

PUT THE ACTION INTO SOCIAL ACTION

Stuck at home with nowhere to go and feeling concerned about the security of your food supply? Think about starting a backyard vegetable garden. It can provide you with fresh vegetables and a pleasant outdoor hobby throughout the summer months. While a backyard garden won't feed your family exclusively, it can make a household slightly less dependent on the outside world for nourishment—and that's a deeply satisfying feeling.



There's a beneficial mental aspect, too. With movements around town limited, a backyard garden provides a **sense of purpose** and a **reason to be outside in the fresh air and sunshine**.

Adrian Higgins wrote in the Washington Post, "Apart from attending to the practical aspect of spring gardening, you are also cultivating your **mental health**. Weeding can have a Zen quality about it, something to do with clearing the soil while emptying the mind."

When you cannot go to the gym or play team sports, gardening is an effective form of **exercise**, burning anywhere from 200 to 400 calories during an hour of planting, weeding, or raking leaves.

A backyard vegetable garden can also be an **excellent distraction** and **science lesson** for young children cooped up at home. It can teach them about sprouting seeds, the importance of daily watering and weeding, and how exciting it is to eat vegetables you've grown yourself. This is a great way to combat picky eating, too, because what child can resist sampling a radish or an onion he or she has known since it was a seed?



GREEN TIP: PLANT A SIMPLE BACKYARD GARDEN

- A garden may seem like a lot of work, but the outcome will yield more than just fresh produce. You can reduce the environmental damage caused by traditional farming methods using large tractors and toxic pesticides.
- Having a backyard garden also reduces fuel usage associated with transport.
- But now we'll get to the best part: You can save up to \$800 per year! The key to starting your own garden is picking the right spot, the best crops for your area, and learning to maintain a healthy ecosystem.
- Your garden doesn't have to be huge or complicated. Start small if you're inexperienced. Vegetables need 6-8 hours of sunlight per day, so a southern exposure and minimal shade is better. Do some research into your region's growing climate and figure out what crops can go into the ground already, or if you need to start seeds in egg cups or other small containers indoors. Check out this list of [20 of the most practical plants you can grow](#).
- If you don't want to dig up your backyard, consider [raised planting beds or big pots](#) placed on your patio or deck.
- Don't have a green thumb yet want in on the action? Start by tackling [herbs](#) that are easy to grow indoors—even if you've never grown a thing! There's nothing like fresh basil or rosemary snipped from a pot on your deck/patio or kitchen window.

CORRECTION: The information about LED vs. CFB bulbs last week was provided by David Mintz, a congregant with a long career in the lighting industry. He should have been credited. We thank him for his input.

A GREEN CRAFT: MAKE A BUG HOTEL

At any given time, your garden might contain over 2,000 species of insects. Some destroy your flowers and vegetables, but many others are the kind you want to attract because they control pests and help pollinate flowers.



Placing an insect hotel in the garden increases the chances that beneficial insects will visit your garden. Also known as bug hotels, these structures are not only decorative but they supplement the increasing loss of natural habitats.

This bug hotel is simple and easy. It's made with local materials and without any major drilling or cutting and is the perfect garden craft for young children! If you're up to making a more complex one, check out the one from [Garden Therapy](#). Have a look for inspiration.

Think "natural," think "nooks and crannies," think "what will last" (paper could get soggy, and leaves will become brittle and break/disintegrate). Use things from your local environment because you are looking to attract bugs, beetles and insects from the same environment.

MATERIALS:

- A large plastic soda bottle cut into two cylinders (An adult will have to do this.)
- A piece of corrugated cardboard rolled into a cylinder
- Sticks
- Pine cones
- Bark
- Anything else you can find—bamboo with its holes is great, too!

INSTRUCTIONS: (Time needed: 15 minutes)

1. Cut the bottle down to size. Poke a hole in the bottle and use a scissor to cut around it. Cut off the top and bottom parts; then cut the remainder into 2 pieces.
2. Roll up a piece of corrugated cardboard and put it in the bottle cylinder. This creates the **waterproof**, cozy habitat bugs love.
3. **Arrange your materials.** Check your materials and arrange them by size and texture; snap twigs to make them a little smaller. Mix larger and bigger ones. Arrange pine cones.
4. **Make the bug hotel nice and cozy.** Stuff it to make it firm, so it doesn't get blown around.
5. **Decide on where to put the bug hotel and add twine for hanging.** If you plan to hang your bug hotel, loop some garden twine round and then start layering your bug hotel. Set one hotel on the ground and one hanging from a tree to see if each attracts different creatures.