

# GARDEN TO TABLE

A guide for growing, harvesting, and  
cooking your own food

By: Mother Daughter Earth



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# A BIT ABOUT MOTHER DAUGHTER EARTH

We're a mother-daughter duo that's passionate about the environment and spreading the message of living a conscious, fulfilling, and sustainable lifestyle. We bring three decades of professional horticulture experience (mother) and a Harvard degree in Environmental Engineering (daughter) to give you eco tips and tricks that are rooted in real-life knowledge and scientific understanding.

"I love teaching people about the world of plants!" -- Gina (mother)

"I'm excited to see where my path leads; I know it will always be driven by the purpose of helping others learn to care for our planet." -- Marianna (daughter)

## WHAT TO EXPECT IN THIS GUIDE

This is by no means a comprehensive guide for everything you need to know about veggie gardening; however, after growing and cooking our own food for years, this is a compilation of many of our experiences and nuggets of wisdom.

We'll go over some of the high-level tips to keep your veggies thriving, we'll share some of the veggies that have been easiest for us to grow (in case you're just getting started), and we'll end with a handful of our

favorite family recipes (most of which we make with the food we grow). Of course, keep in mind that we live in Dallas, Texas so some of the specific veggies might not work in your area, but there are still plenty of tips that apply to any veggie garden.

Many of the links in this guide are for products that we love and are affiliated with. If you make a purchase via a product link, you can help support us at no additional cost to you. We only endorse products we have personally used and love!

Please reach out if you have any questions or feedback. You can DM us on Instagram (@motherdaughterearth) or contact us through our website ([www.motherdaughterearth.biz](http://www.motherdaughterearth.biz)).

A woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a grey t-shirt and purple shorts, is smiling and holding a large bunch of harvested green onions. She is standing in a garden with a wooden fence in the background. To her left is a raised garden bed filled with various green plants. In front of her is a blue plastic crate filled with more harvested vegetables, including leafy greens and root vegetables. The entire image has a green tint.

# OUR VEGGIE GARDENING TIPS



# HOW TO BUILD YOUR OWN BEDS

You're probably thinking, "there's no way I'm going to build my own veggie beds!" I get it, building your own beds isn't easy, but I can't tell you how rewarding it is, and I'm not exaggerating when I say it's probably my favorite thing I've done in my garden so far!

## LET'S GET THE HEAVY STUFF OUT OF THE WAY FIRST...

My husband and I (Marianna) had been wanting to build beds since we moved into our house, and nine months later we finally got there! The two main reasons it took us so long are the typical culprits: time and money.

### **It took us a lot of time to finish this project.**

Between the two of us, it took us three whole weekends to purchase, prep, construct, and finish our beds. That's a big time commitment, not to mention many physically exhausting days. We're lucky we have the experience and stamina to be able to do this, but it's by no means a small project. Having said that, we opted for two large beds (10' long x 4' wide and 12' long x 4' wide), which is a lot of material and work. But even a smaller bed requires digging, trenching, constructing, and filling, so you need to make sure you're honest with yourself and determine if that's realistic for you and your family to complete.

### **Money was the second hurdle.**

For full transparency, when all was said and done we spent over \$1,000 on building our veggie beds. Not cheap. That also is taking into account that we owned all the tools we needed and already had most of the irrigation material from building the beds at my mom's house. The largest cost was the lumber; we spent over \$800 on the cedar planks and posts. I'll talk more about the lumber in a bit, but you want to make sure it's good quality, and especially because it was in our front yard, we didn't want to go the cheap route on this. You can always build your beds out of materials like straw bales, cinder blocks, or other material you might have laying around or can get cheaply. But aesthetics were important to us this time, so we went with smooth, cedar planks. My friend and I were chatting about our beds the other day and jokingly she said, "Mar, you don't like to spend money on clothes but you'll drop over \$1,000 on veggie beds." Guilty... what can I say, home-grown veggies make us happy!

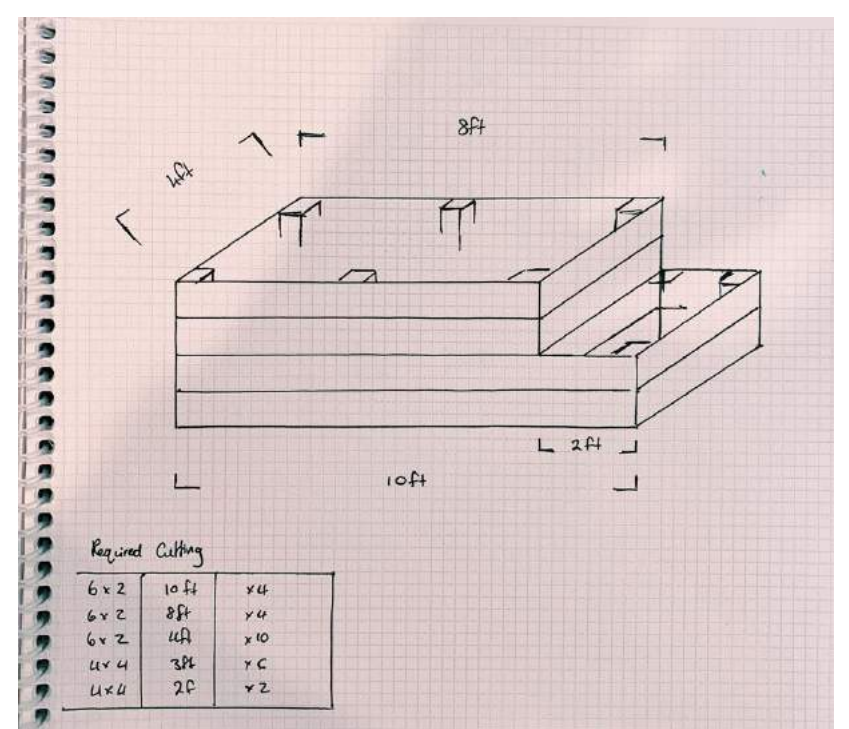
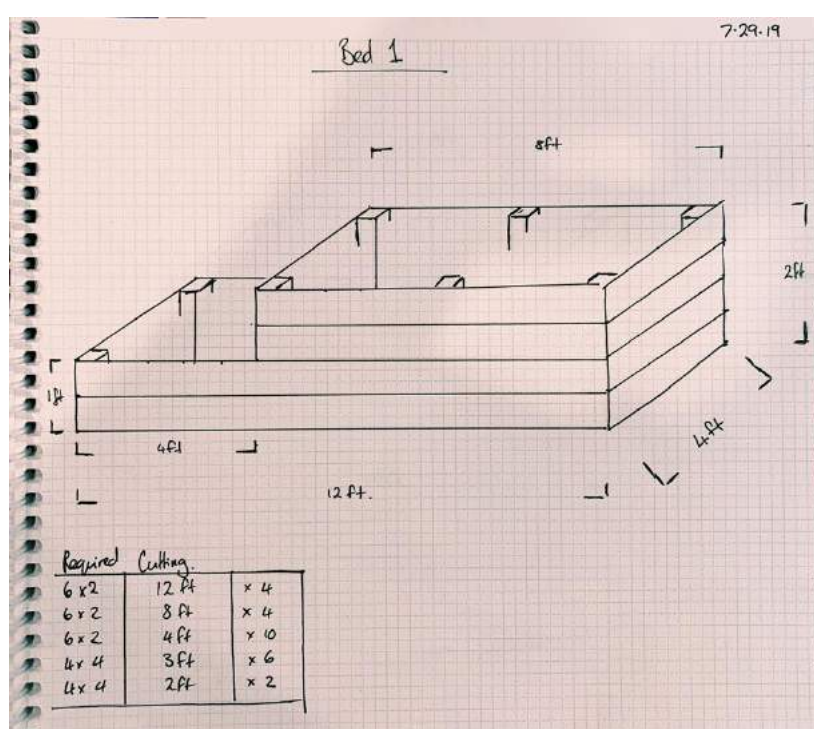
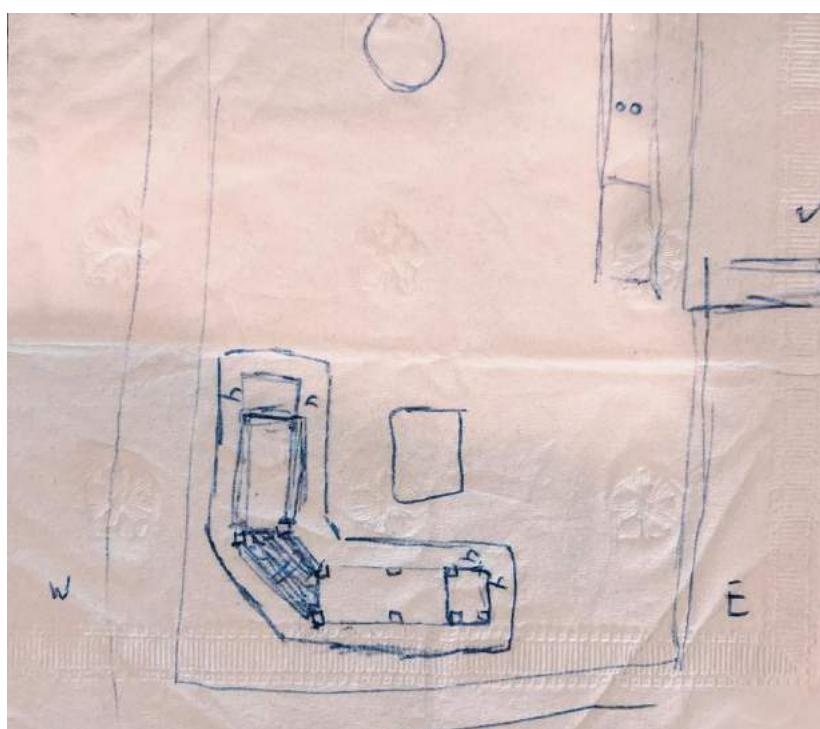


# How to build your beds contd...

## STEP 1: TAKE YOUR TIME PLANNING

Before we even got started buying wood and digging holes, we drew, redrew, and drew our plan again. Sketching everything out really helped us think through how we were going to build the beds and what they were going to look like. After we sketched everything out and felt good about our dimensions and plans, we went outside and outlined the beds with stakes so we could see exactly how big they were going to be.

