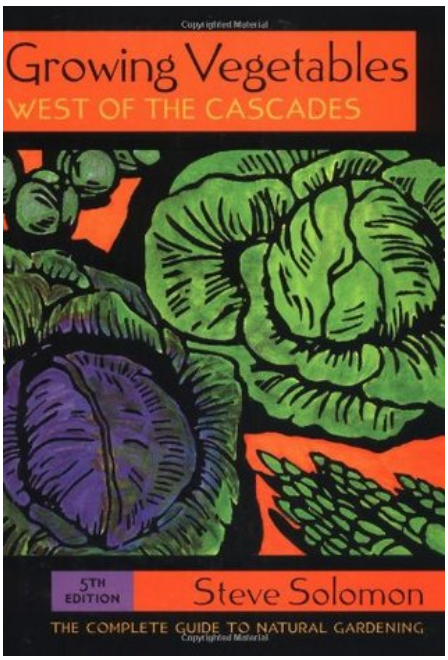

Growing Vegetables West of the Cascades: The Complete Guide to Natural Gardening

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Growing Vegetables West of the Cascades: The Complete Guide to Natural Gardening Steve Solomon This is the bible of vegetable gardening for anyone turning the soil west of the Cascade Mountains -- from Western British Columbia to Northern California. It includes the basics of soil, when best to plant, the art of composting, what varieties grow well here, which seed companies are reliable, information on handling pests, and an extensive section on the cultivation of each vegetable.

Growing Vegetables West of the Cascades: The Complete Guide to Natural Gardening Details

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From Reader Review Growing Vegetables West of the Cascades: The Complete Guide to Natural Gardening for online ebook

tonia peckover says

Well, Steve Solomon isn't going to win any nice guy awards - he can't quite keep his disdain for ordinary people out of his writing - but he has a tremendous amount of information to offer the Pacific Northwest gardener. Solomon points out that most general gardening books are written for eastern climates and their advice simply won't work in NW gardens. I had several OH. moments during this book, realizing why I've had such trouble getting things to grow in the past. I did get pretty bogged down with the overwhelming amount of technical details he offers, but it's also good to know that as I grow as a gardener, the information is on hand for improving my skills.

Patricia says

I. Love. This. Book. As you might have guessed by the title Solomon throughly explores how to grow things if you live west of the Cascade Mountains. Our climate over here is different than the rest of the US and so a lot of general gardening guides don't work for us, for instance, mulching with hay or leaves around a plant will bring the slugs a chomping.

While not a how-to guide, Solomon has many handy items included in this book: a month-by-month planting guide; advice NOT to do a soil test as well as the organic fertalizer he recommends you stirr up yourself and use; instructions for planting your garden so you never have to water it; a 4-5 year rotation of land to avoid insect infestations.

This guide will be by my right hand when planning my garden next year. The only drawback I could find was that reading it made me long for more ground in which to grow things.

Fernleaf says

A very interesting read, my copy is now heavily marked with bookdarts. Solomon challenges much conventional gardening wisdom with a book focused exclusively on the cascadia gardening region. Whereas many gardening books cater to the lowest common denominator (east coast/east of the mississippi) he zeroes in on the unique challenges native to the PNW, including our seasonal summer droughts, low summer temperatures, regional soil challenges, and some particular seed advice. He doesn't write it as a gardening for beginners book, he assumes you either already have some knowledge or are capable of further research into basic gardening techniques, instead his focus is really on understanding why and how to best grow the most nutritious possible vegetables for our region.

This book challenged many things I have read about in other gardening books, specifically permanent mulches, adding fertility through animal manures, and garden permanence. Although I don't agree wholeheartedly with all of his advice (in particular he is a proponent of the superiority of hybrid vegetable seed) a lot of his recommendations make good sense and he pitches his reasoning for them in a solid manner. I will definitely be modifying some of my gardening practices to more closely mirror his recommendations,

in particular watering patterns, transplant handling, and more aggressive plant spacing.

I haven't had the time to further research all of his claims, but he certainly seems to have a good background in both personal gardening experience and the trial grounds at territorial during the days he ran them. I'd like to look more into the particular problem of symphylans and also the soil-potassium cycle and our regional soil nutrient deficiencies.

