

The Guerrilla Garden

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First, let's cover seeds and what to grow with them, then we will get 'down and dirty' regarding planting.

When we think of seeds, most of us think of tomatoes, lettuce, and salad greens. A few from the Midwest may think of corn as well.

When it comes to survival gardening, the choice of vegetables takes on an entirely different perspective.

What the prepper gardener needs, are vegetable that meet the following needs:

- They must grow quickly
- They must tolerate a wide range of weather extremes
- They must produce a large amount of vegetable in ratio to the seeds planted
- The vegetable must store well
- The vegetable must produce more seeds for the next garden



This narrows the focus quite a bit. As an example, Tomatoes can be finicky about soil, are largely hybrids, and don't keep very well over the long term unless dried.

What is needed is something that grows like a weed, is practically indestructible, and lasts for many months.

I will leave the selection to you, but here is what I would consider –

First, eliminate hybrids from your garden. Purchase only 'heritage' or 'heirloom' seeds.

You will find this narrows the field immensely, since most vegetables we grow today are hybrids, bred to be disease resistant, have shorter growing seasons, and produce larger fruit. All of these benefits come at a price. Invariably, this price is reflected in the ability to re-seed.



Secondly, producing seeds from these usually means skipping the fruit on those plants, so the available food value from your seeds is reduced by the amount of plants you must let go to seed. This varies based on the type of vegetable. An Eggplant produces only one or two fruits per plant, so the efficiency ratio of seed/fruit is low, and at least two fruits will have to be let go past the eating stage to guarantee the seeds are fully developed. Most of the vegetables we eat that contain seeds are picked and eaten prior to the seeds being fully ready to germinate. Beans and Peas have a better efficiency ratio with more seeds per plant.

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Thirdly, storing the produce must be easily done during times without refrigeration, and must last at least a month or more.

I would consider the following as very high on my list:



Beans – they can be dried and kept indefinitely to eat, and easily to the following year.

Peas – same as beans.

Winter squash – especially varieties with thick skins designed for long term storage, like Hubbard.

Corn – can be dried just like beans, on the cob or off. (Dried kernels can be ground into corn meal).

Onion/garlic/leeks – keep well long term

Potatoes – I routinely keep potatoes in a basket in my garage from October until the following April, when I replant them.

Radish – grows within a month or so, tolerates cold, reseeds well.

Horseradish – You can't kill this stuff.

These are just a few of the possibilities. Look up your own favorites and see how they compare, using the five keys previously mentioned.

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No discussion of this can be complete without some planting ideas.

Forget what you traditionally learned about planting vegetables, most of it is outdated information carried over from the days when farms were common, and machinery was used to plant, till, and harvest.

I suggest reading up on something called “Square Foot Gardening” which makes far more sense in the situations we are describing. The spacing of vegetables was largely determined during the early 1900's and is no longer applicable to the home gardener. I utilize what I have called the “dense pack” system with good success. For instance, I have planted fifty tomato plants in a raised bed garden only two feet wide by four feet long. This provides more tomatoes than I can eat all summer long.

Think about it. Plants in the wild seed in clusters. A tomato falls from the plant on the ground right by the parent plant. There are perhaps 100 or more seeds in that tomato. If conditions are right, they grow. All in one area. They thrive. It works with anything.

I can grow the same amount of vegetables in five 2x4 raised beds, that I can grow in a 25 x50 foot traditional garden in the ground.



Moving On:

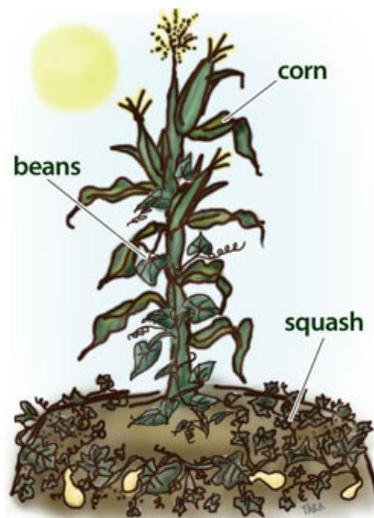
Now we have covered those basics, lets discuss growing a garden under adverse conditions.

A level 1 or even a level 2 event does not really affect how you grow your garden. While an extended level 2 may mean that you need to watch for people stealing some veggies at night, not much really changes. The big difference comes with a level 3 event.

In level 3, social stability is disrupted. This plays havoc with a traditional garden. In a level 3 event, your garden must behave the same way you have to. It must try to stay out of sight. This is virtually impossible with a traditional garden. People easily recognize it for what it is.

This is the domain of Guerrilla Gardening.

The native Americans were not largely a permanently settled people. They migrated from location to location within the area they claimed, based on the seasons. In the spring, they would head for the sugar-bushes to collect Maple sap to make sugar, In the fall, the natives of the upper peninsula of Michigan would head for the swamps and ponds to collect wild rice, in the winter, they would pull back into the hunting camps. Along the way, they planted 'gardens' , to be visited when they were in the area the next time. The most famous of the practices involved planting "The Three Sisters", Corn, beans, and squash.



*Direct-Sow, Easy-to-Grow:  
The Ancient **Three Sisters** Method*

Essentially, they would make a hill, and put a dead fish in it. They would plant the corn and the bean side by side, and the squash around it. The corn would grow fairly quickly, and the beans would climb on the corn. The squash would grow around the base, and the prickly leaves would keep animals away. (How effective this was, we do not know). These became their food caches , planted all along the trails they used to travel.

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In a level 3 event, concealment is what it is all about. This same type of planting would have to be followed. These mini-gardens would be scattered about the landscape, hidden off the beaten path. This is the way we would have to garden under adverse circumstances.

Keep in mind, this all would work only if whatever disasters that had occurred did not affect weather or soil. Radiation, whether from a bomb, a leak, or from natural causes like an CME could seriously interfere or stop growth. Climate change would also affect your growing season. Unusually heavy rains, prolonged cloud cover, storms, all could make trying to grow anything impossible.

In this case, simply holding on to your seeds for a better time may make more sense.

One final word about seed storage - The enemies of the seed are heat and humidity. You must deal with these effectively if you plan on storing seeds.

The best bet here is some kind of vacuum packed bag kept in a cool dry place.

Even with that, germination rates drop by about 10% per year. After 10 years, almost none of your stored seeds will grow.

Keep this in mind if you intend to barter with or for seeds. Knowing how they were packed and stored means the difference between eating and starving.

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