The picture on the left was one of the first sketches we made when we started brainstorming. It's actually drawn on a restaurant napkin; we spent the afternoon relaxing and chatting about our project when we traveled to Mexico in July. The other two sketches were the final ones we made when calculating how much wood to purchase. As you can see, these don't have to be perfect; just start sketching and get your ideas down on paper. It really helps!



## STEP 2: BUY AND PREP

Once we had an action plan, we were ready to buy our material and start prepping everything. Here are a few highlights.

- **Wooden planks:** we went with cedar planks (2" x 6" x 12') because they're good quality wood and will weather nicely in the elements. Don't get pre-treated wood, because all the chemicals will leach into the soil where your veggies are growing!



- **Wooden posts:** because our beds were quite long, we couldn't just have support posts at the corners. You'll see from the sketches above, we have support posts at each corner and in the middle of the long beds. These were 4" x 4" x 8' untreated cedar.
- **Screws:** you might already know this, but Toby explained that screws are way better than nails. Especially with all the weight from the soil pushing on the walls of the beds and the expansion and contraction from changes in temperature and moisture, don't cut corners with nails! We purchased 3" outdoor decking screws.
- **Cut wood to length:** we purchased 12' planks and 8' posts, so we had to cut everything to length before we started building. This is when your sketches really come in handy!
- **Dig ditches and trenches:** we dug all the holes and trenches before we started building the beds. Because we had great plans and measurements, we knew where all the post holes were going. We tried making each post hole 1' deep; a few were a bit shallower because we hit bedrock, so we adjusted the length of those posts accordingly.

# How to build your beds contd...

## STEP 3: BUILD THE FRAMES

Once you have all the wood cut and the holes dug, you can start building the beds. There are many ways you can tackle this, but we found it easiest to **build the ends first**. We assembled all the 4' wide bed ends in the back yard and then lowered these pre-built sections into our ditches. Once those were in the ground and leveled, we started adding the cedar planks to form the sides.

**Tip: add the planks from top to bottom**, otherwise there's a chance the top of your bed won't be flush if you're off by an inch or two.

The hardest thing about this part is making sure everything is level. If you look carefully at the pictures, you'll notice our yard is on a slight incline, so we had to be extra diligent to make sure our beds were level. When we finished building the first bed we even had to add an extra board at the bottom of the lower end because we had a small gap due to the incline in our yard.



## GIVE YOURSELF A PAT ON THE BACK BECAUSE YOU'RE ABOUT HALFWAY DONE!

At this point, a little encouragement is definitely in order! It feels like you've done so much work and you want to believe you're almost there. But, I hate to break it to you: building the bed frames is only about half the battle.

You got this! Seeing those frames built and looking beautiful is definitely a well earned energy boost!



# How to build your beds contd...

## STEP 4: INSTALL THE PIPE FOR DRIP IRRIGATION

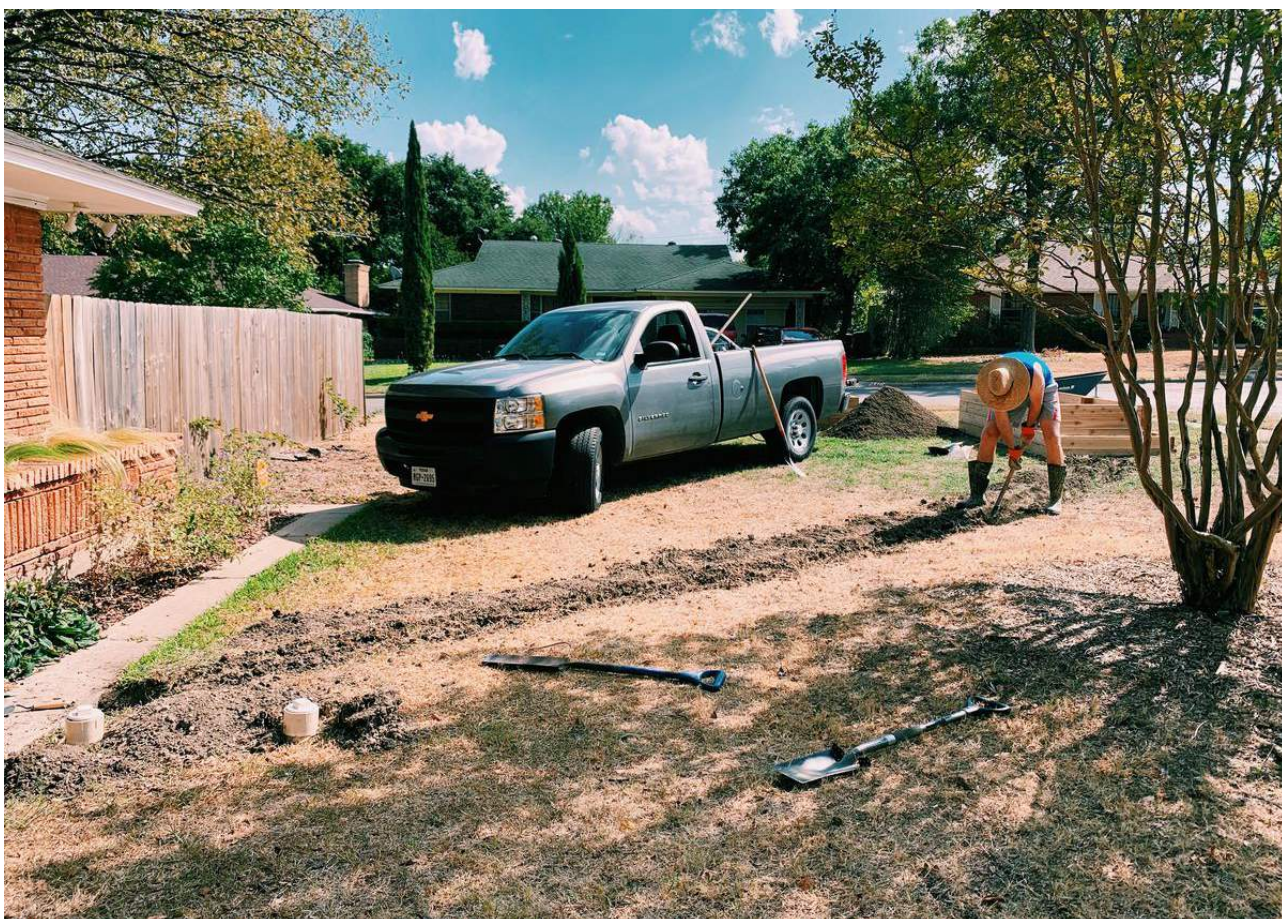
Even though you might be very tempted to dump soil in and get those veggies planted, installing drip irrigation is definitely the smart, long-term decision. Veggies need a good amount of water to grow and thrive, and we didn't want to worry about manually watering every evening.

We're lucky that we have a spigot in the front yard in the middle of our flower bed, so we had easy access to a water source. Yes, we did have to trench underneath concrete and through our front yard, but I'm looking at the bright side! I would recommend going to a store that specializes in irrigation or landscaping for this step. Lowes is great, but you want to be able to talk through your specific plan and situation with

someone who is very knowledgeable about irrigation to get the setup that's right for you.

We didn't finish building out all the drip until we had soil in the beds, but before you dump a bunch of soil in there you want to get the unperforated pipe in. So, we trenched from our spigot to the beds and between both beds as well. We clamped the pipes to the sides of the beds and left them there until we got soil in and were ready to finish building out our irrigation system.

**Tip: tape the ends of your pipes** before you start threading them underneath the beds and through trenches. You want to make sure they don't get clogged with dirt.

