

7-Step Garden System



**Plan & Track Your Most Abundant
Vegetable & Herb Harvest**

with Stacey Murphy

The Difference a System Makes

If you want to get the most out of your garden, having a system changes *everything*.

In my first year gardening, I planted a whole bunch of seeds. While my harvest was decent, I wanted to maximize my results the next season.

So I set some goals for what I wanted to achieve and then systematically measured to see if I was reaching my goals. It only took me a couple minutes each week to tally some data, and what I learned was *extraordinary*!

Three important lessons I learned creating my 7-step garden system:

1) I was growing my greens for \$0.04 per serving compared to spending \$0.75 at the farmers market.

Yes, please! I no longer spend my whole paycheck on fresh food at the market.

2) I could grow 20% more tomatoes each season simply by changing the spacing of the plants and pruning an extra 5 minutes each week.

More tomatoes, please! Sun-ripened tomatoes taste like they are straight from heaven ;)

3) It was cheaper for me to buy seedlings at the local nursery and transplant when the temperatures were right rather than grow from seed indoors. The investment I would have had to make on grow lamps was *HUGE* for all the plants I needed. Plus, I didn't have to spend time worrying about baby plants for 8 weeks.

Transplanting healthy teenage plants that are ready to grow NOW took just minutes instead of 8 weeks.

Now I'm not saying you will make the same decisions I did or see exactly the same results that I have...

But **when you create your garden system, you will discover how to get MORE out of your garden with less time, effort and resources.**



Use the pages below to begin creating your own garden system so that you can plan your most abundant harvest yet.

No matter how small or large your garden is, having a system makes each growing season easier AND you might surprise yourself doubling or even tripling your harvest. That makes a *huge* impact.

-Stacey Murphy

The 7-Step Garden System

The 7-Step Garden System is a process that you follow each growing season. It's circular:



The Common Denominator

Before you start creating your system, every single element in this system has a common element: **You**. Your vision is the glue holds your system together. This is imperative whether you are just getting started or you are a seasoned gardener. The more clear your vision is, the stronger your system is. So, let's take a moment to imagine your dream garden:

If you could wave a magic wand, what would your dream garden do for you and your life? What would it feel like to grow your own food? What would it look like?

Step 1 (Observe): Assess your local conditions

Does your garden space get 6-8 hours of sunlight or more? Map the shadows on your site with the instructions below. Next steps are to gather information about your local conditions. Your climate, humidity, first and last frost dates, etc. will all play an important role in how easy it is to grow an abundant harvest. Even things like how easily accessible your garden is can affect your garden success... if you can't get resources in and out of your garden easily, you're less likely to get it done.

SHADOW MAPPING INSTRUCTIONS:

- STEP 1: Draw your site to scale.
- STEP 2: Each hour, shade the shadows on your site with a different color pencil.
- STEP 3: Look for white spaces on your drawing which will indicate areas that are receiving full sun. Plus add up how many hours of sunlight each area gets even if it's in shade for part of the day. Goal is to know which areas get less than 4 hours, 4-6 hours and 6+ hours of sunlight.

Step 2 (Soil): Create LIVING, Healthy Soil

Your first year growing, soil will be a big, underground mystery. Notice what you can. Your second year growing and beyond, focus more energy on soil and it will pay off in vegetables. This step is about building biology and feeding your root systems so that all those precious nutrients are drawn up into your vegetables and herbs. If you’re working with soil, GREAT! If you’re working with containers or water-based systems, the concepts are the same: track how you sustain the nutrients and fertility in your system.

Create a soil fertility plan:

Vegetables and herbs pull nutrients out of the soil. How do you plan to keep the soil fertile each growing season? Your plan may include compost, manures, minerals, ocean minerals in addition to all kinds of soil amendments. Spend some time getting to know your soil so you know what it needs to grow healthy vegetables and herbs. As you gain experience, you may consider “cover crops” to protect your soil and replenish nutrients, too.

NOTE: Pay attention to pests, diseases and weeds: they tell you a lot about what your soil may be lacking.

Planting Bed 1

Date	What did you notice about your soil?	What did you do to improve your soil?

