

Principles of a Self-Sufficiency Garden

A space that will provide you with sustainably grown, affordable produce every day of the year is based on three fundamental considerations: nutrition, time, and cost. Once you've understood their importance, the journey towards self-sufficiency can begin.

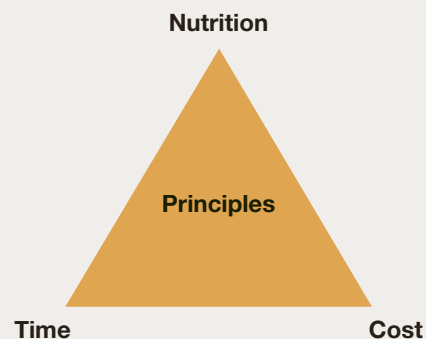
We've designed the garden to produce a significant amount of nourishing food from a space measuring just 10 x 12.5m (33 x 43ft). The approach is practical and efficient because we incorporate time- and cost-saving measures at every stage of the process, from choosing the best crop varieties to efficient growing and food prep. Follow our methods and you'll save time and money in the garden, as well as in the kitchen. The simple diagram (right) shows our priorities.

A simple pyramid illustrates the three key principles of self-sufficiency gardening – nutrition, cost, and time – with nutrition at the top.

PRINCIPLE PYRAMID

Nutrition is at the top of the pyramid because our key aim is to produce nutrient-rich, homegrown food from healthy soil in the space available. At the base, forming the foundation, are time and cost – principles and priorities and must also

be taken into consideration. Guided by these three principles, we'll show you how to organize your time more efficiently to achieve optimum homegrown nutritious crops for the lowest cost. Now let's look at each of the principles in more detail.



Nutrition

Prioritizing soil health is key to creating a productive and resilient garden. Living soil that is rich in beneficial microbial life enables plants to access vital nutrients and flourish. We then absorb those nutrients when we take our fresh garden produce into the kitchen to prepare and cook it. We interact with them via our tastebuds and sense of smell. And the more nutritious the food is, the better it's going to taste. Good nutrition is essential for our own health and wellbeing, as well as that of the plants in our gardens.

Cost

Making the most of free and low-cost resources from your local area is the best way to reduce your dependency on material sourced from further afield. The same applies to material sourced on a regular basis. You can, for example, create raised beds from salvaged material such as pallets, establish a composting scheme in your community, and trade (barter) your skills or your equipment with other people. Growing food in this way means you are sure to spend less, which will save you money at the local shop or supermarket.

Time

Considering time as a resource that we can only spend once helps us to prioritize. It encourages us to get as much achieved as possible, which brings satisfaction. Understanding the importance of time-management and prioritization also helps us to avoid bottlenecks and celebrate each step of the journey. Embrace seasonality and the changes that come with it, and always view gardening tasks through the lens of opportunity.

PUTTING PRINCIPLES INTO PRACTICE

Together, the three key principles constitute our guiding ethos as we work towards becoming self-sufficient. Whenever there is a decision to be made, bear them in mind and ask yourself how your decision might align with one or more of these principles, and how you could maximize its benefits. Once you have embraced the principles, you can make use of the two approaches we explain in detail on the next page. These will help keep you on track so you can enjoy success with your growing as soon as possible.



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I believe that any time you eat something you have grown yourself, it's a valid reason for celebration.

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SELF-SUFFICIENCY APPROACHES

The goal of self-sufficiency is one for the long term and it's vital to keep yourself motivated as you continue your journey towards it. Keeping track of progress and knowing you're heading in the right direction is key, as is celebrating all the small successes that get you closer to your goal.

Two approaches to self-sufficiency have worked well for me – incremental and crop-focused – are explained in detail below. Using the first, you break the self-sufficiency journey down into simple, achievable stages, such as your first meal with all vegetables homegrown. Then each stage takes you one step further down the road to self-sufficiency.

With the second approach, the aim is to be self-sufficient in a specific crop over one growing season. Once you've achieved this you build on your success by adding another crop.

1. Incremental self-sufficiency

Starting with an ambitious target, such as not buying vegetables and only eating homegrown and preserved produce, is only achievable if you break the process

down incrementally and build momentum over the long term. Rather like training for a marathon, you don't run all 26 miles on day one. It's easier to take it in stages, starting with half a mile, then building up to a point where you feel ready to tackle the big event.

Below are some key stages, each one will bring your goal a little closer, and each is a cause for celebration:

- ✓ First meal including homegrown veg
- ✓ First meal where all the veg is homegrown
- ✓ First day where all the veg you eat is homegrown
- ✓ First weekend where all the veg you eat is homegrown
- ✓ First week where all the veg you eat is homegrown
- ✓ First fortnight...
- ✓ First month...
- ✓ First season...
- ✓ First year!

Setbacks are a fact of life so if you encounter problems or you need a break, don't be tempted to push on to the next stage. It's better to

stick with what you have achieved, such as eating homegrown veg one day a week, until you feel comfortable moving on.

2. Crop-focused self-sufficiency

Unlike the incremental approach, your target here is self-sufficiency in a single crop, for example salad or garlic, over one season. Deciding to eat only homegrown salad over summer or grow enough garlic to last you all winter does involve a specific timeframe. However, focusing on just one crop is certainly easier than thinking about everything that's growing in your whole garden. As time progresses and productivity increases, you'll be confident enough to add more ambitious targets for each new growing season, such as eating homegrown potatoes all year round.

TIP

Among the best crops to start with for a quick win are perennial and annual herbs, such as rosemary and parsley. They don't need much space, grow very easily, preserve well, and a little goes a long way!