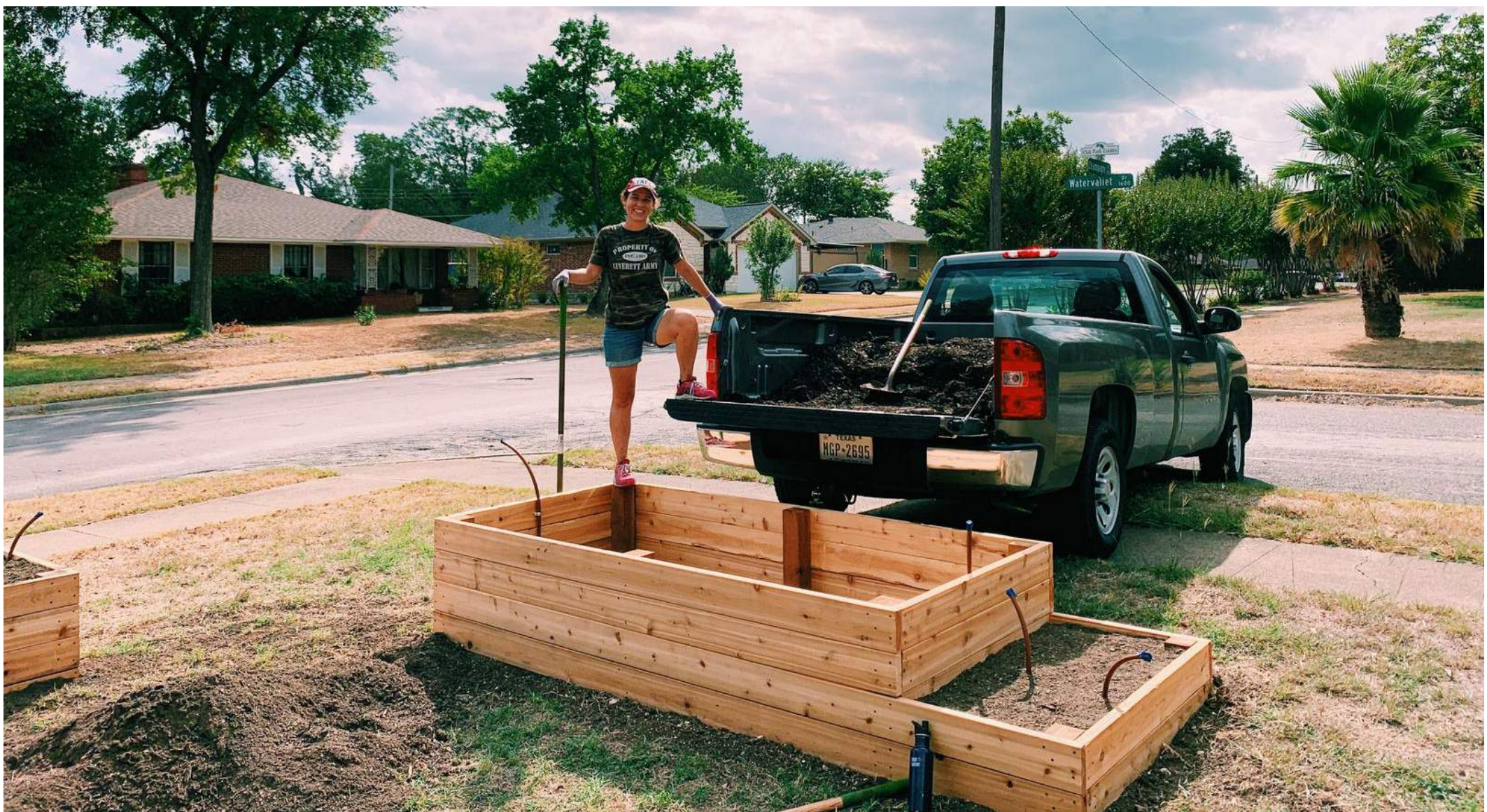


# How to build your beds contd...

## STEP 5: FILL THE BEDS WITH SOIL

If your beds are as big as ours, it's not very practical to buy bags and bags worth of compost and vegetable soil from a home improvement store. Since we had access to a pickup truck, we got a load of compost from my mom's huge compost heap at her house, and then we topped it off with a load of vegetable soil we purchased from Living Earth (a mulch, compost, and soil provider here in Dallas).

The great thing about getting compost from my mom's is that it was free; the downside is that we had to shovel it in the truck and then shovel it out of the truck. The people at Living Earth just filled the truck up for us, so we saved many sweat hours with our second soil load! Even with two truckfulls of soil, we were still a bit short, so we topped the beds off with a few bags of vegetable soil from Lowes. Note: you can see our irrigation pipes sticking out in this picture.



## STEP 6: FINISH BUILDING YOUR DRIP IRRIGATION SYSTEM AND PLANT THOSE VEGGIES!

Ideally you want to build your irrigation system first and then plant your veggies, but we ran out of time and had some transplants in the car, so we planted those before we had a chance to build the drip. Either way, you're almost done!

**Drip irrigation:** this really is the most efficient way to keep your plants hydrated. The water goes

straight to the soil and roots where it's needed, and you don't waste any the way you do with sprinkler systems. We spaced our irrigation rows a little less than a foot apart and connected a timer to the spigot, so we could control the frequency and duration of the water flow.



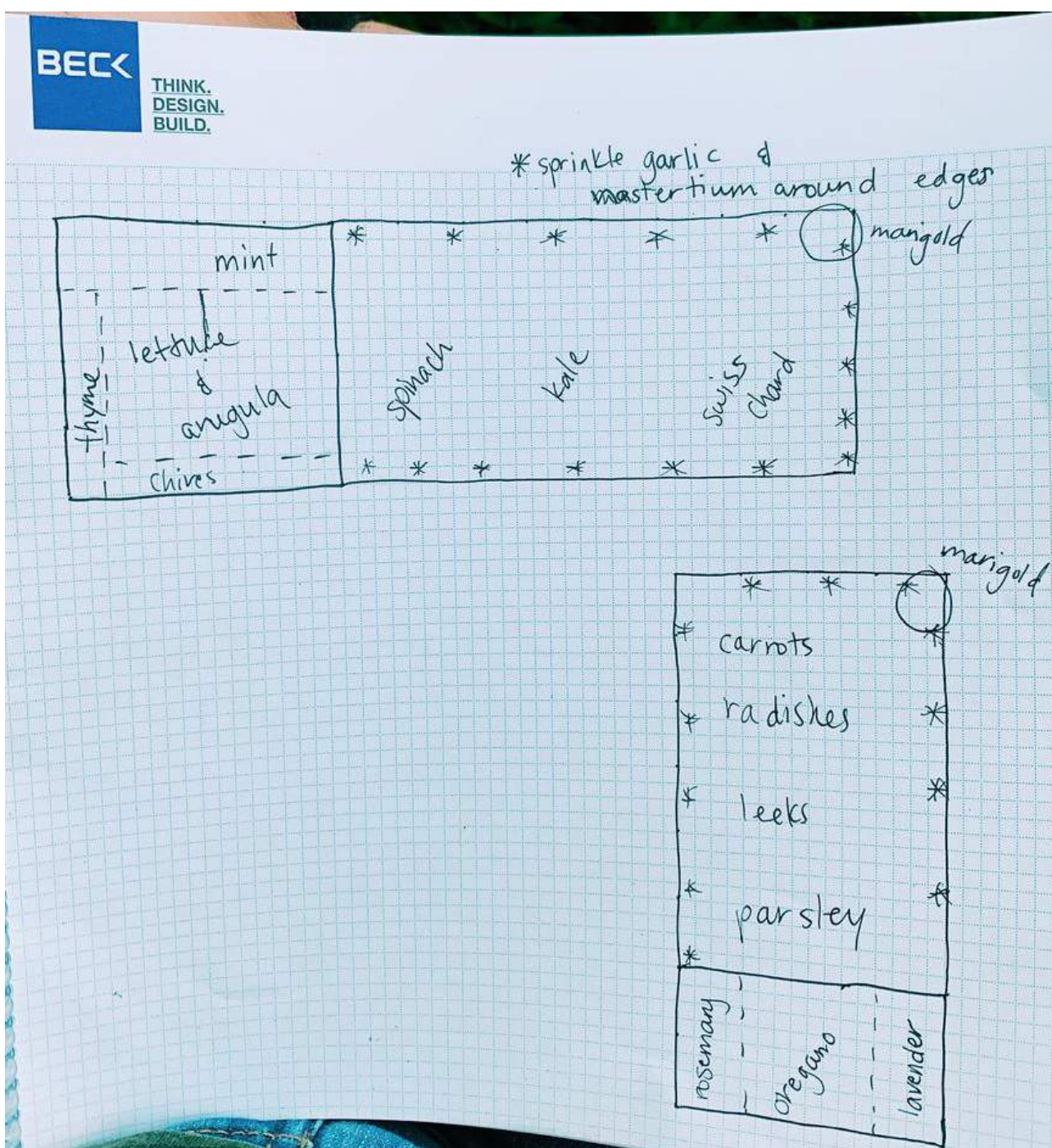
# How to build your beds contd...

**Veggies and herbs:** we always tell ourselves we're going to stick to a few veggie types, but we can't help ourselves. This time was no different, and we're planting eighteen different herbs and veggies including lettuce, arugula, kale, chives, mint, carrots, parsley, oregano, and more! Maybe we got a little carried away, but we wanted them all! Like bed building, planning your veggie placement is key. Here's a sketch of what we first planted in our beds. Some of the plants we already had, others we transplanted from my mom's veggie garden or bought transplants, and the rest we planted from seed.

**THAT'S ALL FOLKS! BE PROUD OF YOUR WORK AND ENJOY THE MOST DELICIOUS VEGGIES YOU'LL EVER EAT.**

It was an exhausting, physically demanding, and expensive project, but I can't tell you how happy our raised beds and homegrown veggies make us! This was a big undertaking, but it's one that we know is going to greatly add to the quality of our lives for years to come.

If all this work sounds a bit overwhelming to you, then why don't you consider buying a raised bed kit, where everything for the frame is sent to you and all you have to do is assemble it and add soil and plants. (Let's not forget that these kits don't include irrigation.) This is a good way to find out if you are really serious about growing your own vegetables for the long term before you make a substantial investment. Here are a couple of options: [Galvanized Steel Raised Bed Kit](#) and [Wooden Raised Garden Bed Kit](#).





# BLACK GOLD

Composting is awesome, and it's one of the best things you can do for your veggie beds! You're taking something that would have unnecessarily ended up in the landfill and creating nutrient-rich soil (for free!). You're truly seeing nature's magic at its best. Once you change your perspective on organic scraps and realize that food isn't trash, you'll never want to throw a banana peel or apple core into the garbage again!

