

Live love garden



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Kristin Cooper Live, Love, Garden Each morning I look out my window at our garden, and the surrounding trees. I listen to a symphony of birds, as the sunlight shines higher in the neighbor's sycamore tree. A full night's sleep leaves me thirsty, so I go to the kitchen for a glass of cool water. I know that the plants in the garden are also thirsty, and I venture outside to water them. The grass feels good between my toes and as I reach for a ripe tomato, a butterfly dips down into a flower. This garden is full of life, and I feel fortunate to know it intimately.

Not only does my garden provide an abundance of organic fruits and vegetables that are healthier than most produce in grocery stores, but the work it takes to grow this produce requires constant physical activity that is great for physical health, and relieving stress. Cultivating a fruit and vegetable garden is a tremendously rewarding experience. A garden is a fertile piece of land with a collection of plants that are cared for by an individual or a community. A garden can be any size arrangement of flowers, shrubs, fruits, vegetables, herbs or trees. My arents taught me how to care for a garden.

We have five members in our family, with five mouths to feed, so we have a large garden. This garden is spread out across our entire backyard, with six fruit trees scattered throughout. Persimmon, apple, mandarin, orange, avocado, and lime all yield their fruits at different times throughout the year. We have a beautiful flower garden, with many varieties, as well as a dedicated rose garden. We have categorized most of the vegetable plants into separate garden boxes or planters. For example the herb garden box contains osemary, thyme, oregano, cilantro, curry, and borage.

The salsa garden box contains various types of peppers, and onions. A third garden box contains zucchini, yellow squash, cantaloupe, and peanuts. We also have a planter with fifteen tomato plants, consisting of eleven different varieties. The food grown in these garden boxes is healthier than industrially farmed food bought in the store, because I am knowledgeable about how the food was grown. In fact we consider our garden to be organic, which requires using natural fertilizer, and not using pesticides, herbicides, and growth hormones, all of which are chemical products and these substances are harmful to humans.

For example, growth hormones make fruits and vegetables look bigger, and better, but without nutrient rich soil they lack in nutrients. On the other hand, fertilizer made from natural compost, decomposing plant matter is free of pesticides and herbicides. Fruits and vegetables grown organically can taste much different than store bought foods and that taste of extra flavor means the produce is higher in nutrients. Of the eleven different types of tomatoes in my familys garden, each has a rich and unique flavor; store bought tomatoes do not compare. The oranges we grow are also much tastier than oranges I have bought in grocery stores.

Some oranges have a really thick peel, and once opened up, it is not a juicy treat, while the oranges from my tree, have a thin peel, and are dripping with juice. Eating organic fruits and vegetables instead of processed foods is vital for good health. Having a home garden provides an abundance of healthy food that is easily limited our trips to the grocery store and saved us a lot of money. Having the ability to pick fresh food from the garden has

ensured that even when there is scarce food in the refrigerator, we still have plenty of healthy food to eat.

It is financially rewarding when a plant that costs as much as a few pieces of fruit, produces enough to feed a household for weeks. Sometimes a plant will produce a lot of ripe fruit and there is too much to eat all at once. When fruit is ripe it has a short period when it needs to be eaten, or it will go bad. I find it very unfortunate to watch good food go to waste, so I try to share what I can with my neighbors, friends, family, and community members. The orange tree in my backyard produces hundreds, thousands of oranges every summer.

With so much fruit, my family can eat oranges everyday and there are still a lot that never get eaten and rot away. My family's solution is to share them with everybody, and when we still have leftovers we make orange juice. I start by picking a few dozen oranges, and cleaning them. I take them inside, and roll them on the counter to break up the pulp and make them juicier. The next step is to cut them in half, and then juice them using a manual or mechanical juicer. It takes some time and some muscle to make a pitcher full of orange juice, but the work is well worth the fresh, sweet and sour flavor that invigorates my taste buds.

The home squeezed orange juice is rich in nutrients, and healthier than store bought orange juice. The physical activity that is required to maintain a garden can help keep a gardener in good physical health. Juicing oranges is only a tiny part of the physical activity in maintaining a garden. Actually, there is a lot of work to maintain a garden, such as pulling weeds, watering

plants, picking the fruit and vegetables, digging, planting, cultivating, pruning, fertilizing, etc. This work requires constant bending, stooping, kneeling, reaching above your head, and walking back and forth.

After a few hours of work in the garden I am as sore as I would be if I had gone to the gym. In addition to the physical work, at the beginning of each growing season there is a lot of planning to be done, especially since each season there are different vegetables that can be grown. When it is time to change the crops my family has to prepare the land and the vegetable boxes by removing old vegetable plants and weeds. Some plants have extensive roots and if they cannot be pulled out by hand it may be necessary to dig them out of the ground with a shovel.

First we evaluate the situation to prepare for how much work needs to be done, how many holes I will need to dig, and the size of the holes. When the holes are prepared, the soil needs to be cultivated and amended as final preparation before the planting. My family has a compost bin that we use to make natural fertilizer amendment for our garden. Compost is recycled plant matter that is collected in a bin, and given time it will break down into nutrient rich soil. To help the compost break down, it must be turned often. One of my brothers has a chore to turn the compost twice a week.

Turning the compost can take him from three to ten minutes. Using a pitchfork to lift the material from the bottom of the pile and place it on top, continuously until the material from the top makes its way to the bottom since the material on the bottom decomposes much faster. Once the compost is ready to use we till it into the surrounding soil, a pronged tool

helps to mix this fertilizer into the garden soil. When the land is fertile it is time to put the plants in their holes, with a mixture of compost fertilizer, and untreated earth.

Once the maintenance to keep the garden healthy. To do this maintenance on a regular basis actually provides a place and sometimes strenuous activity to relieve stress. It can be very cathartic to take the time working in a certain area that needs maintenance. For instance, I enjoy sitting down in the dirt, and weeding. Being out in the sunshine, the fresh air, amongst the plants, and in the dirt, feels good. While my life gets crazy in a fast paced way, I am grateful to have a beautiful piece of land that is a peaceful scape place.

Our plants remind me of how important it is to notice the natural cycle of life. Life, death, and rebirth, is the natural cycle of all life on earth. A seed will grow into a plant that will one day die, to then be recycled back into the earth. Part of that natural cycle is eating! Having homegrown food as ingredients in a homemade meal is the ultimate reward for growing a fruit and vegetable garden. It feels like a luxury to enjoy fresh produce that is so rich in flavor. When I pick out ingredients for dinner, I take a basket and I go shopping for free in my backyard.

One of my favorite recipes is fresh tomato sauce. The recipe calls for tomatoes, onions, olive oil, garlic, parsley, basil, oregano, a bay leaf, and sugar. To make it, first steam the tomatoes to soften them. Then slice up the onions, crush the garlic, and brown them in a pan with the olive oil. After the tomatoes steam, they are peeled, crushed and added to the garlic and

onions. Oregano, a bay leaf, parsley, and basil are added to the simmering sauce. Finally, sugar is added to the sauce to neutralize the acid in the tomatoes.

The full aroma of fresh tomato sauce fills the kitchen where we stand shoulder to shoulder over the stove while the food simmers. My entire family expresses our gratitude for the rewards of our garden as we sit down for our meal. In the short time I have been growing a fruit and vegetable garden I have gained experiential knowledge that has inspired me to grow my own healthy food for the rest of my life. I am grateful for the family interaction, the physical activity, and the organic produce. Growing organic fruits and vegetables takes hard work, but the experience is deeply rewarding.