

Building a Keyhole Garden

The instructions to build a Keyhole garden are as varied as the materials you choose to build with. These guidelines are basic with most materials. Stones should be secured with mortar or mud, and wood needs to be protected from contact with the compost or soil.

1. Select an Area 10-12 feet in diameter that is flat and receives 7-8 hours of direct sun daily.
2. Measure a 6-foot diameter circle to define the inside wall of your garden.
3. Notch the circle (like cutting a wedge of pie) so you can access the basket at the center.
4. Construct the exterior wall about 3 feet high using rocks, metal, timbers or any material that can support the weight of wet soil.
5. Use wire mesh to create a tube about 1 foot in diameter and about 4 feet high. Stand the tube in the center of the circle.
6. Line the outer walls with cardboard and fill the garden area (but not the wire mesh tube in the center), with layers of compostable materials, wetting it down as you go. Fill the last few inches with compost or potting soil. The soil should slope from a high point at the top of the center basket downward to the edges of the garden.
7. Fill the center basket with alternating layers of compostable material, along with layers of kitchen scraps and herbaceous weeds that provide the plants with moisture and nutrients.
8. Water the center basket and the garden only when the plants will not survive without it. This forces the plants' roots down toward the center basket.
9. Feed the garden by adding more kitchen scraps, lawn clippings, etc., to the center basket.
10. Consider arching a framework of thin wires over the garden. During the hottest months, the wires can support a shade cloth, and in winter, plastic sheeting creates an instant greenhouse.
11. Enjoy the fruits (and vegetables!) of your labor.