Lise Petrauskas says

I love this book, but it can be a bit of a stumbling block if one is just starting to garden, especially if one is the personality type to become too focused on getting everything right the first time, or doing everything the most efficiently or just the way Steve says. The garden is a place where one must improvise and work with what one has, especially if there isn't extra money lying around infinite time and energy to be burned, both of which things Steve Solomon himself is very stingy about saving himself. I'm infinitely glad I spent so much time obsessing about this book and absorbing the information, but I'm also grateful to the eventual putting it into perspective that I was forced to make. My urban garden is on a much smaller scale than Solomon's, and he is so insistent on plants having a maximum of space, that I have had to reconcile myself to my lot, literally and figuratively, in order to make certain decisions about what to plant how close, etc.. In fairness, though, I have to say that whenever I have followed his instructions to the letter, for instance when I planted potatoes just his way and followed through with the gradual mounding technique he recommends the results were fabulous and have yet to be achieved again. This book is in all ways a thorough treatise on gardening frugally in the Pacific Northwest and is based Solomon's years of experience. Full of scientific, practical, and common-sense techniques for planting, raising, and harvesting a large array of vegetables, recipes for a cheap, mix-your-own fertilizer, practical advice on how to minimize water use, cut down on back-breaking labor, and most of all enjoy the fruits of one's labor, this is the cornerstone of my gardening practice. And, considering the potatoes I grew that magical year, I should perhaps get back to the basics in future!

Debbie Teashon says

Understanding our climate with mild temperatures and cold springs, and our typical soil types west of the Cascades, makes this an invaluable asset for the maritime NW gardener. For small garden spaces, I recommend this and Square Foot Gardening by Mel Bartholomew for the new as well as seasoned gardener.

Gina says

This has a lot of information, and the tone in which the knowledge is delivered can sometimes be a little off-putting, as he seems a little cranky. With many gardening book authors, their fervor for their methods come off as evangelical; but this is almost more of a "if you knew what was good for you" thing. (Which I am afraid sounds worse than it is.)

It is nonetheless very valuable to have a book tailored to the region, and one that goes into so much detail about available varieties, potential pests, and even how when you sow can affect flavor. The opening information on how soil health affects nutrition and flavor is really important.

So although I think my eventual path is going to be more of a mix of permaculture with some square-foot gardening, I can still see myself coming back to this book as a reference as I expand which vegetables I add to the mix. And even if he does not quite have the missionary zeal of Mel Bartholomew, Solomon's passion for good-tasting nutritious food comes through clearly.

SK Gaskell says

Steve Solomon's "Growing Vegetables West of the Cascades" is a really strong book for those that want to grow in a medium to large scale within the Pacific Northwest Region. As one of the founders of the Territorial Seed Company (a huge retail seed company primarily in Oregon, Washington and northern California that has both a "conventional" and certified organic line) he has many years of knowledge and experience to impart to readers.

Though much of his information is fantastic to read for novice to intermediate plant growers - subjects like working with the soil profile and also timing of plantings - I sometimes found his information to be far too opinionated, almost to the point of rejecting new practices that may be beneficial. Also, as an organic gardener myself I found some of his tactics too likely to employ conventional methods with one notable section suggesting that using roundup might be the only way to control some weeds and may be worth the problems it causes (it's an opinion, I know, and you can choose not to heed it but especially in riparian zones like much of the PNW I think it's inappropriate and shouldn't be suggested to novice gardeners). He puts practicality above many other things.

The long and skinny of it is that if you come from somewhere else this is a fantastic knee dip into the world of gardening here in the PNW. It covers soil biology, pest management, timing, preferred varieties, etc. and can be a really great place to start.

Sheela Word says

4.5 stars. Took me two years, but I finally finished it, by God. Surprisingly nice bedtime reading. Calming. And I've come to know Steve Solomon really well. I'm glad he's not my next-door neighbor, constantly frowning and shaking his head at my pathetic, ineffectual attempts to grow things. But I'm fond of him. And grateful for his expertise and thoroughness.

EVERYTHING is in here. Everything you could possibly want to know about Pacific Northwest vegetable gardening. How to buy seed, amend soil, space plants, fight pests, harvest, save seed, overwinter, dry-garden, etc. for any possible vegetable. And by vegetable, we don't mean "onion" versus "corn". We have our sweet Spanish, red onion, potato and pearl onions. Our Welsh and Lisbon overwintering scallions. Our Catawissa and Egyptian Walking top-setting onions. Etc. Etc.

