

SEEDS OF Self-Reliance

Thanks to a Church Welfare Services initiative, members throughout the world are sowing seeds of self-reliance and reaping the blessings of gardening and food production.



By Allie Schulte

Welfare Services

As President of the Church, Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) encouraged members “to grow all the food that you feasibly can on your own property. Berry bushes, grapevines, fruit trees—plant them if your climate is right for their growth. Grow vegetables and eat them from your own yard. Even those residing in apartments or condominiums can generally grow a little food in pots and planters. Study the best methods of providing your own foods. Make your garden . . . neat and attractive as well as productive.”¹

Being prepared in the face of adversity is only one of the many blessings that come from planting a garden. It also brings improved nutrition, the satisfaction of working together to sow seeds and pull weeds, and the joy of a successful harvest.

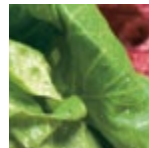
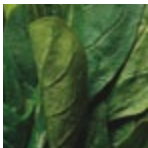
Gardening also has spiritual lessons. It teaches that, in every aspect of life, “whatsoever ye sow, that shall ye also reap” (D&C 6:33). Growing a garden fulfills the command given to Adam and Eve and their posterity, “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread” (Genesis 3:19). Gardening is work, an important principle of the gospel; “He that is idle shall not eat the bread . . . of the laborer” (D&C 42:42). Obedience to seeming temporal laws are important since all commandments are spiritual (see D&C 29:34).

Through a major initiative of Welfare Services, Church members in urban areas and developing nations throughout the world are reaping the blessings of gardening. The Church’s food initiative gives priesthood leaders in these areas the tools and training necessary to teach members how to plant a garden. Even when faced with difficult terrain, limited resources, and minimal experience, members are learning techniques that will help them to become self-reliant not only in food production, but also in nutrition, food hygiene and preparation, and storage.

Cape Verde

Although the islands of Cape Verde are not technically classified as desert, with an average of 10.3 inches (26 cm) of rainfall each year, the soil is dry and barren, and water is scarce—hardly ideal conditions for gardening. In addition, most people on these islands, located about 500 miles (800 kilometers) off the western coast of Africa, live in small, cement homes with little outdoor space to plant a garden.

Despite such adverse conditions, in the summer of 2009 several Latter-day Saint families enjoyed home grown vegetables for the first time. Because 90 percent of the food in Cape Verde is imported, most people cannot afford to purchase vegetables. But with help from experienced



gardeners serving as humanitarian specialists, these families learned to plant gardens in whatever containers they could find—pots, bowls, bottles, or even used food containers. Families maintained their small gardens on the roofs or porches of their homes.

They learned how to improve the soil they use to plant their gardens by combining fertilizer and potting soil with the soil found in their region. Families also built small containers out of wire netting to create compost piles, where they began collecting table scraps, banana and orange peels, and other organic material. Now, the members are using the compost to make rich soil for their container gardens.

As the gardening season approaches, these families will also teach others in their communities the skills they have learned so more people can benefit from growing their own food. Each year, more families and individuals will be able to save money and enjoy the nutritional benefits as well as the personal satisfaction and financial savings of home grown vegetables as they plant their own gardens.

Bolivia

At 14,000 feet (4,267 meters) above sea level, the temperature in El Alto, Bolivia, changes drastically from morning to midday and at night becomes too cold for many plants to survive. With such a harsh climate for food production, most families have grown accustomed to a diet of only meat and potatoes. Children in particular suffer from the lack of nutrients.

Now, with help from the Church food initiative, families are learning to create a suitable climate for gardening using small, underground “greenhouses” they call *panqar huyu*. A roof made of inexpensive clear plastic covers the greenhouse and allows sunlight in, facilitating plant growth and warming the surrounding soil. At night, the warmed soil radiates heat back into the greenhouse.

With one of these simple structures, a family can produce up to six pounds of greens every three to four weeks, adding a substantial amount of essential nutrients to their diets. And with nearly 100 greenhouses already built, families are now working to tackle their next obstacle: getting their children to eat the vegetables they grow.

