



Turning tomatoes upside down

Guelph man's gardening gimmick saves space, foils pests and cuts weeds

Kate Murphy

If pests and blight are wrecking your plants, it might be time to turn your garden on its head.

Growing crops that dangle upside down from homemade or commercially available planters is growing more popular, and its adherents swear they'll never come back down to earth.

"I'm totally converted," said Mark McAlpine, a body piercer in Guelph, who began growing tomatoes upside down two years ago because cutworms were ravaging the ones he planted in the ground.

He made six planters out of five-gallon plastic buckets, some bought at the Home Depot and some salvaged from the trash of a local winemaker.

He cut a two-inch hole in the bottom of each bucket and threaded a tomato seedling down through the opening, packing strips of newspaper around the root ball to keep it in place and to prevent dirt from falling out.

He then filled the buckets with soil mixed with compost and hung them on sturdy steel hooks bolted to the railing of his backyard deck.

"Last summer was really hot so it wasn't the best crop, but I still was able to jar enough whole tomatoes, half tomatoes, salsa and tomato sauce to last me through the winter," said McAlpine, who plans an additional six upside-down planters this year.

Upside-down gardening, primarily of leggy crops like tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers, is more common partly because of the ubiquity of Topsy Turvy planters, which are breathlessly advertised on television and have prominent placement at retailers like Walmart and Bed Bath & Beyond.

According to the company that licenses the product, Allstar Products Group in Hawthorne, N.Y., sales this year are twice last year's, with 20 million sold since the planter's invention in 2005.

Not to be outdone, Gardener's Supply and Plow & Hearth recently began selling rival upside-down planters.

"Upside-down gardening is definitely a phenomenon," said Steve Wagner, senior product manager for Plow & Hearth.



The latest gardening craze is upside down tomatoes. Horticulturists, agronomists and plant scientists are unsure whether growing them upside down rather than right-side up will yield better results.

The advantages of upside-down gardening are many: it saves space; there is no need for stakes or cages; it foils pests and fungus; there are less, if any, weeds; there is efficient delivery of water and nutrients thanks to gravity; and it allows for greater air circulation and sunlight exposure.

While there are skeptics, proponents say the proof is in the produce.

Tomato and jalapeno seedlings sprout from upside-down planters fashioned out of milk jugs and soda bottles that hang from the fence surrounding the Redmond, Wash., yard of Shawn Verrall, a Microsoft software tester who blogs about gardening at CheapVegetableGardener.com.

"I put one tomato plant in the ground and

one upside down, and the one in the ground died," he said.

The other tomato did so well, he planted a jalapeno upside down, too, and it was more prolific than the one he had in the ground.

While horticulturists, agronomists and plant scientists agree that pests and blight are less likely to damage crops suspended in the air, they said they are unsure whether growing them upside down rather than right-side up will yield better results.

"Growing things upside down seems like a fad to me, but I'm glad people are fooling around with it and hope they will let us traditionalist gardening snobs know what we've been missing," said Hans Christian Wien, a horticulture professor at Cornell University



in Ithaca, N.Y.

Judging from gardening blogs and websites, those fooling around with upside-down gardening are generally enthusiastic, particularly if they have planted smaller varieties of tomatoes.

"Bigger tomatoes are too heavy and put too much stress on the vine, causing it to twist and break," said Michael Nolan, an avid gardener in Atlanta, who has four upside-down planters in which he grows bushels of cherry and small pickling cucumbers.

Tomato varieties are labelled as either indeterminate or determinate, and horticulture experts recommend choosing indeterminate ones for upside-down gardens.

Determinate tomato plants are stubbier, with somewhat rigid stalks that issue all their fruit at once, which could weigh down and break the stems if hanging upside down.

Indeterminate types, by contrast, have more flexible, sprawling stems that produce fruit throughout the season and are less likely to be harmed by gravity.

In addition to plastic soda bottles, milk jugs and five-gallon buckets, upside-down planters can be made out of thick heavy-duty plastic trash bags, plastic reusable shopping totes, kitty litter containers, laundry hampers and even used tires.

McClatchy-Tribune

Watch your waistline — measure your tummy

As a personal trainer I am advising you of your right to live a healthy lifestyle by getting in your daily exercise and eating a balanced diet. You also have the right to remain unhealthy, overweight, weak and tired.

If you choose to remain unhealthy I guarantee you will have more body fat, weaker muscles, a bigger midsection and you will feel lethargic. It is your choice.

The factor stopping most of us from making the right decision is lack of motivation. We all want to be the best we can be and know what to do to reach our goals. The difficult part is following through.

Do not focus on weight loss. If you change your mindset and focus on getting healthy you will be far more successful. It is important to get baseline statistics to show why you want to get healthier. You can do a few simple tests to see how you 'measure up.' These body assessments will remind you why you want to make changes.

The best way to tell if your health is at risk is to measure your waist. Waist measurements are easy to do and may be a better



MARLA ARNDT
fitness bootcamp

predictor of your health risk than the body mass index (BMI). That's because BMI does not show where any extra weight is carried and does not distinguish between body fat and muscle. Extra girth at your waist is not likely to be muscle. Over time, your BMI may stay the same, but your waist measurement may change, indicating changes in your body composition.

A really simple way of knowing whether you have a healthy waist measurement is to take a tape measure and put it around your body at the level of your belly button. That number should be less than half your height. So, for my height of five feet three inches, my waist should remain below 31 inches. If the

tape measure shows a number greater than half your height, you might consider putting down the ice cream.

In men, a waist measurement of 102 centimetres (40 inches) or greater increases risk of developing health problems. In women, a waist measurement of 88 cm (35 inches) or more increases risk of health problems.

Taking your measurements will provide you with valuable information and should motivate you to make positive changes to reduce your risk of health problems. You do need a positive attitude. Think about what you have to change in your life to help you become healthier. It is easier to stay motivated when you make a plan. I can't emphasize enough to keep a health journal.

So get out that tape measure and empower yourself with information. Exercise your right to live better!

Guelph-based personal trainer Marla Arndt owns and operates Frameworks Fitness Studio. Reach her at www.frameworksfitness.com. Her column appears every other week.



Measuring your midsection is a good way to learn if you have a healthy waist.



THE ROTARY CLUB OF GUELPH

DREAM HOME LOTTERY 2010

Guelph Mercury Community Partnerships Program

EARLY BIRD DEADLINE IS FAST APPROACHING
JUNE 8TH AT 8PM

YOU COULD
WIN
\$543,000
DREAM HOME

PLUS OVER \$52,296 IN EARLY BIRD CASH & PRIZES

GET YOUR TICKETS NOW!

\$100 each or 3 for \$250

ONLY 8,500 TICKETS

GuelphDreamHome.com • 1-877-675-2399

Ticket purchasers/contestants must be at least 18 years of age. Only Ontario residents are eligible to win a prize. Draws monitored and audited by BDO Canada LLP, Chartered Accountants and Advisors. Rotary Club of Guelph, Ontario Lottery Licence No. 2640



R001695799