

Williams
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Keyhole Gardening Guide

Keyhole gardening refers to growing plants in a raised bed type of garden plot which is typically round with a notch cut out, thus making it resemble a keyhole. This type of gardening is especially popular in Africa, as it allows people to use less water and compost easily. It also allows people to grow food in a small space, as a typical keyhole garden is no larger than 6 feet in diameter. Keyhole gardens can also be made out of a variety of materials, from wood to stone to bricks, making it a great way to recycle materials while building.

A typical keyhole garden is made by mapping out a circle and removing a pathway that is wide enough for a person to stand, leading to the center of said circle. The perimeter of the keyhole can be built up to various heights, usually dictated by the material and goals of the plot. While some keyhole gardens are only the height of a single brick, others are waist height to prevent crouching while working. After the frame is built, a compost basket can be placed in the center, typically being made out of chicken wire. In this basket, scraps and organic material can be directly thrown and allowed to compost if desired. The garden bed is then filled, typically in a layered fashion as one would do with any raised bed, and soil is added on top. The soil should slope outward from the center compost basket so that nutrients from the compost basket can travel throughout the bed.

To care for a keyhole garden, simply garden as you typically would, but focusing on the compost bin when watering. This causes water to be retained in the compost bin and slowly seep out as the rest of the soil dries up. This attribute of keyhole gardens is what makes them great in arid regions.

In regards to the keyhole garden that has been added to the Communiversy Gardens, there are many modifications which change the way it will function in a few ways. First, it is a double keyhole “bowtie” shape (because of its large size) allowing for multiple people to plant and harvest at once. Secondly, it does not have a compost basket, although this can be added at a later time using chicken wire dug into the soil if desired. This omission is due to the new shape and the type of composting done at the Communiversy Gardens. Composting in the garden is done in a 3 bin system, so a compost basket for ‘household scraps’ is not necessarily needed. Because there is no basket system, plants can be placed in the center of the ‘bowtie’, and watering can be done more uniformly throughout the structure. The soil, however, is still sloped from the center, so watering can be done by standing in a cut-out path and focusing water at the center mound. This garden plot should be dedicated to perennial herbs which are compatible with one another, and compost should be added as necessary throughout the year.

Examples of Typical Keyhole Gardens:





Some Good Sources for Keyhole Garden Information:

<http://www.bigblogofgardening.com/build-keyhole-garden/>

https://bakerinstitute.org/media/files/page/4d152358/khg_card_final_english.pdf