

KEYHOLE GARDENING

by Lynn Chimera

We received a request for a MG to speak on keyhole gardening. None of us were prepared so I investigated. This is what I found out.

Keyhole gardening is the building of a raised bed (usually a vegetable garden in the shape of a keyhole.) (See picture) The concept behind it is one of practicality. The keyhole shape is designed to be drought tolerant and make it easier to weed and tend the garden without having to move up and down garden rows. In the center of the keyhole is a cylinder holding compost which continually adds necessary nutrients to the soil as you water through it. Keyhole gardens combine all the necessities that plants need to thrive featuring a drainage layer, a soil layer, nutrients and a planting area,

The keyhole garden was developed in Lesotho, Africa by the Consortium for Southern Africa Food Security Emergency (C-SAFE) in the mid 90s. Lesotho was experiencing a damaging drought and an Aids epidemic leaving people too weak to maintain a garden or carry the needed amount of water for the plants to survive. The keyhole gardens were designed for them. Because they were so productive, people in good health started building them as kitchen gardens. Keyhole gardens were first adopted in the US in Texas also experiencing a drought. It is common in Texas to add red wiggler worms to the compost basket to help break down the organic matter.

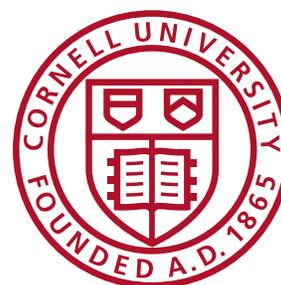
Typically a keyhole garden is a 6-foot circle about 2-3 feet high with an entry path, thus the name "keyhole." The keyhole entry allows gardeners to add uncooked vegetable scraps, greywater, and manure into the composting basket. The walls are often of stone, brick or other materials that will help hold in moisture. The soil is higher in the center around the compost hole so when you water through the compost the water filters down and out throughout the keyhole. This technique greatly reduces the moisture evaporation that occurs in an in-ground garden.

Certain vegetables do better than others. Even though this gardening method was developed as a kitchen garden, perennials could be grown as well.

There is information online including videos showing how to construct a keyhole garden. It's rather like making soup. There are many ways to make it. (If any of you have tried a keyhole garden we would love to include your experience in a MG Newsletter.)



Image provided by Lynn Chimera



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