Deducted half-a-star, because the organizational structure of the book was a little obscure to me. Maybe in the regular (non-Kindle version), it would be more obvious.

Olivia says

Some good advice. But dry and overly detailed. Textbook like. I did a lot of skimming.

T Hill says

Reasonably good advice for gardeners new to the Pacific NW. He explains why some techniques used in other parts of the country are less effective here and which crops you can grow in a 4 season garden here. (I've been gardening in this part of the state for about 30 years and agree with much of what he says.) His focus is on larger gardens (1/4 to 1/2 acre), but his methods would probably be useful to experienced gardeners with smaller lots or even container gardens. I was a little surprised that he doesn't encourage more experimentation with the types of veggies you can grow as we tend to have lots of micro-climates west of the Cascades. Gardeners with a lot of experience in this climate might be happier checking this one out of the library.

Shannan says

Excellent resource for the Pacific Northwest. I especially appreciate the detailed description of how to plant each class of vegetable and his honest assessment of how things will grow in our area. This is going on the reference shelf for much future use.

Cort Odekirk says

This books is not something you ever really finish reading, it's pretty much a guarenteed pick up each spring. Steve Solomon has an earthy style that makes the sometimes dry material fun and homey, but can come across as a bit preachy at times.

The tips are focuses for the Northwest, although that still covers a surprisingly wide range of growing zones. He's based in coastal Oregon, but his tips still are viable for most of the coastal Northwest. I'd take them as a starting point for more eastern areas.

That said, the tips on soil maintenance and general garden theory are spot on no matter where you grow.

Sasha says

What it boils down to is this: there are two books that address year round gardening in the BC/Washington/Oregon region, and this is the only one that is in print. (Winter Gardening in the Maritime Northwest is the other one, out of print and older. I haven't yet gotten my hands on it.) It's useful, its region-specific information basically makes sense. If you live in this region, it's an important companion to whatever other gardening books you may use, perhaps even if you aren't oriented towards year round gardening. But make sure you read a wide variety of gardening books to get more perspectives on the basic,

not-very-regional topics this book also addresses.

Beyond that, this book has some issues. First of all, there's a lot of snark in the author's writing style. It trickles through as he mentions the prejudices of experienced organic gardeners, and comes out in full as he writes about an old neighbor he once had who gardened very inefficiently, which inspired the author to eventually write this book. Apparently the fellow's produce was "pathetic" and he is described as whining. Then the snark goes back to being subtle. I get into gardening as a great joyful optimistic thing, and I appreciate writers who assume you will and should think for yourself--no 'side comments' needed. Forgive me if my review is not snark-free either, though I'll try!

Second, his way of approaching compost seems a little crazy to me. But let me start by saying that his essential point, that the rainy season in our regions leaches nutrients from the soil, is of course completely true. That's essentially the fact he's trying to work with, and it's useful for a gardener to see what his suggestions are. I would just also suggest that the gardener should not stop there--read more about compost from other sources, lots of other sources. Digest this information together and come up with a approach that makes the most sense to you, then experiment with it.

Another caveat is that a lot of sources seem to me to be crazy in their approach to compost, both with industrial style gardening and the most common sources of organic gardening. This includes this book but it's hardly fair to single this book out, and the author mentions some of these issues as well. We'll skip the problems of industrial style fertilizing/composting because you're probably already familiar with that and if not the information is readily available. But in common organic gardening, the approach is often to import as much compost as you can from outside the garden. In a normal garden, it's not usually not practical to be a 100% self enclosed system, where you get all your food out of the soil, and then you put back a healthy proportion of organic matter left over from the plants, and also safely put your human waste into the soil, though this may be a sustainability ideal. But it's still worthwhile to be skeptical about importing, for a number of reasons: (1) The less heavily you rely on importing compost, the more environmentally sustainable your garden will be, since you'll be doing less depleting of outside soils. We already often have food waste from our kitchen that didn't originate in our gardens, so that's a practical source. (2) Imported compost materials can be full of weed or invasive seeds, weird chemicals or salt in the case of seaweed etc, pesticides and other chemicals in the case of materials grown on land. Just because the supplier says they aren't doesn't guarantee anything nowadays. (3) When you import compost from a wild area, such as seaweed, you may be throwing off an ecosystem--not a big deal if few do it over a large area, but something to keep in mind. (4) Manure can be tricky to use in a balanced way, and may also contain chemicals or seeds--my parents import manure now and then, and then let it cure on the lawn before putting it in; one particular manure load left a big barren spot on the lawn one year, which is still there. Manure can be worthwhile, but it's perhaps overhyped in traditional organic gardening. (5) Importing compost materials may be an added expense, when you could just stick to kitchen waste and grow some of your own, ie corn stalks. So anyway, those are all details to keep in mind. Another issue is that often in gardening books there can be an overemphasis on nitrogen. This book has a nice treatment on the carbon and nitrogen ratio.