#1 Recommendation:

Include a minimum of 2” (5cm) good quality compost each year as part of your plan. Depending on the size of your garden, you may be purchasing a few bags or getting a few dump loads.

Step 3 (Plants): Choosing your vegetable plants & varieties

Compare benefits and drawback of each to see what you prefer to grow. Go to your farmers market or a gardening Meet-up. Ask local growers what vegetable and herb varieties they grow and why. Here's a series of questions that you can ask so that you can get the whole story about each vegetable and herb and compare them side by side.

[illegible]

Step 3 (Plants): Creating your planting calendar

This exercise is powerful and takes a couple hours to complete. So if you're just getting started, you may want to save this exercise until your second growing season. Here's why this is so powerful: when you visualize the whole planting calendar, you can maximize yields. Write down the date you plant and the date you will harvest each vegetable and herb. Use the calendar on the right to write a 'P' in the box for the week that you will plant and an 'X' for the day you will harvest. During the season, you can look at what's ready for harvest each week. As the season unfolds, mark any changes you make to the schedule. To save time next year, use the same planting calendar.

[illegible]

Step 4 (Water): Track your seasonal rainfall

Could you collect all the water you need for your garden? Or will you water? Most of your vegetable crops prefer 1” (2.5cm) of water per week which means a garden bed 4’ x 8’ (1.2m x 2.4m) requires approximately 20 gallons (75 liters) of water per week. Calculate your water needs and add up your local precipitation to see if you receive the water you need on your site. You might even decide to automate your watering with a drip irrigation system.

	Jan	Feb	Marc	April	Mav	June	Notes - Severe Weather - Storm
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3							
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26							
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28							
29							
30							
31							
							TOTAL INCHES OF RAINFALL

Day	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Notes - Severe Weather - Storm
1							
2							
3							
4							
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7							
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							TOTAL INCHES OF RAINFALL

Step 5 (Harvest): How much can you grow?

If you’re just starting out, this is the first template to help you create your garden system. Harvest weekly and weigh by vegetable variety. At the end of the season, divide your total harvest by the number of plants to get your predicted yield per plant for next year. You will better predict future yields and maximize harvest by choosing varieties that provide well for your local conditions. For lightweight plants like herbs, record how many bunches you grow.

	May	June				July					August				September					October					
	27	3	10	17	24	1	8	15	22	29	5	12	19	26	2	9	16	23	30	7	14	21	28	Total	Predicted
Beets																									
Radish																									
Leeks																									
Turnips																									
Carrots																									
Lettuce																									
Arugula																									
Chard																									
Cabbage																									
Collards																									
Kale																									
Mustards																									
Spinach																									
Peas																									
Beans																									
Eggplant																									
Tomatoes																									
Cucumber																									
Squash																									
Parsley																									
Basil																									
Other																									
Garlic																									

Step 7 (Time Mastery): Focus on activities that grow food

After you’ve been growing food for a season, this exercise takes just a moment each week to notice: what activities could you eliminate or automate to save time? Time is a non-renewable resource. Are you spending your time wisely & getting what you want? NOTE: List number of hours each week, rounding to the nearing 1/4 hour.

	May				June				July				August				September				Total Hrs	Avg. Hrs/Wk
Design Planning																						
Budgeting																						
Resource Management																						
Building Infrastructure																						
Seeding/Propagation																						
Transplanting																						
Soil Cultivation																						
Composting																						
Irrigation																						
Harvesting																						
Record Keeping																						
Weeding																						
Mulching																						

Create your seasonal garden budget

NOTE: Garden tools can be borrowed. Soil and other infrastructure will be your biggest investments.

