

Grow Your Own Greens with Salad Tables™ and Salad Boxes™

Introduction

Do you love the idea of eating home-grown salads from April through November? This fact sheet tells you how to build and use new types of container gardens that will enable you to produce fresh, flavorful greens near your backdoor.

The Salad Table™ is essentially a shallow wooden frame with a large surface area and a mesh bottom that allows water to drain. You can attach legs of any length you desire or set it on saw horses or other supports. It is portable, versatile, easy and inexpensive to build, and terrific for gardeners of all ages, sizes, and abilities. The Salad Table™ can be moved to capture sunlight in spring and fall and avoid the sun and high heat of summer. Best of all, you can garden comfortably at waist level and avoid problems with rabbits and groundhogs. The Salad Box is the baby version of the Salad Table™ and works especially well for kids and folks with small spaces.



Building a Salad Table™ (33" wide x 58" long):

- Untreated, framing lumber:
 - Two 2 x 4s, 10' long
 - Two 2 x 4s, 12' long
- 2 1/2" galvanized deck screws
- 3/8" staples
- Roofing nails - 1" long
- 3' x 5' roll of 1/2" mesh hardware cloth
(This is a galvanized wire mesh that comes in a roll.)
- 3' x 5' roll of aluminum window screening

Tools:

Handsaw	Square,
Hammer	Tin snips,
Drill	Staple gun
#2 Phillips screw bits	Leather gloves
Tape measure	

Directions:

- Cut (2) 58" sections from a 10' 2 x 4 (long sides)
- Cut (4) 30" sections from the other 10' 2 x 4 (cross pieces)
- Cut (4) 32.5" sections from a 12' 2 x 4 (inside support legs)
- Cut (4) 36" sections from the other 12' 2 x 4 (outside legs)

- Attach the long sides (58") to the cross pieces (30") using the 2 1/2" galvanized screws (2 screws/cross piece.) The two interior cross pieces are attached on center at 19 9/16" from each end of the long pieces (this makes for three equal sections that are each 30 in. x 17 5/16").
- Center the window screen on the outside bottom of the frame. Two people are required to stretch it taut and staple it to the frame bottom and sides using a staple gun.
- Center the hardware cloth over the window screen, pull it taut, and staple it to the frame bottom. Nail roofing nails around the frame for added support. Now make a diagonal cut with tin snips at each corner of the hardware cloth. This enables you to fold it up and onto the ends of the frame where it can be stapled and nailed. (It will be difficult to attach the legs properly if the hardware cloth and window screen are folded and bunched on the sides where the legs attach.)
- Build four sturdy legs by attaching each of the 32 1/2" legs to a 36" leg using the 2 1/2" galvanized wood screws. (See Figure 1, page 2)

- The table will rest on the shorter piece of each 2-piece leg. Attach the legs, 4 inches in from the four corners, by driving three 3" screws through the top of each leg and into the long side of the frame.

Tips:

1. Drill pilot holes with an 1/8" drill bit before driving in the galvanized screws.
2. Use a wood rasp to clean up rough edges after cutting your wood pieces.
3. Cover the edge of the window screen and hardware cloth on all four sides of the frame using duct tape or molding.
4. For a more attractive salad table, paint the exterior only with latex paint or an acrylic stain.

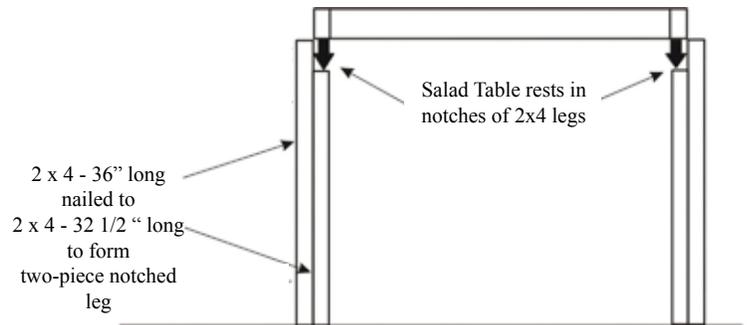


Figure 1. Salad Table on 2 x 4 Leg (End View)

Alternative construction methods:

1. The Salad Table™ can be made any width and length as long as the weight of the growing media, water, and plants can be supported.
2. You can substitute 10d galvanized nails for the screws. If you prefer, you can have your lumber yard or store make the required lumber cuts. You can substitute 2 x 6 boards for a deeper growing bed (good for snap beans), or 2 x 8 boards (good for peppers, determinate-type tomatoes, and bush cucumbers.)
3. Legs can be made from 4 x 4s (with a 1 1/2" x 3 1/2" notch cut out to support the frame) or you can set the frame on two sawhorses, or other supports. Attach sturdy casters to the legs to make it mobile!
4. You can substitute 4" lag bolts for screws for attaching the legs (2 bolts per leg). This allows easy removal of the legs if you need to break down the Salad Table™.
5. You can eliminate the hardware cloth and just use window screen for the bottom. Be sure to attach three 1 x 4 boards, each 58" long, over the window screen to prevent the bottom from sagging.
6. A hardware cloth bottom alone can be used but you'll need to cover the bottom of each section with newspaper or a paper grocery bag to prevent the growing media from sifting out.
7. You could make the frame with one divider instead of two.

