



STRAW BALE GARDENING

What is it? Straw bale gardening has been popularized by Joel Karsten. This concept is a form of dirtless gardening requiring no tilling, cultivating or weeding. The straw bale acts as the container and the growing medium. You add the seeds/seedlings, water and fertilizer with minimally 8 hours of sunshine for optimal plant growth. As the straw bale decomposes, it provides the necessary nutrients for the plants during this growing season. At the close of the growing season, the cycle for the bale is complete and the straw is then added to the compost bin.

How it works: Initially, the bale will need to be conditioned for 12 days using water and fertilizer. Water will "fuel" the microbial activity in the straw and carry the fertilizer deep into the bale. A high nitrogen fertilizer such as Milorganite, blood meal, or feather meal may be used. After the 12 day process, the bale will have composted sufficiently, the bacteria inside is activated and has begun digesting the straw, thus allowing nitrogen and other nutrients to be available for plant/seed growth.

Advantages to Straw Bale Gardening: Don't have to worry about poor quality soil, no weeding, extends the growing season (bale heats up in conditioning phase and remains warm longer in growing cycle), higher germination of seeds, moisture holding and over watering impossible, no crop rotation, prevents or eliminates disease, easily locatable, minimal tools needed, no heavy work, overcome mobility problems.

Conditioning Chart:

DAY IN PROCESS	ORGANIC FERTILIZER	WATER
Day 1	3 cups	Water to saturation
Day 2	Skip	Water to saturation
Day 3	3 cups	Water to wash in fertilizer
Day 4	Skip	Water to saturation
Day 5	3 cups	Water to wash in fertilizer
Day 6	Skip	Water, warm is best
Day 7	1 ½ cups	Water, warm is best
Day 8	1 ½ cups	Water to wash in fertilizer
Day 9	1 ½ cups	Water to wash in fertilizer
Day 10	3 cups with P & K	Water to wash in fertilizer
Day 11	skip	Water to saturation
Day 12	Plant	Water any new planting

Seedlings are planted directly into the straw. Seeds are planted in sterile, "potting soil" directly onto the bale. Continue to water as needed preferably using soaker hoses or irrigation and apply a balanced, liquid fertilizer such as fish emulsion every two weeks. As crops complete their growing cycle, another crop can be planted. Adequate spacing should be followed to allow air circulation and prevent disease.

DON'T BUY HAY. Straw and hay are not the same. Straw, be it oat straw or wheat straw, is the hollow plant tube left behind after you harvest the seeds. Hay is a grass or alfalfa with the seed head still attached and waiting to sprout.