I'm trained in the biointensive method, which he criticizes on page 60. I'll just write a ~~quick~~ response here:

"If you are limited to a very tiny backyard, you may wish to produce every possible radish and head of lettuce regardless of the effort expended and the attention needed to get that last radish." Well yes, I'm limited to a small, though not tiny, back yard. Many of us are--it's not an unusual situation. My veggie space competes with fruit trees, unproductive plants, and social/recreational space in there--and let's not forget about compost space. I would love to be able to squeeze more berries in, and so on. It's really not *that* much more work compared to more common gardening methods, though I think it can be harder to learn at

first without some in person instruction. (Online videos may change that.)

"(1) I am concerned about the natural degredation caused by overuse of compost and manure." I don't know where he's gotten this idea that there's overuse involved. Let's set aside 'perfect biointensive' which would be a closed system mini farm like I mentioned above--few of us can do that anyway, so we'll just address biointensive as most people can and will practice it. Manure is normally not used since animals are not really included in the biointensive system--they could be, but they usually aren't, and there's little information on how to do so. Compost is not used any more than it is in any other vegetable garden. Granted, there's an emphasis on providing enough compost, whereas common organic gardening can either have insufficient compost or import way too much--anything goes. In biointensive, most of your compost comes from the garden. While the garden is more productive than a regular garden, as he points out below in (2) as another flaw, it's not *that* much more productive. Importing compost material is generally minimized aside from kitchen scraps. So this problem really doesn't exist. (He makes some good points about general problems with compost in our soil, with its low nutrient levels thanks to leaching from rains, but it's not like you'd want to stop using compost, nor does he recommend that.) Now, in biointensive there *is* a stronger emphasis on carbon in compost, and having more carbon coming out of the garden (ie from big plant stalks like corn). For relative sustainability and long term soil health, this is best. But beyond that it isn't very different from a garden which imports its carbon heavy or 'brown' compost materials.

"(2) Digging only 1 foot deep and using reasonable amounts of compost [see (1)] and complete organic fertilizer will result in a harvest nearly as large as double digging 2 feet deep and using many times more compost [again]." This is generally true. In some gardens, and with some soils, it will make a bigger difference over the first few years. If you have limited space to work with, a small-ish boost in harvest can be worthwhile. It will also improve the quality of your soil over the long term, so that it holds more organic matter, air and moisture inside it. And most of us want to reach a point where we no longer have to add fertilizer. But if your soil is of a decent quality already, you can do fine with just loosening the soil up with a garden fork and not double digging--you might want to plant your crops a little further apart if you do that. You'll be gardening in a more typical style with a more typical workload, but you'll still get the benefits of other biointensive techniques (transplanting, large beds, hexagonal spacing, etc).

"(3) Spacing plants as closely as generally recommended by intensivists makes plants overly competitive for light in the North, where we live." This one's a no-brainer--increase the spacing. You can still use a hexagonal planting, just plant them a little further apart. It's worth pointing out, though, that the numbers John Jeavons (the originator of the biointensive method and author of most books) comes up with are usually based on his research in Willits, California. The climate there is not *so* radically different from ours, except that their rainy season is much shorter and their summer drought much longer--but they still have both, as we do. Our tomatoes still grow in somewhat intense sun, but we need earlier varieties for the shorter season. Both of our winter spinaches are growing in the same drizzly conditions, we just have more time to eat spinach. Every region and micro-climate may need to experiment and try different spacings. Numbers may also vary for different varieties of plants, in some cases.