Volunteers and staff with the food initiative are teaching both parents and children about the nutritional benefits of vegetables through nutrition classes and workshops held in schools and at churches. Families are also learning ways to prepare the vegetables. They have already noticed a positive difference in their children’s health and performance at school and in other activities—just from eating a few vegetables each day.

Navajo and Hopi Nations

The climate and terrain on the Navajo and Hopi Indian reservations in Arizona, USA, and surrounding states is just as difficult as for those in Bolivia or Cape Verde. Yet after hearing about these and other food production projects, the Tuba City Stake president, Larry James Justice,



Right: Using improved soil and intensive growing methods, it's possible to grow surprisingly productive gardens, even in relatively small spaces.

Below left: In Bolivia's chilly highlands a simple below-ground greenhouse, the panqar huyu, creates a mini climate suitable for growing vegetables that otherwise couldn't thrive.



felt that the members of his stake could also benefit from learning how to plant gardens. With high levels of diabetes and obesity among his members—an increasing problem worldwide—he realized that fresh fruits and vegetables could supply the vitamins and minerals that most members lack in their typical diet of corn, beans, and mutton.

In 2009, the stake launched a pilot project with the help of the Church food initiative. Stake leaders and Church-service missionaries began by planting a demonstration garden at the stake center. Leaders used the garden to teach members the techniques that would help them succeed in planting their own gardens—which vegetables to plant, how to fertilize the soil, and even how to prevent birds from eating the crops.

That year, families in the Tuba City Stake planted 30 gardens, and many experienced success. Along with the vegetable gardens, a variety of fruit trees and vines are also thriving on the reservation, including peaches, apricots, raspberries, and watermelons.

Now that members have a basic knowledge of gardening, stake leaders are teaching members other provident living principles, such as how to use and store the fruits and vegetables they grow. Using the pilot project as a model, the Church launched eight more projects in 2010 on Navajo and Hopi reservations, allowing more families to reap the benefits of home food production.

Your Home

Many Church members throughout the world live in apartments or small homes with no yard space for a garden plot. Others live in dry regions where the soil is barren. Some feel that they do not have the time or financial means to grow their own food. Yet with study, faith, diligence, patience, and a little creativity, anyone can succeed in gardening.


Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has said, “There have been very few years in my life when I have not been responsible for a garden. Even now as a city condominium dweller, I still plant and harvest a garden each year. . . .

“Each spring as I look over an insignificant, small seed and place it in a well-prepared seed bed, I marvel at how much it will produce.”²

As members prayerfully consider the counsel to plant gardens and search for ways to be obedient to this principle, they will be amazed at the solutions they find. Here are some experiences and advice from members who have followed the counsel to plant a garden.

1. Gardening on a Budget

While living in a small townhouse apartment, Noelle Campbell, of Houston, Texas, USA, discovered that most of the materials she needed to plant a garden were right in her own home. On her patio, she began planting vegetables in used containers—anything from laundry soap containers to kitty litter buckets.



Although gardening began as a hobby, Noelle was quickly amazed at the amount of food she could produce in the small containers. She then expanded her garden, still using materials collected from her home. Old bookshelves and bins became a vertical garden. The frame of an old mini-trampoline is now used to support beans, peas and other climbing plants. She even uses old grills from barbecues to keep her tomatoes from leaning.

“I love the challenge of container gardening, of seeing my patio transformed from a tiny 8-by-8-foot (2.5-by-2.5-meters) concrete slab into a green, living, producing garden,” Noelle says. “It is small, much smaller than the garden you might have with a house, but it brings my family and me joy and makes us feel as if we are doing all we can to follow the prophetic counsel to live providently.”

2. Sharing a Garden

It hardly resembles the farm he grew up on in Utah, but Glen Nelson and his family have a six-by-six-foot (1.83 by 1.83 meters) garden plot in the middle of New York City, New York, USA, a few blocks south of Central Park. Behind a community garden in the park is a series of plots given free of charge to the residents.

Although space is limited, the Nelsons are able to grow raspberries, strawberries, cucumbers, mesclun greens, cilantro, dill, mint, chives, four varieties of tomatoes, and three kinds of basil. Using cones and poles, they grow many of the plants vertically, making use of every inch of space they have.

“I never dreamed—but I always wished—that I would have a garden nestled between Manhattan’s skyscrapers,” Glen says. “I know my urban garden’s not as productive as my childhood farm was, but I think I love it just as much.”

