

HOW MUCH CAN A VEGETABLE GARDEN SAVE IN FOOD COSTS

Gail Langellotto, Statewide Coordinator of the Oregon State University Master Gardener Program, wrote a blog post a couple years ago summarizing studies regarding the savings a home vegetable garden can provide. Gail looked at 8 studies and summarized the results. Values were adjusted to 2012 values. Overall, gardens had an average value of \$0.74 per square foot of garden and a median value of \$0.62 per square foot. That would equal \$148 for a modest 200 square foot garden using the average value. Most of these studies included the cost of establishing the garden the first year. These costs would certainly be less in the years following. Also, interesting were the crops that provided the greatest return per square foot. Those crops were tomatoes, salad greens, beets, broccoli and potatoes. However, be sure to plant crops that will actually be eaten. Vegetables that will not be used are a waste of time and money. To see much more detail, go to Gail's blog post at <http://osumg.blogspot.com/2012/04/how-much-does-vegetable-garden-costsave.html>

Newer Fluorescent Lights Available for Indoor Gardeners

Many gardeners use fluorescent lights to start young vegetable and flower plants during the spring or to grow certain houseplants all year long. Traditionally, we have used fixtures with T-12 lamps suspended a few inches above the tops of the plants. However, T-12 lamps are fading away due to newer lamps that are a better choice for indoor gardens. These are known as T-8 and T-5 lamps. The number after the "T" refers to the diameter of the lamp in eighths of an inch. Therefore, a T-12 lamp is 12/8 or 1.5 inches in diameter and are what most people are familiar with. A T-8 is 8/8 or 1 inch in diameter, and a T-5 is 5/8 of an inch in diameter. So, does a smaller diameter mean less light? Not at all. In fact, the T-5 can be the brightest of the three. Another advantage for these newer lamps is they use less electricity per lumen. Our traditional 48-inch T-12 is rated at 40 watts. However, there are newer styles of T-12's that are 34 watts. The T-8 is rated at 32 watts and the T-5 at 28 watts. This sounds too good to be true. Are there drawbacks? Maybe so or maybe not. First is cost if you have to replace T-12 fixtures to convert to a T-8 system. However, newer fixtures may be able to handle either T-12's or T-8's. Therefore, if you purchased fluorescent fixtures in the last few years, check to see if they are rated for T-8's before replacing them. Note that lamp costs are comparable between T-12's and T-8's. The T-5 lamps are significantly more expensive and cost over twice as much as either a T-12 or T-8. The question becomes, is it worth it? If you have a T-12 fixture that is rated for T-12's only and are satisfied with your results, then maybe not. However, if you are investing in new fixtures or have fixtures that can use either T-12's or T-8's, then go with the T-8's. They will use less energy, last longer and provide more light.

Conservation Trees from the Kansas Forest Service

The Kansas Forest Service offers low-cost tree and shrub seedlings for use in conservation plantings. Plants are one to two years old and sizes vary from 5 to 18 inches, depending on species. Orders are accepted from now through the first full week in May each year, but order early to insure receiving the items you want. Orders are shipped from the second week of March through May 5. Approved uses for these plants include windbreaks, wood lots, riparian

plantings, wildlife habitat and Christmas trees. They may not be used for landscape (ornamental) plantings or grown for resale. All items are sold in units. Each single species unit consists of 25 plants. For example, a unit of Eastern red cedar has 25 trees per unit. Though a single species unit is most commonly purchased, four special bundles are also available including a songbird bundle, quail bundle, pheasant bundle and wildlife mast bundle. Tree planting accessories are also available including marking flags, root protective slurry, rabbit protective tubes, weed barrier fabric and tree tubes. If there have been problems with deer browsing on young trees, the tree tubes are a must. Order forms are available from the local Butler County K-State Research and Extension office at 206 N. Griffith in El Dorado. Order forms are also available on the Kansas Forestry Service website at https://www.kansasforests.org/public_saps/Welcome.aspx

Bird Feeding

Severe winter weather is not only hard on people but can be a life and death struggle for birds. Though birds require water and shelter, food is often the resource most lacking during cold weather. Many different bird food mixes are available because various species often prefer different grains. However, there is one seed that has more universal appeal than any other: black oil sunflower. If you are new to the bird-feeding game, make sure there is a high percentage of this seed in your mix. White proso millet is second in popularity and is the favorite of dark-eyed juncos and other sparrows as well as the red-winged blackbird. As you become more interested in bird feeding, you may want to use more than one feeder to attract specific species of birds. Following is a list of bird species with the grains they prefer.

- Cardinal, evening grosbeak and most finch species – sunflower seeds, all types.
- Rufous-sided towhee – white proso millet
- Dark-eyed junco – white and red proso millet, canary seed, fine cracked corn.
- Many sparrow species – white and red proso millet.
- Bluejay – peanut kernels and sunflower seeds of all types.
- Chickadee and tufted titmouse – peanut, oil (black) and black-striped sunflower seeds.
- Red-breasted nuthatch – oil (black) and black-striped sunflower seeds.
- Brown thrasher – hulled and black-striped sunflower seeds.
- Red-winged blackbird – white and red proso millet plus German (golden) millet
- Mourning dove – black sunflower seeds, white and red proso plus German millet.

Extended cold periods can also make water unavailable. A heated birdbath can be a tremendous draw for birds during times when all other water is frozen. Energy use is usually less than what most people expect IF the heater has a built-in thermostat. If you would like more information, Chuck Otte, Agriculture Extension Agent for Geary County has a series of backyard birding guides at <http://gearycountyextension.com/NRMW.htm>