		Free	Budget (Low)	Budget (High)	
Infrastructure					
	Planting Beds (soil, compost, lasagna, raised, etc)	Good soil or Lasagna beds, layer organic materials			
	Soil Testing	No free option			
	Water Source	Spigot or hydrant nearby			
	Compost Bin	Build from recycled pallets or soft fencing			
	Toolbin or toolshed	Reuse a plastic tub or build a small chest from recycled materials			
	Drip Irrigation System	Recycled bottles			
Tools					
	Clippers	Hand-me-down			
	Digging Fork	Borrow when you need it or find a giveaway 12-15 times a season aerating soil			
	Hand Trowel	Use your hands or kitchen knife			
	Hoes & Wand	No free option			
	Shovel	Borrow when you need it or find a giveaway 15-20 times a season compost turning			
	Rake	Borrow when you need it or find a giveaway 1-3 times a season prepping bed			
	Hoe / Weeding Knife	Borrow when you need it or find a giveaway 12-15 times a season			
Supplies					
	Seeds / Transplants	Free Giveaways from garden groups			
	Trellises / Stakes / Twine	Creative use of tree branches			
	Spray bottle				
	Binder & Checklists / Notes				
	Wash tubs / Rubberbands	Use kitchen tubs & recycle rubberbands			
	Finished Compost	Make your own			
	Compostables	Leaves, twigs, food scraps, etc			
	Propagation Supplies	Buy all transplants			
	Organic Pest & Disease Supplies	Household items: soap, baking soda, garlic, bleach, beer, vinegar			
	Organic Pest & Disease Supplies	Household items: soap, baking soda, garlic, bleach, beer, vinegar			
			\$0.00	\$0.00	Total

[SAMPLE] Garden Budget

NOTE: Your investment will vary based on your local resources: possible low and high budget numbers are shown.

		Free	Budget (Low)	Budget (High)	
Infrastructure					
	Planting Beds (soil, compost, lasagna, raised, etc)	Good soil or Lasagna beds, layer organic materials	\$0.33	\$10.00	Note: this is \$ / sq. ft.
	Soil Testing	No free option	\$25.00	\$100.00	Note: search for university or cooperative extension for testing facility
	Water Source	Spigot or hydrant nearby			
	Compost Bin	Build from recycled pallets or soft fencing	\$10.00	\$100.00	
	Toolbin or toolshed	Reuse a plastic tub or build a small chest from recycled materials	\$20.00	\$500.00	
	Drip Irrigation System	Recycled bottles			
Tools					
	Clippers	Hand-me-down	\$10.00	\$45.00	
	Digging Fork	Borrow when you need it. 12-15 times a season aerating soil	\$25.00	\$90.00	
	Hand Trowel	Use your hands or kitchen knife	\$3.00	\$15.00	
	Hoses & Wand	No free option	\$50.00	\$100.00	
	Shovel	Borrow when you need it. 15-20 times a season compost turning	\$10.00	\$69.00	
	Rake	Borrow when you need it. 1-3 times a season prepping bed	\$10.00	\$69.00	
	Hoe / Weeding Knife	Borrow when you need it. 12-15 times a season	\$20.00	\$50.00	
Supplies					
	Seeds / Transplants	Free Giveaways from garden groups	\$0.33	\$2.00	Note: this is \$ / sq. ft.
	Trellises / Stakes / Twine	Creative use of tree branches	\$5.00	\$40.00	
	Spray bottle		\$1.00	\$15.00	
	Binder & Checklists / Notes		\$2.00	\$10.00	
	Wash tubs / Rubberbands	Use kitchen tubs & recycle rubberbands	\$5.00	\$30.00	
	Finished Compost	Make your own	\$12.00	\$20.00	Note: this is \$ / cubic foot
	Compostables	Leaves, twigs, food scraps, etc	\$0.00	\$0.00	
	Propagation Supplies	Buy all transplants	\$0.00	\$0.00	
	Organic Pest & Disease Supplies	Household items: soap, baking soda, garlic, bleach, beer, vinegar	\$10.00	\$20.00	
			\$218.63	\$1,285.50	Sample Total

Join the Homegrown Revolution



Now you know the basic elements to create a successful garden system as well as just a few of the templates I use in my own system. Each of the steps in this system can be as simple or detailed as you want it to be as you gain experience and try new things. **Start simple: the harvest log will tell you *so much*. And then geek out as much as you want from there.**

Hundreds of people on six different continents have adapted my 7-step garden system to grow successful vegetable and herb gardens.

Like nature, the system is cyclical, so you will discover emerging patterns each season. And every growing season you have another chance to hone the details of a garden that works best for you and your local conditions.

The right garden system can create simplicity in your life as you do less and grow more. It's the secret to gardening smarter (instead of harder), which makes all your harvests that much sweeter.

Peace & carrots,
Stacey Murphy