## IT DOESN'T MATTER HOW, JUST COMPOST

We all have different lifestyles and the traditional form of composting (turning a big pile in your backyard with a pitchfork once a week) just doesn't work for everybody. The good news is there are composting options that fit many kinds of lifestyles, so you just have to find and implement the one that's right for you. Here are our four favorite ways you can compost at home.

### 1. Open Air Composting (for those who don't shy away from a pitchfork)

This is what we all probably imagine when we think of composting: food waste, yard clippings, and other organics piled up in your backyard. Most often, these piles are contained by a wire cage or cinder blocks, but it literally can just be a pile in your yard. You can create your compost cage out of materials you already have at home and it doesn't cost much (if anything), but you need the space and have to be okay with having a pile of organics that needs to be turned regularly. Here is a [great article](#) that goes in depth into open air composting and everything you need to know about it.

### 2. Tumbler composting (for those who are awesome like us!)

We love compost tumblers! They're efficient, easy to turn and aerate (so the organic matter decomposes faster), and they keep your yard neat and tidy. You do need to be more hands-on and vigilant about the balance between green and brown items you put in (it should roughly be a 50/50 split), but the upkeep requires minimal physical exertion and it's fun to see how the organic matter decays inside. Read more about tumbler composting [here](#) and check out our favorite tumbler in [our shop](#).

### 3. Vermicomposting (for those living in apartments or homes with limited to no yard space)

We've had worms taking care of our kitchen scraps for years! They're fascinating (they regulate their own population depending on how much food you give them), low-maintenance, and super efficient decomposers. One word of caution about vermicomposting is that worms like to be within a temperature range of 55°F - 75°F. So, on hot summer days and cold winter nights we have to bring them inside and it can cause a bit of a fruit fly problem. However, once you get the fruit flies under control, you don't even notice the worms are there since the bin is completely odorless. Go to our [products page](#) to see our favorite worm bin and Red Wiggler worms, and [learn more](#) about how to be a vermicomposting pro.

This is by no means an exhaustive list on all the ways you can compost, so get creative and figure out what works best for you!





# FERTILIZER AND WORMS

For many years we didn't have a strong opinion about fertilizers nor gave them much thought, since we tried to add all the needed nutrients to our garden through compost and mulch. But the more we started learning about organic fertilizers and seeing their results, we became convinced there is only one way to go on the fertilizer path for us and that is organic.

## FEED AND CREATE HEALTHY SOIL FOR YOUR PLANTS

We've been to a lot of gardens over the years with Yardspell (Gina's landscaping business), and we can honestly tell you that we have never seen a healthy, lush and thriving lawn and garden where synthetic fertilizers have been routinely and consistently applied. Synthetic or inorganic fertilizers are manufactured from man-made and petroleum based chemicals, where organic fertilizers are derived from animal and plant sources. To be blunt, synthetic fertilizers are poison, and why would we want to poison our plants when nature has provided us with very effective and non-toxic fertilizers such as blood meal, bone meal, greensand, and kelp?

We understand why synthetic fertilizers were so popular for so many years. Pound for pound they are less expensive than organics, and short term they work quickly and effectively. But the long-term effects are not only detrimental to your garden and lawn but also the overall environment. The prolonged use of these chemicals degrades the health of your soil, and once they leach out of the ground and enter our waterways, they create algae blooms and dead zones in our streams, ponds, lakes, rivers, and oceans.

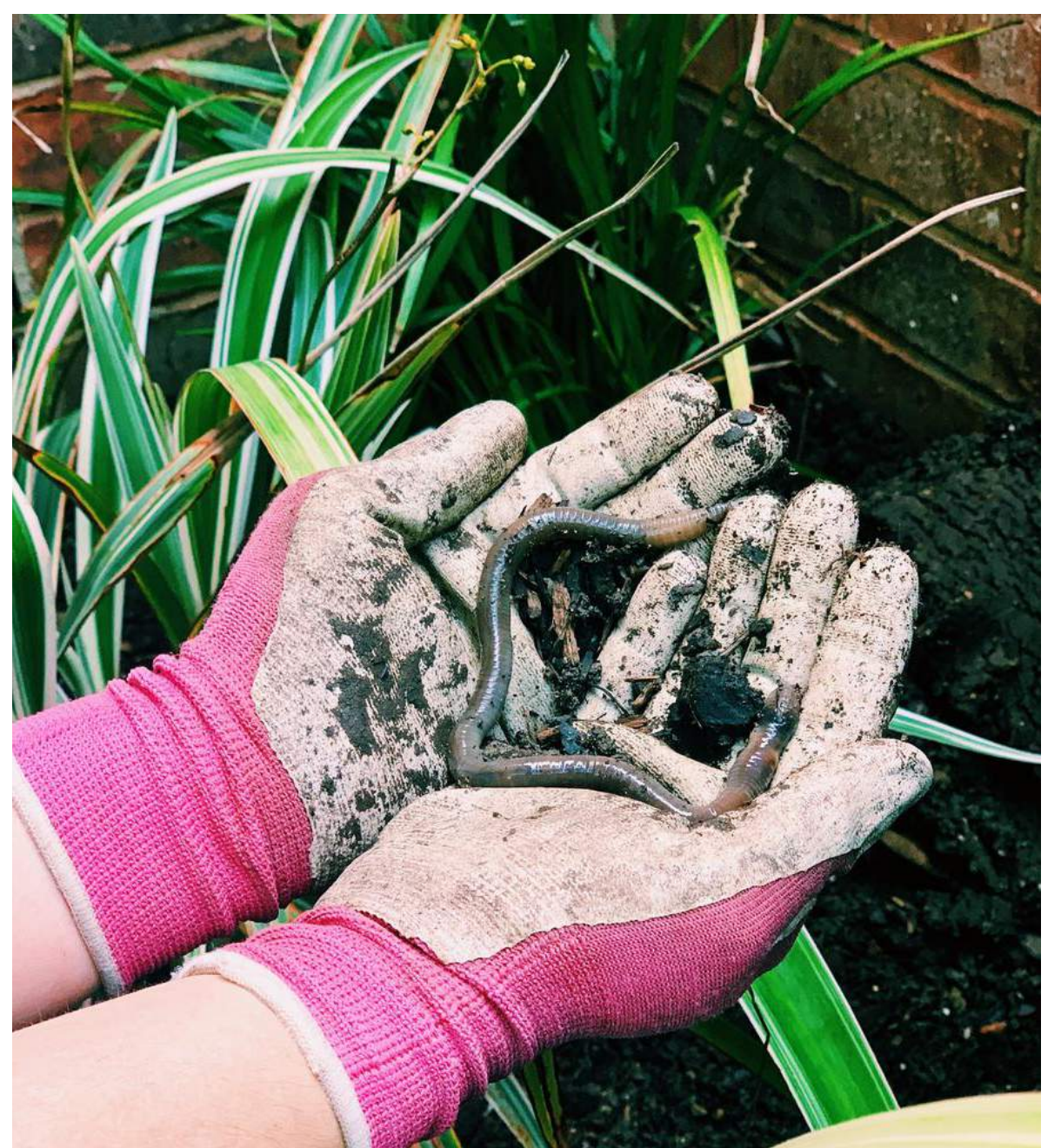
Organic fertilizers have many advantages over synthetics:

- You're increasing the health of your soil and building microorganism populations.
- Healthy soil makes healthy food and plants
- You have more movement of water through the soil.
- You don't have to worry about burning your plants like you do with synthetics.
- Oh, and of course, you're not poisoning your plants!

If you can't tell, we're sold on organic fertilizers! The results we've seen have blown us away, and we'll never use a synthetic fertilizer again. If you're looking for a great brand, we highly recommend MicroLife. We've been using it consistently for the past few years, and we've seen nothing but spectacular results!

### With happy soil come worms!

For a gardener, finding a worm in your garden is like receiving a little present... finding this guy was like opening Santa's gift on Christmas morning! Worms in your garden are a great sign of the overall health of your soil and in turn the garden's ecosystem. The more worms you see and the fatter/larger they are the better! So, you can imagine the yelp of joy when I found one that spanned both my hands! Great day!





# GOING OLD SCHOOL WITH FISH HEAD FERTILIZER

This one is stinky but oh so nutritious for your veggies! It's said that Native Americans used to fertilize their crops with fish heads.

## THIS ONE IS PRETTY SELF EXPLANATORY...

If you want to get creative with other natural fertilizers and you happen to have lots of fish heads laying around, then take a leaf from the Native American agriculture book and use those heads as fertilizer for your veggies! If you're not cooking fish for a party of twenty, then you can always go to your local market and ask the fishmonger if they have any heads to spare (since they typically throw the heads away).

My husband is a chef and when it's getting time to fertilize our raised beds, he saves and blends the discarded fish heads from work. He dilutes the blended heads with some water (the amount is totally up to you), and then pours it all over the beds. Fish heads are a great source of nutrients and the veggies love them!

We'll warn you, the concoction smells pretty bad...





# ORGANIC INSECTICIDAL SOAP

We always say we're happy to share our veggies with the local insects -- another reason to plant a few extras! But occasionally, the bugs get a little greedy and we need to get things under control, so we found an organic solution that works amazingly well!

My mom and I whipped up an all-natural, organic insecticidal soap that we have used on many different plants and veggies in our yard, and have always had great results.

In these pictures, you can see the before and after states of my basil; the soap worked wonders! After just a week of spraying, my basil bounced back and was looking super healthy!