"(4) Establishing a double dug raised bed initially involves so much effort that the gardener must consider it to be a permanent raised bed in a permanent garden. But growing vegetables in one place for more than three years in our climate results in a lot of trouble that obviously does not occur in the climates where the authors of the book recommending this method practice it. (See the discussion of symphylans in Chapter 4.)" Man, I don't have the space to move my garden around every three years. I'm sure most don't. I wouldn't want to even if I had the space--that's a hell of a lot more work even if you aren't double digging! More effort to till, and more weeding. I'd rather let my garden go fallow for however long was needed, with either weed covers or mulch.

Finally, there are a lot of great things about biointensive which he doesn't criticize. It's a method that's worth looking at for everyone, though my complaint would be that it's hard to learn about usefully from books.

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Now for some minor points which may come in handy. p 103 "On anything but the most sandy soil, to be able to sow anything in early spring requires having already prepared raised beds for spring crops the previous autumn. Without this forethought you'll have to join the multitudes who will be waiting several more months for the ground to dry out enough to till." Not true unless you're working a huge area all at once. Prepping in the fall for spring planting is disadvantageous because the constant rain will compact the soil all winter+. Just cover the beds/area you're planning to work on with a sheet of long term reusable plastic. Or heck, a big wooden board if you've got it. Leave this on for a few days--if rains are substantial, perhaps a week. (At least that's what I remember.) When the soil is reasonably drier, take it off and dig away. No big deal.

His description of low irrigation planting is quite interesting. Not very useful for my smaller garden, but if I ever decide I'd prefer low yield I might try it.

I was skimming a bit, but I was a little disappointed that his section on winter gardening and protecting veggies didn't go into as much detail as I was hoping regarding frost vs temperature, and different covers. I'll reread though.

Sara Van Dyck says

Solomon has a lot to offer, but thus is certainly not for the average gardener. He does a great job of explaining the biochemistry of NW soils. However, his complex recommendations require a lot of time, research, and resources. Solomon suggests that people have a garden of at least 1,000 square feet, obviously not always feasible. More seriously, Solomon takes an extreme position, claiming in several places that by eating natural, nutrient-dense foods, people can avoid many modern ailments. One of his prime sources for this assertion comes from Weston Price,who visited isolated communities in the 1930s and reported finding many inhabitants with excellent health. However, this is hardly scientifically adequate. Beyond this, the book offers much helpful and sensible guidance. For instance, the chapter “How to Grow It” presents detailed information on specific species. While I personally found his material useful, I give this book only a 3 rating because non-devotee readers such as myself will have to steer around some of his assertions regarding health.

Erika RS says

Reading this book, you can tell that Solomon is something of a personality, but the book is packed full of detailed information about growing vegetables in the Pacific Northwest.

I appreciate how this book takes a scientific approach to gardening. In addition to telling readers what to do, Solomon tells readers why they should do them. He clearly believes that readers should have the background information to adapt their gardening practices to their particular location and problems.

There are many reasons why it is useful to have a book that focuses specifically on growing vegetables west of the Cascades. Because of our climate, we face a combination of gardening challenges that differ from the rest of the country (although any given problem is likely to be experienced elsewhere).

Our frequent rain fall washes nutrients out of our soil, so we need to use different soil amendments and fertilizers than in other parts of the country. Our summers are not as long or as hot as elsewhere, so growing heat loving plants such as egg plants, melons, and tomatoes takes greater care. We do not have long freezes in the winter so pests that are killed by winter in the east survive over winter here. Solomon addresses all of these difficulties.

One way that Solomon's book differs from other gardening books is that he does not advocate intensive gardening practices. He believes that these gardening methods, if used too long, will deplete the nutrients in the soil and effect the growth of vegetables. Solomon instead encourages giving vegetables lots of space to grow so that you harvest fewer vegetables that are larger and healthier. He also strongly recommends rotating between garden plots periodically to allow the land to rest and recover from vegetable gardening.

If you are serious about vegetable gardening in the Pacific Northwest, this book is a must read. It is full of practical advice, educational background material, and some good ol' gardening philosophy. Now I cannot wait until I have enough room to start a real vegetable garden. =)
