



Straw Bale Gardening:

Basics, Tips, Resources, Encouragement

ALISON GRIEGGS
 NMGRIEGGS@MSN.COM

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Conditioning Schedule: Time

Amounts for EACH bale

	Organic Fertilizer	Synthetic or Chemical Fertilizer	Water Until Saturated <1 gal. per bale
Day 1	3 cups Nitrogen	½ cup Nitrogen	Yes
Day 2	Skip	Skip	Yes
Day 3	3 cups Nitrogen	½ cup Nitrogen	Yes
Day 4	Skip	Skip	Yes
Day 5	3 cups Nitrogen	½ cup Nitrogen	Yes
Day 6	Skip	Skip	Yes
Day 7	1 ½ cups Nitrogen	¼ cup Nitrogen	Yes
Day 8	1 ½ cups Nitrogen	¼ cup Nitrogen	Yes
Day 9	1 ½ cups Nitrogen	¼ cup Nitrogen	Yes
Day 10	3 cups Organic Balanced Fertilizer	1 cup Balanced Fertilizer 10-10-10	Yes
Day 11	Skip	Skip	No
Day 12	Wait about 5 days to plant	Plant today	Water new plantings/Keep moist

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Planting: What to Plant

Tomatoes: 1-2 plants per bale

Peppers: 2-4 plants per bale

Squash: 2 plants per bale

Cucumbers: 2-3 plants per bale

Herbs & Flowers: great on sides



What Not to Plant

Some vegetables don't do well in straw bales. Corn is usually too tall and top-heavy. Potatoes, sweet potatoes, carrots, turnips, and other root crops may not do well due to the moisture. And clearly, avoid perennial crops because straw bales decompose so much.

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Maintenance

- Stakes/poles can support frost blanket early and shade cloth later—an added bonus in our climate.
- Treat bales like a hanging basket or a container.
Water daily at first, then go to twice a day (shorter periods) from mid-June thru the monsoon.
- **Fertilize** every 10-14 days while plants are young and weekly once they start bearing crops.
- Bale integrity—you may have to tighten the bales near the end of the season.

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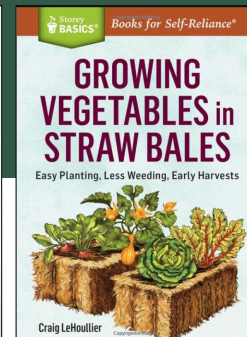
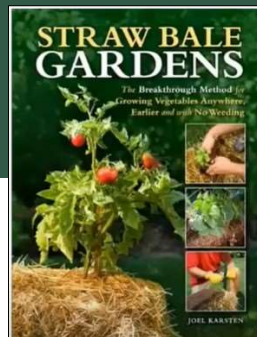
Resources for more info

Books by Craig LeHoullier and Joel Karsten are foundational.

“It turns out that bale gardening is a great option for providing food to families in third world countries. Some Asian countries burn rice straw off the fields after harvest, but Joel is involved with an organization teaching local farmers to bale the material instead. They’re also sharing seed saving methods.

“Poor families in these areas don’t need to spend money on tools or supplies, they use creative nitrogen options – like human pee – to condition bales and irrigate with greywater from cooking, bathing and washing. It’s this type of creative thinking that’s keeping many people fed in these struggling areas of the world, and that’s just one more reason that we can all feel so good about gardening.”

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Online Resources



- **Joel Karsten** strawbalegardens.com
- **Craig LeHoullier** video on "epic tomatoes and straw bale techniques" <https://youtu.be/3lxMQdDhapw>
- **Joe Lamp'I** joegardener.com/podcast/gardening-in-straw-bales/
- **Oregon State Univ** <https://today.oregonstate.edu/news/straw-bale-gardens-work-where-others-wont>
- **New York Times** nytimes.com/2013/03/21/garden/grasping-at-straw-a-foolproof-vegetable-plot.html
- **UC Marin County Master Gardeners** video "how to grow edibles in straw bales" <https://youtu.be/feNw8eN6KPw>

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