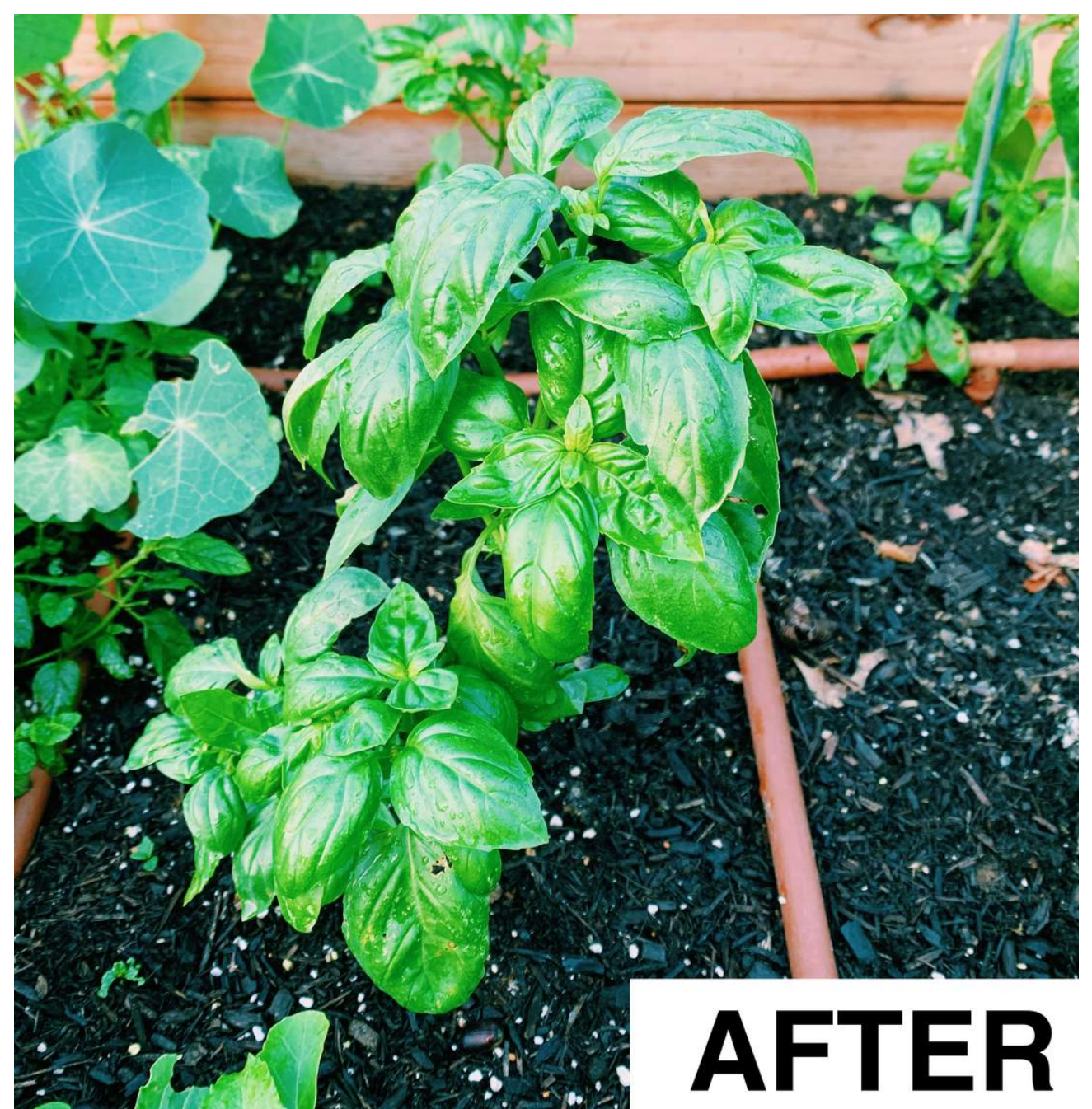
In case you have trouble with veggies (or other garden plants) along the way, here's the recipe we used.

## Ingredients

- 1 tsp of Dr. Bronner's Castile Soap
- 1 quart hot water
- Cinnamon (optional)

## Directions

Use 1 teaspoon of Dr. Bronner's Castile Soap in 1 quart of hot water and mix thoroughly. Sprinkle in some cinnamon if you'd like, but if you don't have any, the soap and water should work just fine. Caution, stick to just 1 tsp of Dr Bronner's soap. If you add too much Castile soap to the solution, you could burn your plant leaves.





# RAINWATER HARVESTING

It can get very hot and dry here in Texas during the summer, and we're so lucky to have one of our favorite DIY projects sitting in our back yard. Our rain barrels!

## RAIN, RAIN, GO... INTO A BARREL FOR LATER!

Rain barrels are such a perfect example of not letting precious resources go to waste and saving them for later when they're really needed; in this case, that precious resource is water. There's a reason the saying, "When it rains, it pours" rings true for many of us. It seems like we're either in a crazy storm with too much water leading to flash floods or a blistering drought where the ground is dry and cracked, and all the plants are begging for water. In either case, it's rain barrels to the rescue!

### **What exactly are rain barrels and more importantly, how do you get your hands on one?**

Rain barrels are containers typically ranging between 50 and 80 gallons that capture water running off of your roof to use at a later date. These barrels are normally placed underneath your home's guttering system and have a spigot for filling watering cans and/or a hose connection to make it easy to utilize the stored water in your garden. Rain barrels can be anything from plastic drums, to terra cotta pottery, and everything in between.

If you're feeling industrious, you can make your own barrels like we did; they're not the most beautiful creations but they're tucked away in the corner of our backyard and you can hardly see them. Here are a couple of resources to get you going on building your own: [DIY Network](#), [HGTV](#).

If the 'do it yourself' approach isn't really your thing and you want something a bit more professional and aesthetically pleasing, you're in luck because there are so many options out there! Below are just a few that we came across that looked awesome (full disclaimer, we haven't used any of these, so we can't personally recommend one).

- [Algreen Terra Cotta Rain Barrel](#)
- [Portable and Collapsible Rain Barrel](#)
- [FCMP Brown Rain Barrel](#)
- [Palm Rain Barrel](#)



Photo by Waldemar Brandt on Unsplash



Algreen Products Terra Cotta Rain Barrel



# **THE EASIEST VEGGIES TO GROW**

**(AT LEAST FOR US...)**



# MINT, OREGANO, AND THYME

We love growing all kinds of herbs, but these three are possibly at the top of the list! Part of the reason we love them so much is due to the fact that they're perennials and keep producing year after year. They have a permanent place in our gardens, and Gina (mother) even has thyme growing in between her patio pavers!

## IT DOESN'T GET MUCH BETTER THAN COOKING WITH FRESH HERBS

### Mint

If you're not currently growing mint and were thinking about dipping your toes into the veggie gardening world, this is a great one to start with!

It's so easy to grow, especially if you don't have a yard and access to garden space. It's one of the most versatile herbs (use it in salads, water, ice tea, cocktails) and its freshness is extra appreciated during our hot summers.

Three simple tips for growing mint:

1. Buy a transplant (growing from seed can be a bit tricky and takes much longer).
2. Plant it in a pot because it's an aggressive grower and will take over!
3. Give it plenty of water (it'll clearly tell you when it's thirsty) and don't worry if it goes dormant during the winter - mint doesn't love the cold weather, but it'll come back in the spring. If you have really harsh winters, consider bringing your mint pot indoors.

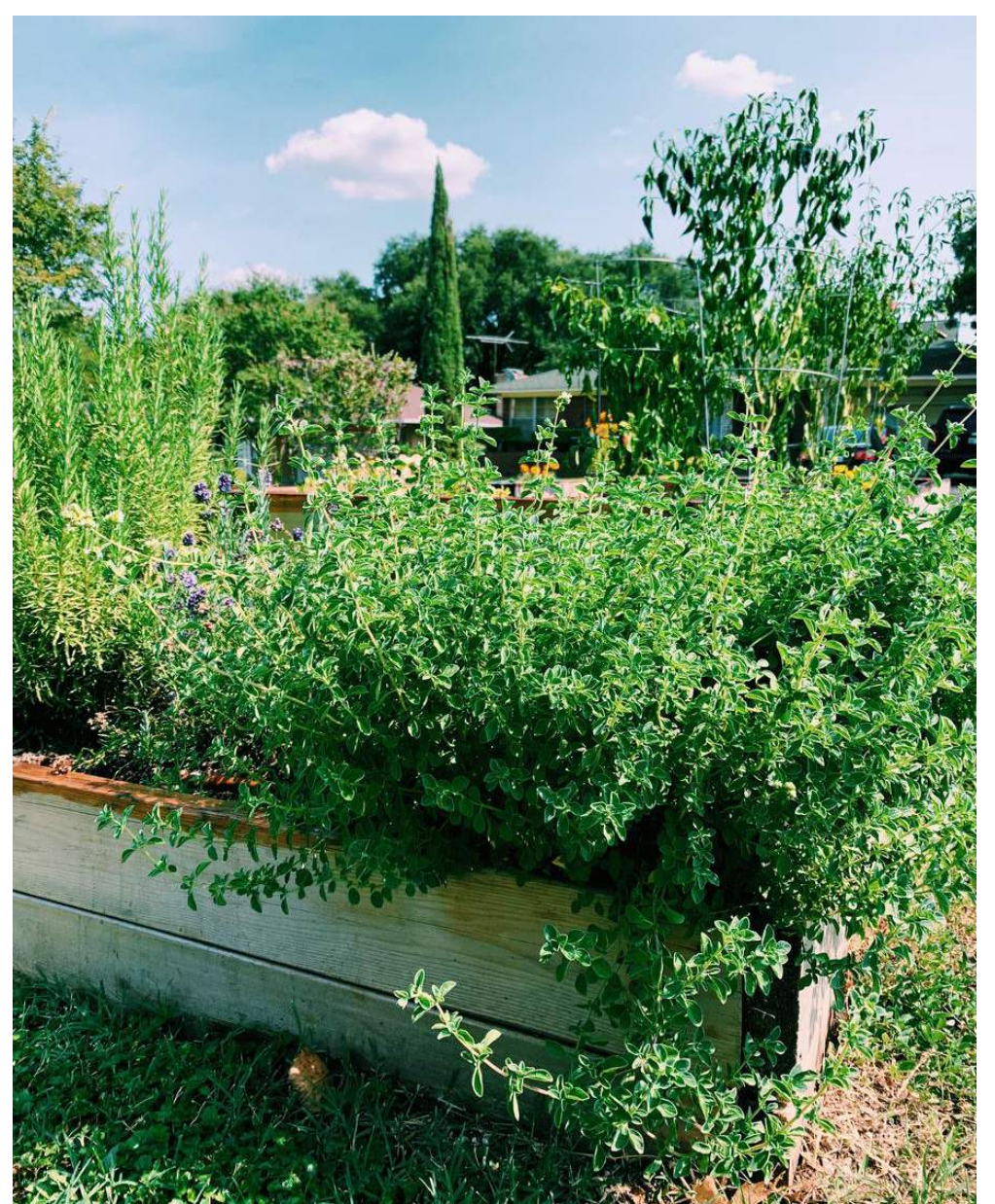
[Watch our video](#) where we give tips on growing mint!

