



NO DIG GARDEN - Straw Bale Method

BY JULIA HANCOCK

Imagine a garden that is so easy to make and maintain that even a toddler can do it. A garden that's cheap, instant and virtually foolproof. A garden that needs no digging, no weeding, minimal bending and very little watering. A garden which is ideal for the elderly and physically challenged. A garden that will transform a concrete back yard, balcony or patio into an abundant vegetable patch. A garden that can become an exciting school project or an activity that the whole family can enjoy. A garden that, at the end of the season, can be swiftly disassembled and completely recycled to provide valuable compost. If all this sounds too good to be true, read on, because the straw bale garden has arrived!



Eggplant are ideal for bale planting



WHAT YOU NEED

- *A straw bale, such as lucerne, pasture hay, straw and sugar cane*
- *Searles 5 IN 1 Plus® and Searles Garden Soil Mix*
- *Searles Kickalong® Fowl Pellets*
- *Dolomite*
- *Liquid fertiliser such as Searles® Fish & Kelp Plus*
- *Re-wetting agent, for example Penetraide® Re-Wetting Granules*
- *Summer salad seedlings like tomatoes, lettuce, cucumber, eggplant, capsicum and basil*
- *Stakes and tie wire to support taller plants if necessary*

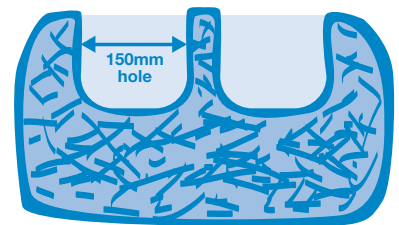


WHAT TO DO

Select a position outdoors which gets sun for at least six hours a day. Place the straw bale on the ground so the string is around the sides rather than the top. Using a thick stick, make a separate hole for each seedling by jamming the stick into the straw and wiggling it around until the hole is as big as a 150mm flower pot. Each bale can accommodate up to eight holes, the optimum number depending what plants are selected. For instance, tomato plants need to be spaced far enough apart to allow them to develop properly while lettuce can be planted closer together.



First, mix into your hole **Searles 5 IN 1[®] Plus** & **Searles Garden Soil Mix**, then sprinkle a handful of **Searles Kickalong[®] Fowl Pellets** and a handful of dolomite over the top of the bale. Using a watering can with a gentle spray so the compost is not washed off, water the bale with a solution of **Searles[®] Fish & Kelp Plus**.



SHORT END VIEW OF BALE

To avoid burning the tender roots of young seedlings, it's important to leave the bale to 'cool down' for a week before planting and allow the fertilisers to be absorbed.

Insert one seedling into each planting hole, burying it a little deeper than normal to compensate for any shrinkage that may occur as the compost settles. Water in well. Push a wooden stake in firmly behind any vigorous plants such as tomatoes that are liable to become tall and floppy.

Keep the compost moist by watering as required and fertilise once a week with a solution of **Searles[®] Fish & Kelp Plus** to promote healthy growth. On alternate weeks add a tablespoon of dolomite to the fish and kelp solution to keep the compost sweet. If you have problems wetting your bale, apply some **Searles Penetraide[®] Re-Wetting Granules** to facilitate absorption.





THE BENEFITS OF STRAW BALE GARDENING

- Straw bale gardening allows you to grow your own vegetables, even if your yard doesn't contain a single speck of soil.
- The bales can be arranged to make maximum use of vertical space in small areas. For instance, by positioning a bale directly in front of a trellis attached to the wall you can train a vine type tomato or telegraph cucumber to climb up it.
- Straw bale gardening eliminates the risk of your plants becoming contaminated by soil-borne viruses, one of the main causes of death in tomatoes in sub-tropical areas.
- Straw bales are perfect for wheelchair gardeners because they can be easily accessed from all sides.
- If mobility is limited or bending is a problem, straw bales can be raised off the ground and placed on a bench or trolley to facilitate access. By fitting the bench or trolley with wheels, the straw bale garden becomes fully mobile.
- Straw bales gardening is extremely economical with water, because once wet, the bales hold moisture for long periods. They make it possible to have a lush vegetable garden even in drought-stricken areas.
- Straw bale gardens enable you to grow maximum crops with minimum fertilizer because every nutrient is fully absorbed into the system, preventing waste and saving you money.
- There are no weeds in straw bale gardens, therefore plants don't have to compete for food and water.
- Pests can be discouraged by companion planting, for example by pairing basil with tomatoes and lettuce with parsley.
- Straw bale gardens provide a real bonus at the end of the season because each bale can be turned into premium compost or used as an exceptionally rich mulch at no extra cost.
- It is possible to create a completely organic straw bale garden by selecting organically certified straw, compost, fertilizers and seedlings.



Tomatoes perform well in bale plantings.