

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

by Karen Smith McDonald/Class of 2010



Keyhole Garden

The Keyhole Garden concept comes to us from the continent of Africa, known for extreme droughts, recycling and repurposing most every material and the need to grow year-round sustainable gardens. It uses tin cans, cardboard, compost, fence wire, newspaper, old telephone books, junk mail, vegetable kitchen waste, rocks, broken cement, dry animal bones, manures, grass clippings and most yard waste.

This garden design would only need to be repurposed about every five years. The soil is self-enriching, has superior moisture retention, uses labor saving technology, is low-cost in its design, is user friendly to elderly and handicap gardener and enables year-round vegetable production. This might be a garden design worth consideration. As the name implies the shape of the garden is like a keyhole. It resembles a round raised garden that by design retains moisture, is layered with organic materials, and is self-fertilizing. If you are physically challenged, in a wheel-chair or need to sit while gardening, this is a garden design just for you as it is totally accessible on all sides.



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The keyhole garden has a basic pattern. You can be as creative as you want to be as long as you follow the basic pattern. You start off with a keyhole design. The walls can be wood, rock, broken concrete, cement blocks. Make the height of the keyhole garden to fit your needs. If you are wheelchair bound or need to sit, take a chair and a yardstick out there with you and get your own tailored measurements. Measure how far you can reach at a comfortable height from which to work. Otherwise make the walls at least 32" in height. In the middle you place your wire cage, plastic garbage can or receptacle that has holes drilled through it. We want to start a compost pile in this tower and we need air circulation. This is where all your plant roots will gravitate too. Water, water, and water...even use your grey water in the compost pile. Now put a cover on top of your compost bin like an umbrella or a tarp or plastic garbage bag to keep in moisture. You want to line the entire interior and walls of the keyhole garden with moisture absorbing material such as cardboard, newspaper, telephone books, junk mail. Now throw in old metal, tin cans, wood matches, nails, along with eggs shells for added minerals. Let's top that off with compost, topsoil, peat, vermiculite and mix it up well. Water, water, water the

entire garden. Got worms??? Add them in too! Let's add a frame structure over the entire keyhole garden, so if the temperatures fall or get too hot, we have a way of sheltering the garden from heat or cold because we can cover it.

Now, let's plant and rejoice that we have reduced, reused, recycled and created a garden that is low maintenance and will feed us. Whether you are five years old or have mobility issues or not, the Keyhole Garden is one that anyone can use and enjoy.

Resource: Karen Smith-McDonald, *Ozark Green Thumb* April 2013; and <http://www.texascooppower.com/texas-stories/nature-outdoors/keyhole-gardening>