### Oregano and Thyme

These two are such staples in our garden and are so hassle free, that they sadly don't get much air time. Both herbs like lots of sun and they do just fine being left alone to grow; no need to fuss too much.

Once the plants are established, they can be harvested at any time. We often have too much and have to cut them back, so we dry them and keep them in our cupboards to use during the winter. Jars of dried thyme and oregano make for great gifts!

Both herbs may need some protection if you experience harsh winters; in Dallas we don't really have to worry about them even though it does freeze. As it is with most herbs, oregano leaves taste better before flowering, so pinch off the flowers when you can.





# BASIL

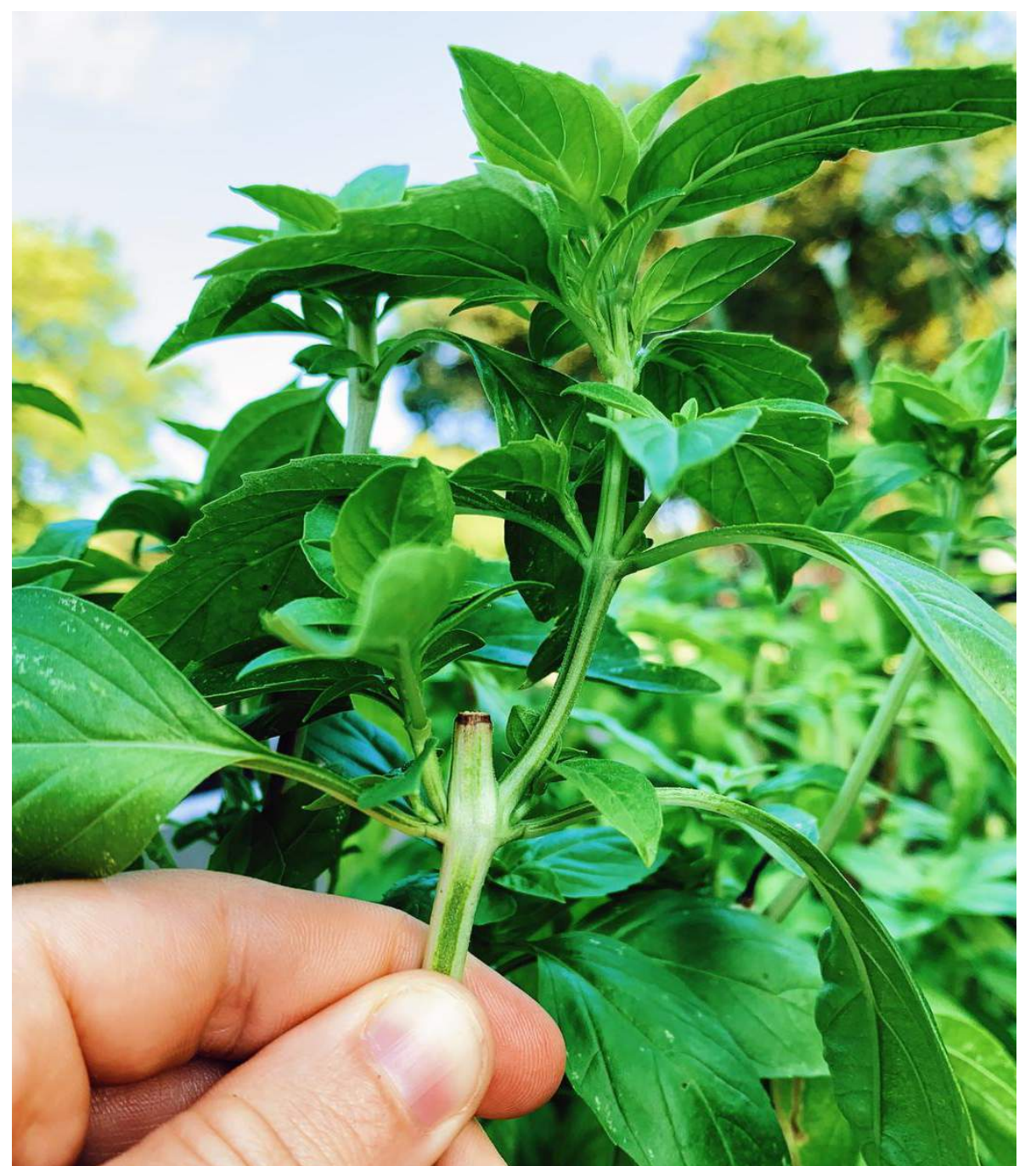
I know we say this about many of our veggies, but basil is definitely a summer favorite! We typically get enough pesto out of our harvests to last the whole year and have the added bonus of fresh leaves sprinkled on many summer meals.

## SO EASY TO GROW AND EVEN MORE DELICIOUS TO EAT!

A few tips to grow and harvest your basil like a pro:

- Like most other herbs, basil likes plenty of sunlight. We have ours planted on a southwestern corner, and it's very happy there.
- When you think of basil, think warm weather. They are very sensitive to the cold and even a light frost will kill the plant. Do not plant it until all danger of a frost has passed.
- Keep your plant from flowering. If you're planting basil for its leaves (like most of us are), continue harvesting so that the plant doesn't have a chance to flower. If you fall a bit behind (happens to us all the time), it's not a big deal, just pinch off the tops when you see a flower has formed. This just makes sure that the plant is putting all its energy into leaf production and you'll get a larger yield.
- Stay on top of harvesting, especially early on, so you encourage your plant to bush out and not get leggy.
- When you harvest, it's best to cut just above a pair of new leaves (scroll to the second picture for an example). This is not only the ideal place for the plant, but as you can see in the picture on the bottom right, it encourages your basil to bush out and produce more leaves; when you do this every stem becomes two new stems!

There are so many ways you can use your basil leaves! A few favorites for us are freshly sprinkled on top of pizza, pasta, or salads and of course the famous homemade basil pesto! Continue on to the next section in this guide for some of our family's favorite pesto recipes.





# GARLIC

We've found that garlic isn't often thought of in your typical home veggie garden, but it's one of the first veggies we started out with and we've had nothing but success. It takes a couple of seasons to reach maturity, but the taste is mind blowing and it basically grows itself!

## IT'S WORTH THE WAIT...

Harsh, summer heat came about a month early this year to North Texas, which means that our garlic was ready to harvest early as well. We were afraid this was going to lead to smaller garlic heads, but no sirree!

Some of the garlic heads we got this year were as large as my hand (okay, that's a bit of extra cream on the taco, but you get the gist).

Although growing garlic takes time (in North Texas we plant ours in October and harvest around June), it's pretty maintenance free and grows very easily. We lined the perimeter of both of our veggie beds with it and just let it thrive during a couple of growing seasons without taking up growing space for other crops.

We successfully pulled between 20 and 30 garlic plants out of the beds and now they're drying up nicely in our garage. We'll leave them in our garage for a few weeks while we let the stalks fully dry out.

Pro tip: leave all the soil on the heads while you let your stalks dry because it acts as a natural barrier against bacteria. Once our garlic is done drying and we bring it inside, we'll give them a good clean before storing them in our pantry.





# MALABAR SPINACH

Malabar spinach is one of our favorite summer plants to grow because it's tasty, low-maintenance, and gorgeous! Last year, Malabar spinach was unfortunately vetoed by the mama bear since we didn't have enough space. Mother-daughter give and take at its best... but this year Malabar spinach is back in the game, and I'm pumped!

## DITCH PACKAGED SPINACH FOR THIS HOMEGROWN GARDEN SHOWSTOPPER

If you live somewhere with warm summers, this veggie is for you! Malabar spinach loves to climb and thrives in full sun with hot and humid conditions — let's just say Dallas summers definitely get hot enough. Although a location with full sun is best, it can also handle partial afternoon shade. We have ours on a south-west corner, and it's super happy there!

### **Warm weather**

Think of Malabar spinach as your garden swimsuit: the hotter it is the better, and once it starts getting cool it's a no go! Malabar spinach can't handle frost or cold soil. We take it out at the same time we plant our fall veggies.

### **It's a climber!**

When I mentioned above that it loves to climb, that's an understatement! Hint hint, you need a trellis or cage because it'll take over neighboring plants otherwise. It's also a super fast grower, so don't even try to train it without a trellis or cage.