3. Finding Space

Louise Hough inherited a passion for gardening from her mother. So while living in a third-floor apartment in London, England, she decided to plant a mini-garden on her balcony.

Louise went to the library and searched online for ideas on how to garden with minimal space. With help from a friend,



In urban settings, well-kept containers and raised beds provide a green and welcoming relief from asphalt and concrete—as well as truly fresh vegetables that may otherwise be hard to obtain.

she put baskets and planter boxes on her balcony wall and before long, vegetable plants and flowers were thriving.

“I have loved going out each morning to water the plants and watch them grow,” Louise says. “The flowers I have grown are stunning, and it has been lovely inviting friends over to eat the things I have grown. You can always manage to grow a little something with the space you have!”

4. Using Containers

Jennifer Dalley of Cincinnati, Ohio, USA, recently discovered that she could plant a successful garden in reused soda or juice bottles. It is an inexpensive and simple way to grow food in areas with access to only a window or a grow light—an electric lamp designed to promote plant growth.

In Alberta, Canada, Shirley Martin knows from experience that she can grow just about any kind of plant in a container—anything from flowers to vegetables to strawberry plants. She says the key to a successful container garden is adequate lighting and frequent watering (since the soil in containers dries out much more quickly than it does in a garden).

“This year,” Shirley says, “I am growing a kitchen garden in a few pots on my deck, complete with herbs, lettuce, tomatoes, onions, chives, and peppers. Your imagination is the limit.”

For more information on how to plant a garden, visit the gardening section at providentliving.org.

5. Learning by Doing

Wah Kam Kwan of Hong Kong first decided to plant a garden to supplement her home storage. She had never attempted to grow her own food but assumed she could learn all she needed to know by reading books.

Although the information she found was helpful, Wah Kam soon discovered that the greatest lessons she learned came through the process of actually planting the garden. With each additional year of experience, she has learned more about the best soil to use for different seeds, how to recognize good seeds, various ways to water and fertilize plants, and the best seasons to grow various vegetables.

The lessons Wah Kam learned were not limited to gardening alone, however. One evening, a terrible storm threatened to destroy her garden. In the morning, she was surprised to discover that the plants were not damaged, but instead, grew stronger from the additional water.

“From that experience, I learned that with faith in God, we can become stronger as we face our trials and difficulties with courage,” Wah Kam says. “The blessings I have received from gardening are both temporal and spiritual.”

6. Never Giving Up

After reading the words of President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) in the talk “Prepare for the Days of Tribulation,”³ Lynelle Swensen of Fountain Green, Utah, USA, felt the desire to plant a garden. Although she and her husband had little experience, they began cultivating a small garden plot. However, after several years with little success, Lynelle became discouraged.

As she prayed to Heavenly Father for guidance, Lynelle was filled with peace and a desire to keep trying. After a few more tries—and a few more failures—the Swensen family finally experienced an abundant harvest—so

much that they were able to share with friends, family, and neighbors.

“We are so thankful for the loving guidance of our Heavenly Father that helped us endure the years when we nearly gave up,” Lynelle says. “We feel blessed that we have been able to follow the counsel of the prophets and prepare for the days ahead.”

Reaping the Blessings

As these members discovered, the possibilities for planting a successful garden are endless—even with minimal space, money, or experience. As members strive to be obedient to this principle, they will realize that by planting small seeds in the pursuit of self-reliance, they will reap great blessings for their efforts.

Elder Perry encouraged, “Our labors will continue to bring forth a more abundant harvest each year as we follow the Lord’s law of the harvest. He has bound himself to provide us with abundance so long as we will live his law in righteousness and labor for that blessing.

“Have your own experience in planting a garden. Then make application in your own life of this great principle of the law of the harvest.”⁴ ■

NOTES:

1. Spencer W. Kimball, “Family Preparedness,” *Ensign*, May 1976, 124.
2. L. Tom Perry, “The Law of the Harvest,” *New Era*, Oct. 1980, 4.
3. Ezra Taft Benson, “Prepare for the Days of Tribulation,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1980, 32–34.
4. L. Tom Perry, *New Era*, Oct. 1980, 4.

