

BACKGROUND AND ADVANTAGES

www.easygrowvegetables.com

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Why we developed the systems

My friends and I like to eat fresh, healthy, minerals-rich vegetables grown without artificial chemicals all year round. We live in sub-tropical Queensland with cool dry winters and long hot summers which can be dry or very wet. Temperatures can be high while insects, weeds and diseases are serious challenges. Growing vegetables organically in summer is difficult, but we have now done it over four summers with our Easy-Grow system. Others have tried it under even more difficult conditions. So we want to make the systems available to any-one.

Wicking

‘Wicking’ refers to the ability of water to ‘move upwards’ in most soils through capillary action. It is much like molten wax moving up in a candle wick, hence the name.

We use wicking by creating a ‘bath’ of about 8 to 15 cm deep, which includes water storage. In and above that we place 30 to 40 cm soil.

Close to the water table the soil is very wet; at 30 cm high it is only damp. This gives plants optimum growing conditions somewhere in the soil. Plants have water they can use even under the hottest and driest conditions.

Wicking systems

Wicking systems consist of a container or bed with a bottom that can hold water up to 15cm deep. At the bottom is a water reservoir that gets filled through a vertical inlet. The beds or boxes are filled with mixtures of local soils and compost, well-rotted manure or worm casts (worm manure). We add organic minerals and compost worms. On top of the soil we spread mulch to keep down weeds, evaporation and temperature, and to feed the worms.

We cover the boxes or beds with 30% shade cloth to protect against sun, wind and large insects. Easy-Grow systems can be Styrofoam boxes under netting on a table, a bed made from local stones under mosquito netting, or a number of beds within a 6m x 4m shade-house.

Advantages

Our systems provide us with fresh healthy vegetables virtually all year round at very low cost. How much we grow depends on how big the systems are and how hard we work them.

Weeding is minimal. The plastic keeps out the roots from competing plants and the mulch suppresses weed-seeds from germinating. We don’t have to kneel as the beds are 45 cm above the ground, some are higher.

We water only once every five to twenty one days, depending on the season, weather and crops. We can use automatic watering systems in summer to supply part of the needed water.

Wicking systems use minimal water because there is almost no evaporation or leakage into the subsoil. Clean and useful water is becoming increasingly scarce.

Once set-up the systems require little time. That means that we can go on holidays as our neighbours look after them willingly, in exchange for produce.

Feeding plants in these systems is essential as they produce large amounts of plant material. Feeding can be traditionally or organically, but must be in low doses spread over the crop’s life.

The systems cause almost no greenhouse gasses. Vegetables bought in supermarkets leave a long trail of those gasses behind that will be in the atmosphere for a long time. Ours don’t.