### **Volunteer seedlings**

If you're planting Malabar spinach from seed, sow those in the soil in late spring (after the soil has warmed). You can always start your seeds a couple of weeks early inside if that's an option. However, the best part is that after you've grown Malabar, chances are you'll get a few volunteer seedlings the next season! Once you see them pop up, just move them to the area where you'd like your Malabar plant to grow, and you're set! This is exactly what we do.

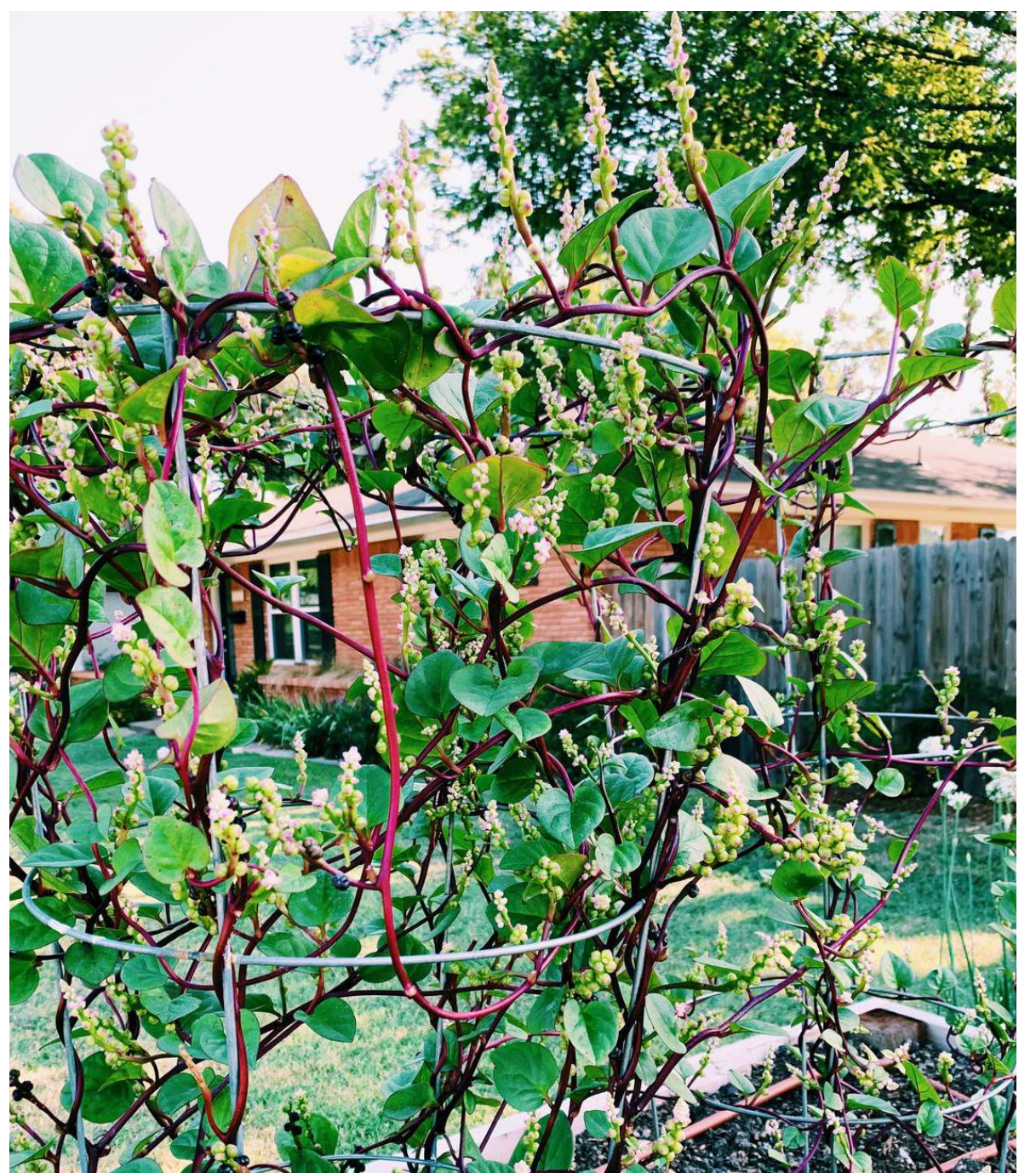
### **Harvesting**

When you're ready to harvest, just clip off the leaves and off you go! We suggest cutting with small shears instead of picking off with your hands.

So, ditch the prepackaged lettuce mixes for some homegrown, iron-rich, Malabar spinach! If you've never grown veggies before or feel like you don't have a green thumb, this extremely low-maintenance and forgiving plant is the one to start with. Sometimes I feel like all we do is watch it grow!

Even if you don't have a veggie garden, you can always put it in a pot and away you go. Just remember that pots dry out faster than veggie beds so it might require some regular attention to watering.

Need some inspiration for how to eat your new favorite leafy green? Go to our recipes section for a Spinach Salad with Oranges and Almonds recipe!



A smiling woman with blonde hair, wearing a white ruffled shirt and large green earrings, is holding a small glass bowl of yogurt topped with blueberries in her left hand and a croissant in her right hand. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent yellow filter. The text "OUR FAVORITE RECIPES" is centered over the image in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

# OUR FAVORITE RECIPES



# BRAISED SWISS CHARD

This is one of our favorite recipes using our home-grown Swiss Chard. It's super easy to make and delicious!

Amounts aren't specific for this recipe because we make it slightly differently every time and it really just depends how much Swiss Chard we're harvesting.

### Ingredients

- Large bunch of Swiss Chard (it reduces significantly, so more is better!)
- Onion
- Garlic
- Red chili flakes (optional, unless you're in our house at which point they're required)
- White wine vinegar
- White wine
- A little bit of butter



### Directions

Separate Swiss Chard stems from leaves. Cut leaves into manageable pieces (roughly 3") and cut stems into smaller pieces as well. Set both aside.

Dice onion and in a VERY LARGE pot, sweat onion down with some olive oil over medium heat until it's soft, roughly 7-10 minutes. Leave lid on and stir occasionally. Once onion has reached a translucent color, add garlic and chili flakes. Mix together and let it cook for another 5 minutes with the lid on, until garlic is tender. Add white wine, white wine vinegar and stems and let it reduce for a few minutes, then add butter. Reduce the liquid by about half and cook until stems are tender.

At this point you can add the leaves — this is why you want a large pot! Put the lid back on and let them steam down. Stir once or twice. This should only take 2-3 minutes.





# SAUTÉED BROCCOLLI RABE ON CHEESE TOAST

Broccoli rabe wasn't one of our go-to veggies when we first started gardening, but boy did it surprise us! We enjoyed it so much and found so many ways to cook it.

## CHEESE MAKES EVERYTHING BETTER

Deciding which veggies we want to plant every season can be tough; we have our favorites that we know we'll eat and enjoy week after week but we also try to be adventurous and plant new things. One season, our adventurous veggie was broccoli rabe.

We didn't really know what to expect and thought we would get florets, similar to your typical broccoli. However, we quickly learned that broccoli rabe is actually in the Brassica family (along with kale and cabbage) and is much leafier and only produces small florets. We found the perfect recipe for Sautéed Broccoli Rabe one day in Ruth Reichl's *The Gourmet Cookbook* (recipe below) and put it on cheese toast. Made for a deeeeelish breakfast!

### Ingredients

- 2 lbs broccoli rabe, trimmed and any hollow stems discarded
- 4 teaspoons olive oil
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1/2 teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 1/4 cup chicken stock or store-bought low-sodium broth
- 1/2 teaspoon salt

### Directions

Cook broccoli rabe in a 6 to 8 quart pot of boiling salted water (1 tablespoon salt per every 4 quarts water) until stems are crisp-tender, about 5 minutes. Drain, then plunge into a large bowl of ice and cold water to stop cooking; drain well. Heat 2 teaspoons oil in a 12 inch nonstick skillet over moderately high heat until hot but not smoking. Add half of garlic and 1/4 teaspoon red pepper flakes and cook, stirring until garlic is golden, about 1 minute. Add half of broccoli rabe and 2 tablespoons broth and cook, stirring until heated through, about 2 minutes. Transfer to a serving dish, then cook remaining broccoli rabe in same manner. Sprinkle with salt.





# FERMENTED NASTURTIUM HOT SAUCE

The credit for this recipe goes to Toby (Marianna's husband) who found so many creative ways to cook all of the nasturtium leaves we had one season thanks to what we realized was over-fertilizing on our part.

## CREATIVITY FOR THE WIN!

Planting nasturtiums in our veggie garden is an easy choice every year: all parts of the plants are edible (including the flowers), they are great companion plants especially for tomatoes, and their blooms add a pop of color that we love! One season however, we were extra diligent with fertilizing our raised beds, and let's just say they were very well fed! Interestingly, we noticed that our nasturtiums just kept growing and growing, putting out tons of foliage but no flowers (let's be real, we really look forward to the flowers). So, we did a little research and it turns out that nasturtiums don't love well-fertilized soil! Who knew? If they have too much fertilizer, they'll do exactly what ours did: take over with foliage but not produce flowers.

So, needless to say we had to get creative that season with different ways we could use up all those edible leaves.

Toby knows how much I (Marianna) love hot sauce, so he came up with a Fermented Nasturtium Hot Sauce recipe. It sounds pretty random (and possibly odd), but it was delicious!

### Ingredients

- Poblano peppers
- Serrano peppers
- Jalapeño peppers
- Nasturtium leaves
- Salt

### Directions

In a food processor or blender, chop together all the ingredients. Add a little water as needed. Place the mixture in a sealed jar and put it in a cupboard for three weeks to give it time to ferment. Depending on the heat level that you like, you can always add more serranos and jalapeños to make it spicier.





