



Easy with **Growing** the Instant Organic Gardener Gardening through thick and thin

by Don Rosenberg

My approach to gardening focuses on simplicity: If growing vegetables is too difficult and takes too much time, few people will do it. The keys to success are to go small with a raised bed and to go weedless by filling your bed with high-quality – weedless – potting mix. Good soil means healthy plants, and weedless soil eliminates two-thirds of the day-to-day work in your garden.

Plant thick, harvest thinnings

The trick is finding ways to get a lot of productivity out of a small garden. Ideally, you want a lot of harvest over a long period. A great way to do this, especially with a spring garden, is to “thick and thin,” plant thickly and then eat the thinnings as an early harvest.

Lettuce is a good example. If you plan for one plant every 10 to 12 inches as the seed package advises, you’ll end up with a one-day harvest. You’ll plant the seeds, wait seven weeks, harvest all the lettuce and have a bare spot in your garden until it’s time to plant summer crops.

Instead of planting one seed, plant 36 seeds per square foot. They’ll sprout in a few weeks, producing a nice carpet of baby plants. As they grow to about three inches tall, they’ll start to crowd each other a bit. That’s when to start thinning with scissors. Clip every other plant above the root and put it in a harvest basket. (Pulling out the whole plant, roots and all, disturbs the plants nearby and also gets dirt in the lettuce!) If you’ve planted five or six square feet of dif-

ferent lettuce varieties, you’ll have enough organic baby lettuce leaves for an excellent salad every night of the week!

Ensuring an ongoing harvest

Wait a few more days until the remaining 18 plants per foot have grown to about four inches high. Again, snip every other one. There will be fewer plants, but they’ll be larger, yielding another nice bowl of salad.

With nine plants left, continue removing plants as they start to crowd their neighbors until you have selected five plants per square foot in an X pattern. Let these continue to develop, and pull an entire plant every evening until there’s just one left in the middle of the square.

That’s when you start the “North, South, East, West” method. Don’t harvest the entire plant; just take a leaf

from the north side of each plant on one day, another leaf from the south side the next day, and so on throughout the rest of the cool-weather growing season.

This method works with more than just lettuce; the same trick can be used with spinach, onions (harvest the young plants as scallions) and carrots. By planting thick and eating the thinnings, you’ll have an early – and ongoing – harvest all spring. □

Send your gardening questions to gardener@thecharlotteweekly.com.



Planting thickly and harvesting the thinnings will guarantee ongoing productivity from a small garden.