

How to make a Keyhole Garden

LESOTHO STYLE



For groups and gardeners with a bit of unused space and a little ambition, keyhole gardens are ideal. They act like an organic recycling tank, using your food and garden waste as fuel to grow vegetables!

That's why they are part of Send a Cow training for people who receive help from us in Africa. When families are able to make the most of what resources they've got to hand, they can produce two or three times as many vegetables from their land. Simple techniques like this make a world of difference.



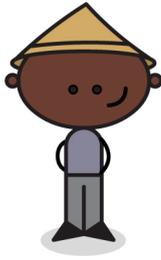
Mpho lives with his mum and grandma in Lesotho. They get lots of healthy food from their garden.

They have to put a net over their keyhole garden to protect it from hailstones! The people of their village come and visit to see how they grow so many good plants.



This group of schoolchildren from Morija Primary School have just built an impressive keyhole garden in their school grounds.

Soon, it will be bursting with life from all the vegetables that they have planted. And the crops will be used for school dinners!



TO MAKE ONE, YOU WILL NEED...



Garden soil, compost,



Well rotted manure and wood ash



Strong string



Large stones, bricks or logs



Straw or something similar



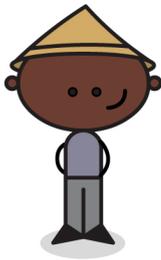
Broken lengths of pipes, or old cans



Worms!



Several sticks or 5ft garden canes



HOW TO DO IT - TEN STEPS

1

Find a space in your garden that's about 3m², with good sun, access to water, close to your classroom and relatively sheltered - clear it of weeds and dig it over.

2

Measure out the arm span of whoever will use the garden with some gardening twine. Halve this length and then add another 30cms – this is the radius of your garden (you can make any size you like, however!). Tie a stick to each end, plant one in the centre of your space and use the other end to draw your circle in the ground.

3

Draw out an entrance triangle to your keyhole from the edge of the circle to its centre, starting at a width of two feet.

4

Now take the sticks and create a basket by carefully hammering four sticks into a square with sides about 30-40cm long, make sure they are firmly in place. Next lash the other sticks horizontally along the base, middle and top of the vertical sticks to create your basket – it should reach a height of about 1.3 metres, or at a level that can be reached by the children for watering.

Line the inside of the basket with straw (to keep the compost from falling out) and then fill with a layer of cans, then soil/manure, straw, ash, soil/manure and so on, until the basket is about two thirds full.

6

You'll need to start by laying the largest stones around the perimeter of the garden, remembering to create the entrance to the basket. The first layer is made up of the cans or old piping for good drainage.

7

Now you can start filling the garden with the same layers as in the basket - the layers of mixed soil, then straw, ash, soil, ash and so on until the garden is at a height that your children can comfortably reach. Also, if you can include some worms, they'll help to circulate the soil. Whilst you are filling these layers in, you will need to add more layers of stone to your perimeter wall – effectively making a dry-stone-wall that holds in the layers. If your wall is leaning very slightly towards the centre of the garden you are less likely to have a stone fall on your foot in the months to come! The wall can be made sturdier by packing soil into the gaps. Remember to make sure that the soil goes into the garden in the order that it came out of the hole it came from n.b. the top-soil goes on top! You should end up with a mound, which slopes away from the basket – this increases the surface area that you can plant on.

8

Your keyhole garden is now ready for planting! You can segment the area into different crops to enable you to rotate them next season. Or, if you are a seasoned gardener, you will know how to do some intercropping and companion planting (*see our advice online*).

9

You can mulch with some wood chippings, old cardboard, leaf mould or something similar and put some colourful wool lines in to remind you what you've sown and to brighten it up a bit. To start with you'll need to water in the basket and the soil surface until the roots grow.

10

Now you can carry on your composting by adding uncooked, organic food-waste into your compost heap or straight into the basket in warmer months, using the entrance. Watering is best with waste washing up water (this contains phosphorous, which some plants really like). Putting a circle of carpet over the top of the basket will help retain heat and speed up the composting process a bit. The water will now permeate the garden and water the roots of your crops with lots of great nutrients.

Now, download a sign, other tips and advice from:
www.sendacow.org.uk/africangardens

You should have easy access to your garden and be able to reach in to plant, weed, and pick your vegetables.
Stick your sign in so that everyone can see what a great job you've done!