

Specialized Garden Designs

Keyhole gardens



Keyhole gardens

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Gardeners will understand the concept of a key hole garden and when it is useful. They and will also practice building a keyhole garden.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Flipchart and markers
- Lots of high quality soil and compost
- Brick, stone or metal for the outer walls
- A sheet of wire mesh to create a cylinder about 30 cm in diameter or wood poles if wire mesh is not available
- Pegs and a string
- Stones, branches, twigs for the bottom of the garden
- Water
- Mulching materials
- Vegetable seeds and/or transplants
- Local tools such as spades, axes, and hoes



DURATION



KEY CONCEPTS

- Keyhole gardens require upfront time, labor, and materials and are best used when gardeners do not have arable land, so must create it.
- The plants in a keyhole garden are elevated, which makes them suitable for people with disabilities.
- Keyhole gardens should be used when gardeners can identify a challenge that can be solved by using the keyhole garden design.

TRAINING AGENDA

1	Is a keyhole garden right for you?	 DISCUSSION	1 hour
2	Building a keyhole garden	 PRACTICAL ACTIVITY	2.5 hours

1. Is a keyhole garden right for you?

INTERACTIVE DISCUSSION

GOAL OF DISCUSSION: Gardeners will learn what a keyhole garden is and if it is a suitable solution for their gardening problems.

MATERIALS NEEDED: Flipchart and markers

1. Discuss with gardeners the key characteristics of a garden bed.
2. Draw a picture of a keyhole garden and discuss each individual component of the garden design with gardeners. Ask gardeners to brainstorm how each component helps create a suitable environment for plants to grow.
3. Discuss with gardeners what materials and labor are needed to construct a keyhole garden and what maintenance they might need to be done the following season and each subsequent year.
4. Ask gardeners if the keyhole garden helps them solve any problems they may currently have with growing vegetables.
5. Finish the discussion by brainstorming a list of locally available materials that would be suitable for building each component of a keyhole garden.

KEY MESSAGES

ARE KEYHOLE GARDENS RIGHT FOR YOU?

Keyhole gardens require a lot of upfront time, labor, and building material. They are best used in situations where gardeners do not have arable land in which to grow vegetables. The plants in a keyhole garden are elevated above the ground, which also makes them suitable for people with disabilities. If keyhole gardens are built to the right height and contain a lot of rich soil and compost, they can produce an abundance of vegetables in a very small space. However they require yearly maintenance to repair broken walls and replace soil nutrients that were harvested. The central "compost pit" must be maintained and soil amendments added to counteract the soil settling over time. Prior to building a keyhole garden, evaluate gardeners' resources and access to land to ensure that other garden bed designs are not more appropriate. Check in with gardeners to confirm their interest in maintaining the keyhole garden structure throughout the course of its lifetime.

2. Building a keyhole garden

PRACTICAL ACTIVITY

GOAL OF ACTIVITY: Gardeners will gain practical experience of building a keyhole garden.

FACILITATOR PREPARATION: Identify a piece of land where the keyhole garden can be placed and gather gardeners there. Ensure that all building materials have been collected in advance. It is essential that soil used in the keyhole garden is of the best quality, therefore make sure enough organic material is available to properly fill the central circle and the inner layer of the keyhole garden. This might mean you need to start locating good soil or building compost piles many months in advance to prepare for building the keyhole garden.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Brick, stone or metal for the outer walls
 - A sheet of wire mesh to create a cylinder about 30 cm in diameter or wood poles if wire mesh is not available
 - Pegs and a string
 - Stones, branches, twigs for the bottom of the garden
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STEP 1. Gather gardeners at the site where the keyhole garden will be constructed.

STEP 2. Explain the materials gathered to the gardeners and what they will be used for.

STEP 3. Assign gardeners to different tasks and construct the keyhole garden.

STEP 4. Discuss with gardeners what should be planted where to make the best use of planting space in the keyhole garden. Plants that are more frequently harvested or are harvested quickly can be planted on the outer rim of the garden, whereas plants that require longer to mature can be placed towards the inner circle of the garden.



HOW TO

BUILD A KEYHOLE GARDEN

1. Determine a suitable place for your keyhole garden, taking into account hours of sunlight, access to water, and security of the garden structure.
2. Using pegs and string, mark two nesting circles: One 2 m (6 ft) in diameter and one 30 cm (1 ft) in diameter.
3. Mark out where the entrance of your garden should be, by leaving a wedge shape or "keyhole" that goes from the outside edge of the widest circle to the center. This allows gardeners to access the middle of the structure.
4. Create your outer structure by building a wall out of brick, stone or metal. Build up the wall until it is about 1 m (3 ft) high.
5. Use the sheet of wire mesh to create a cylinder about 30 cm in diameter, or make a rough basket cylinder from wood poles and dried grasses.
6. Set the cylinder in the center of the circle and put a layer of stones and twigs on the bottom for drainage.
7. Add a layer of wood ash to provide potassium to the soil and an extra layer of grass retains the moisture.
8. Add soil on top of the wood ash. Fill nearly to the top, making sure the soil slopes down from the center to the garden edges.
9. Fill the compost basket with raw vegetable scraps, coffee grounds, eggshells, grass, leaves.
10. Vegetables and herbs that will be picked often should be planted around the edges of the garden.
11. Plants that are harvested once, such as carrots and beets, should be planted toward the center.
12. Water the garden by pouring water into the composting cylinder.

