Developing Countries Farm Radio Network

Pack 14, Item 10

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Date

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**Growing vegetables in raised platform gardens** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Information on this subject area was requested by DCFRN participants in Bolivia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria, Panama, Paraguay,Peru, Philippines, Tanzania, and Uganda.

Presenter: Lorna Jackson

**Special note**

Before using the information in this item, pleased read the notes at the end concerning related DCFRN items.

**Suggested introduction**

We at this radio station are part of a worldwide information network that gathers farming information from developing countries all over the world. It's the Developing Countries Farm Radio Network, sponsored by Massey Ferguson and the University of Guelph, and financially supported by the Canadian International Development Agency and by many interested Canadians.

Through this Network, we bring you information on ways to increase food supplies for your family, or to sell—ways that other farmers have used successfully.

Today our subject is growing vegetables close to your home. Here's Lorna Jackson.

**JACKSON:** I have two questions for you. Number one—do youhave trouble keeping animals and poultry out of your vegetable garden? And number two—do you have a good source of water to put on your garden every day in dry weather? If the answer is "yes" to both questions, here's an idea that may be useful to you. Grow your vegetables on platforms raised up above the ground!

Yes, I said "on platforms”—and these platforms are raised up on posts. That's what farmers do in some Caribbean countries. It helps keep the vegetables out of reach of animals that might damage them. Also, with a raised garden like this, there seem to be fewer problems with slugs and snails—and with certain kinds of insect pests as well.

This kind of garden doesn't need to take up much space —so you could set one up near your house, even if you live in a town or city. You can grow various kinds of vegetables in it, including lettuce, onions, carrots, peppers, even tomatoes, and garlic and other herbs.

In St. Lucia, in the Caribbean, some farmers use raised gardens like this to grow lettuce for sale. In fact, some have found this method so profitable that they grow lettuce on a number of platform gardens, each several metres (yards) long. They plant lettuce in a different one every few weeks, and this provides a steady supply of fresh lettuce to sell all season long.

Other families just have one or two platform gardens to grow fresh vegetables for their own use, to help keep their families healthy.

And how do you make a platform garden?

Well, the platform itself is usually made of wood—it could be bamboo. Build it on top of several sturdy posts that you sink well into the ground. It should be at least 60 centimetres (2 feet) above the ground—almost like a rough table. It can be 2 metres (yards) long or any length you want to build it.

A good width for your platform is 1 to 1-1/2 metres (3 to 5 feet). This way, you can reach the centre from either side of the garden, in order to tend the plants easily. To hold the soil from falling off or being washed off, you need low walls around the edges of the platform, extending up about 30 centimetres (one foot) or more. They also can be made of wood.

When making the platform, keep in mind that when it's filled with soil, that soil will become a lot heavier when it gets wet. You don't want the whole thing to collapse or come apart—so be sure that the structure you build is strong and sturdy and well fastened together.

Now you're ready to add the soil to complete your raised garden.

For this, you could use compost prepared from kitchen and garden wastes and other organic matter; you might use well-rotted animal manure, or you could use a mixture of compost or manure and soil.

And how deep should this soil mixture be in your platform garden? Well, that depends on the kind of vegetables you'll be growing. However, 20 to 25 centimetres (8 to 10 inches) deep is about rightfor most vegetables.

To keep your garden fertilized, you should add more compost or manure from time to time. You could do it each time you plant new vegetables. You can also make your own liquid fertilizer by soaking a bag of manure in some water for a few days. Sprinkle it on your garden and see how well the crops will grow.

Some people remove all the soil from their platform garden every year or so, and start again with a new soil mixture. They do this because it helps to control certain plant diseases. For the same reason, they let the sun shine on the bare platform for a couple of days before adding the new soil mixture.

Finally, a word about watering: You'll find that your platform garden needs more water than an ordinary garden—that's because the soil is shallow and dries out faster. In dry weather, you might need to water it every day. As in any garden, you can help conserve water by mulching. So after your garden is planted, it's a good idea to lay down some cut grass, straw, or leaves ontop of the soil to help keep the soil cool and moist.

Some people also shade their gardens with palm leaves on a frame set up a metre (3 feet) or so above the plants. That's especially good for tender seedlings in hot weather. The palm leaves should let in some sunlight or rainfall, but will protect the plants from too much hot sun or heavy rain.

Many people have found platform gardens useful for growing vegetables close to home. If well-made and cared for, a garden like this can last for several years. It will provide you with fresh vegetables for your family—or to sell.

Serving Agriculture, the Basic Industry, this is Lorna Jackson.

**Notes**

1. We suggest that you use this item along with information provided in:

Making Your Own Compost – DCFRN Package 2, Item 4.

Manure, a Good Source of Plant Food – DCFRN Package 2, Topo 5.

Water young plants and use free fertilizer – DCFRN Package 6, Item 6 (liquid fertilizer from manure).

2. Supplementary information on growing legumes, and on the nutritional importance of legumes, can be found in:

Vegetable gardening (Part 1, 2, 3, 4) – DCFRN Package 7, Items 2, 3, 4, 5.

3. Other DCFRN items about how to protect plants from domestic animals:

Animals with neck yokes don't go through fences – DCFRN Package 13, Item 10.

Cassava fences for livestock and poultry – DCFRN Package 13, Item 5.

Protect plants from animals using their manure – DCFRN Package 14, Item 11.

**Sources of information**

1. Comments from DCFRN members in the Caribbean.

2. Marie Protz, University of Guelph, Canada, observations made in St. Lucia in the Antilles.

3. Mr. Ken Bond, agronomist, Plenty Canada Soya Centre, St. Lucia, Antilles.

4. DCFRN Participant Jeffrey Gold, St. Lucia, Antilles.

5. Dr. Vasantha Chase, Caribbean Agricultural Research Development Institute (CARDI), St. Lucia, Antilles.