# BASIL (AND OTHERWISE) PESTO

A guide about cooking with your homegrown veggies wouldn't be complete without a pesto recipe! Although our go-to is basil pesto, we've also discovered another variation that's giving the status quo a run for its money...

One of the things we love most about pesto is how versatile it is. It's a great addition to some many dishes and having enough to last us all year is definitely a perk!

Below is the recipe we use to make pesto, which we typically make with our basil harvest and love it. However (as you read on the last page) when we had an excess of nasturtium leaves, we substituted the basil with them and the results were great! So, this is now the recipe for basil or nasturtium pesto.

## Ingredients

- 2 lemons (zest and juice)
- 140 grams ( 5 oz.) olive oil
- 150 grams (5.3 oz) basil or nasturtium leaves
- 1 Tbsp parsley
- 1 tsp garlic
- 50 grams (1.8 oz) toasted pinenuts
- 40 grams (1.4 oz) parmesan
- Salt
- Extra virgin olive oil (to drizzle on top)

## Directions

Blend ingredients in a food processor - add the lemon last so you can taste as you go (you may not need both lemons). Pour the mixture into jars and tap them against the counter to get any air bubbles out. Leave a little space at the top of the jar to top it off with extra virgin olive oil to keep the pesto from oxidizing.



# Pesto recipes contd...

HERE'S A PEEK INTO OUR FAMILY RECIPE BOX FOR MORE PESTO IDEAS!

Cilantro Pesto  
1 bunch cilantro  
1 bunch parsley  
red pepper flakes  
garlic (cooked in olive oil)  
toasted & salted pumpkin seeds  
salt & pepper

Pesto  
Greens: Parsley, cilantro, chervil,  
arugula, dandelion greens, broccoli,  
broccoli rabe, scallions, garlic scapes,  
kale, collards, mustard greens,  
radish tops, beet greens, spinach,  
watercress, pea  
Nuts: Walnuts, almonds, macadamia nuts,  
peanuts, pistachios, sunflower seeds,  
pumpkin seeds, sesame seeds, pecan nuts  
Cheese: Pecorino Romano, aged Manchego,

aged gouda, aged cheddar, cotija,  
Grana Padano, aged Asiago  
Garlic, olive oil, lemon juice & zest  
vinegar

Parsley Pesto  
1 bunch parsley  
olive oil  
garlic  
salt  
red pepper flakes  
anchovies  
parmesan cheese



# HOMEMADE YOGURT

This one isn't veggie related, but I've been making yogurt for over 30 years now and I will hopefully continue for the rest of my life. This culinary journey began for me out of necessity. I moved to a remote ranch in Mexico in 1987 and I was not able to find any unflavored, non-fat yogurts in the small markets at the time, so I decided I would make my own.

## THE RECIPE IN 5 SIMPLE STEPS

Internet did not exist back in 1987, so I turned to the Joy of Cooking to learn how to make yogurt. My mother had given me one of her yogurt makers (which I still use to this day), I had the recipe, so all I needed were three other items:

- Milk
- Yogurt cultures and
- A cooking thermometer

I am sure there are variations on this recipe for yogurt, but this is how I have been doing it for over three decades. Here are the steps.

- Pour the appropriate amount of milk to fill your yogurt containers. My yogurt maker has 5 individual containers for the yogurt and each container holds  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a cup of milk, so I pour  $3\frac{3}{4}$  cups of milk into a saucepan.
- Warm the milk until the thermometer reads  $175^{\circ}\text{F}$  -  $185^{\circ}\text{F}$ . There were times when I couldn't find my thermometer, so I warmed the milk until I saw little bubbles forming along the rim of the saucepan.
- Turn off the stove and let the milk cool until it reaches  $100^{\circ}\text{F}$  -  $110^{\circ}\text{F}$  and pour it into each of the containers that are placed in the warming yogurt maker.
- In each container, mix in about 1 1/2 teaspoons of yogurt (store-bought or from a previous batch).
- Put the lids on, and then let the yogurt sit for at least 7 to 8 hours. Yogurt does not like to travel while it is growing, so don't move them.



I usually make my yogurt in the evening, while I am making dinner, and the next morning it is ready for my fruit and granola. Enjoy!!!



# EAT YOUR WEEDS!

I planted a native groundcover in my front yard and was looking forward to seeing it spread and take hold. Instead, I ended up with a thick, succulent crop of purslane. For those who aren't familiar with purslane, it's a very common weed through out most of the United States. So, purslane wasn't exactly what I wanted to see in my front yard, but I decided to go with what Mother Nature had provided me.

## SOME MIGHT SAY, LET'S MAKE LEMONADE OUT OF LEMONS... HOW ABOUT, LET'S MAKE A SALAD OUT OF PURSLANE!

We're definitely not telling you to go eat every weed that pops up in your front yard, but get to know the native plants in your area because some of them are definitely edible! When you think about it, a weed really is a human concept - they're just plants that are growing somewhere we don't want. That doesn't make them any less interesting or delicious!

The stems, leaves, flowers, and seeds of purslane are all edible. You can eat it raw in a salad, cooked like you would spinach, or add it to soups or stews. I often see it in my local grocery store near the parsley and other green, leafy vegetables. The slightly tart taste is similar to arugula, and it is high in the healthy Omega-3 fatty acids and also beta carotene. And to think many of us in North Texas spends hours throughout the year trying to pull this weed up.

I know you are now ready to run outside and check out your “weed” situation and see how you can prepare this delicious plant in your dinner tonight. Here's a simple recipe I created. If you notice some very fine, black grit on the chopping board, when you are cleaning and trimming the purslane, don't worry. These are only the seeds from the purslane and they too are edible.



### Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 5 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 medium onion, minced
- 1 pound purslane, stems thicker than 1/8 inch discarded
- 1 large tomato, minced
- Feta cheese
- Salt and pepper to taste

### Cooking Instructions

Heat oil in a 12-inch nonstick skillet over moderate heat. Add onion and garlic and cook, stirring until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add purslane and tomato and cook, tossing with tongs, until just wilted, 3 to 4 minutes. Do not overcook the purslane; you want it to still be a bit crunchy. Season with salt and pepper and crumble desired amount of Feta cheese on top.





# MAKE YOUR OWN TEA

We're both southern women, and if there's something we all love down south is a good glass of iced tea. And we're not the only ones: tea is the second most widely consumed beverage worldwide, following only water!

## THERE ISN'T ANYTHING MUCH EASIER TO MAKE THAN TEA

Although focusing on tea may seem a bit random, in 2018 Ready to Drink (RTD) tea was a \$10 billion industry and it represents a huge percentage of the pre-bottled beverage market. I think because we've been drinking homemade tea our whole lives (it's a fridge staple for sure), it astonishes us just how many people choose to buy their tea already prepared and served up in yet another plastic bottle, that costs them ten times as much and usually ends up in the landfill.

So how do you go about making tea? You need water and tea leaves and/or herbs. That's it. I enjoy making different teas at various times of the year. Am I in the mood for green tea? How about black tea and a spiced tea steeped together? It's hot and steamy outside, so how about a cool and refreshing cup of lemon balm tea?

A few of my top reasons for making my own tea:

- 1.The cheapest store-bought, ready to drink tea is approximately 10x more expensive than homemade.
- 2.When buying RTD tea, you're also buying yet another plastic container which typically ends up in the landfill.
- 3.Not only are RTD teas not great for the environment, their ingredients typically aren't great for you either.

Ready to make your own tea? Here's the simple, basic recipe.

### Ingredients

- Water
- 2 teabags (or roughly 10oz of loose leaf tea)

### Cooking Instructions

Bring 10 cups of water to an almost boil (you don't want to bring it to a full boil for tea making). Then add your teabags (or loose leaf tea) to the water and let it steep. Once it has cooled off some, take the teabags or tea leaves out and you're done! You've made homemade tea!

This is the basic iced tea recipe, and you can get creative and play with it! Marianna (daughter) loves almond iced tea; for that she uses some type of black or English Breakfast tea and adds some sugar, vanilla extract, fresh squeezed lemon, and a little bit of almond extract. You can get as fancy as you want, but the basic, sugar-free tea is definitely my go-to.

So, instead of driving somewhere to buy your tea, take a few minutes to boil some water and make your own!





# SPINACH SALAD WITH ORANGES AND ALMONDS

The inspiration for this recipe came from Bon Appetit, and we just modified and tweaked it a bit to fit one of our homegrown summer favorites: Malabar spinach.

## THE RECIPE

### Dressing

- 6 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1/4 cup fresh orange juice
- 3 green onions, minced
- 3 tablespoons unseasoned rice vinegar
- 1 tablespoon honey
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh tarragon
- 1 teaspoon grated orange peel
- 4 oranges

### Salad

- 9 ounces of Malabar spinach (or really as much as you want!)
- 2/3 tablespoons sliced almonds, toasted
- Blue or goats cheese (optional)

### Directions

Whisk first 7 ingredients in a small bowl. Season with salt and pepper.

Cut, peel, and remove white pith from oranges. Working over medium bowl, cut between membranes to release segments. Dressing and oranges can be made 1 day ahead. Cover separately and chill. Rewhisk dressing before using.

Combine spinach, half of almonds and all orange segments in large bowl with enough dressing to coat. Divide among 6 plates. Sprinkle with almonds and cheese.

Enjoy!



We don't have a picture for this one, but we promise it's delicious! Big thanks to Freddy G on Unsplash for the photo.



AND MOST IMPORTANTLY...  
**HAVE FUN!**