However, for those without access to a plot of land or who cannot grow the plants they want in their own ground, straw bale gardening can be a rewarding challenge.

Steps

1 Buy straw bales.

- Bales are readily available at nurseries or farms. Each is about 2 by 3 feet. They typically cost 2 to 7 dollars. Plan on planting 3 to 4 large plants or 6 to 8 small plants in each bale; buy an appropriate number.

2 Lay your bales out side by side.

- Put your bales in an area with good access to sun. Options include patios, balconies, backyards, or driveways. If you are concerned about dirt or debris, put a sheet or a tarp (not black) under the bales.

3 Water the bales heavily for 5 to 7 days until they are cool.

- Straw bales naturally decompose, leading their temperature to rise past what is healthy for growing conditions. Water them several times a day so as to keep them damp. Within a week you should be able to stick your hand inside the bales and note that they are cooler than your body temperature: this means they are ready for plants.

4 Use a trowel to dig a hole in the top of the bale for each plant.

- The holes should be 6 in. wide, 6 in. long, and 8 in. deep (15 by 15 by 20 cm).

5 Fill the holes with composting soil or potting soil.

6 Water the bales so that the soil settles.

7 Plant the seeds and re-cover with soil.

8 Water the straw bales regularly so that they are never completely dry.

9 Remove grass and weeds from the bales.

- Straw bales will often contain grass or weed seeds when you purchase them. Try to pick out the seeds if possible; otherwise, be sure to weed regularly.

Community Q&A

Should the bales be placed with the twine horizontally?

wikiHow
Contributor

The twine will always be horizontal unless you are standing the bales on end. The twine should not be on the ground. The bales should be placed so that the ends of the straw are facing the ground and the sky. This allows the fertilizer, water and other important materials to penetrate the bale and inter-react with the straw to provide the nutrients necessary for growth to develop and become available to your plants.

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Tips

- If you want to transplant plants rather than plant seeds, simply dig a slightly shallower hole than you would for the seeds and bury your plants up to their first leaves in composting soil or potting soil.
- Wheat straw is the best choice for straw bale gardening. Oak straw also works well. Corn and pine straw will likely not grow anything. Hay bales are a bad choice as they are filled with grass seeds that will compete with your plants.
- Adding ammonium nitrate or other fertilizers to the straw bales during the preparation process can increase the pace of cooling down the bales and preparing them for plants. If you want to grow immediately or are preparing to grow particularly difficult plants, this may be a good idea; otherwise, fertilizer is not necessary.
- Gardeners disagree about where the string tying together the straw bale should be: some say on the ground, others say along the side. Regardless, try to use bales with biodegradable string so that it can decompose into the bale.

Warnings

- Straw bale gardens require more water than normal soil gardens because they retain less water. A drip irrigation system is advisable so as to provide regular amounts. If you do not have ready access to water or are concerned about water conservation, straw bales may not be a good idea.

Things You'll Need

- Straw bales, preferably wheat
- Steady supply of water
- Trowel
- Plant seeds

Sources and Citations

- http://www.growandmake.com/straw_bale_garden
- <http://thegardenersrake.com/raised-bed-garden-straw-bale-gardening>
- <http://www.no-dig-vegetablegarden.com/straw-bale-gardening.html>

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