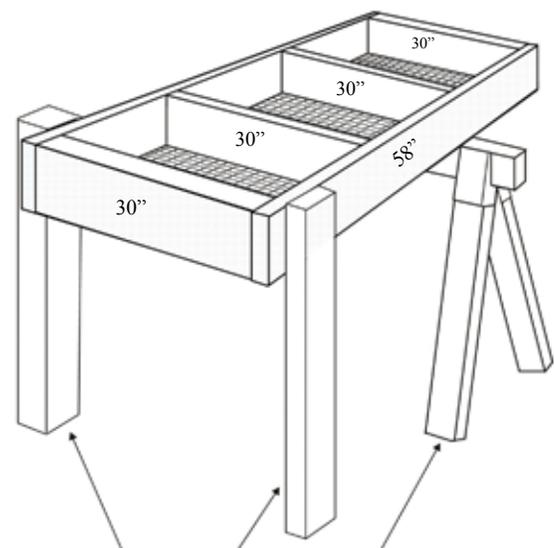
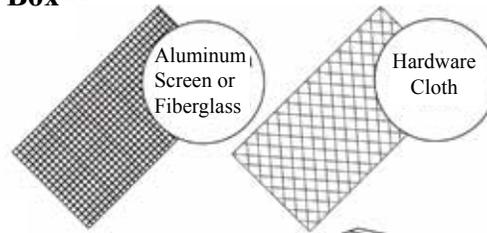
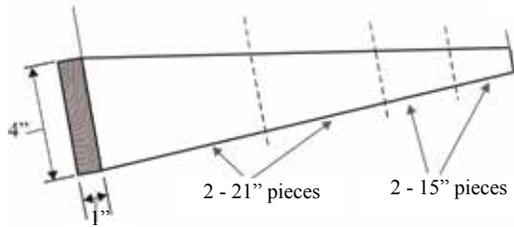


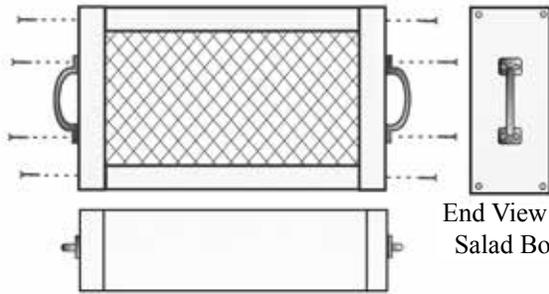
Figure 2. 4 x 4 legs or 2 x 4 legs or sawhorse support options shown in perspective view



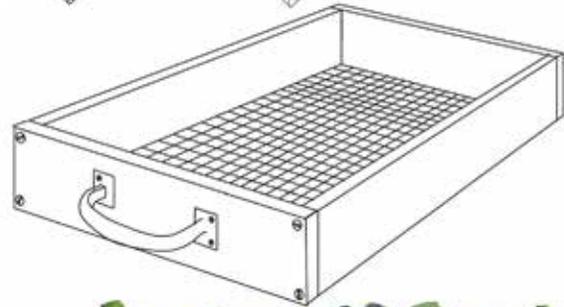
Salad Box™



Top View of Salad Box



Side View of Salad Box™



Building a Salad Box™:

1. Cut one 6' pine or cedar board (1 x 4) into four pieces- (2) 15" pieces and (2) 21" pieces. If using pine, ask for "clear" or "#2"; the latter is less expensive. Use a wood rasp to clean up rough edges after cutting your wood pieces.
2. Use 1/4" long galvanized screws to attach one long piece to the two short pieces. Repeat with other long piece. Drill pilot holes with an 1/8" drill bit before driving in the galvanized screws.
3. Lay aluminum window screen over the box and cut it so that the window screen is even with the box ends (short pieces) and extends over the edge of each long piece by 3 inches on either side. Staple it tightly to the box bottom.
4. Repeat the same procedure with the 1/4" mesh galvanized hardware cloth, except that you should cut it so that it only extends 2 inches up the sides (long pieces) on each side. Staple to the bottom and also the sides. Then, fold down the window screen over the hardware cloth edge to make a seam and staple securely.
5. Attach handles for ease of carrying. When filled with moist growing medium and plants, the box weighs about 12 - 15 lbs.
6. Apply an acrylic stain or latex paint to the exterior only, to extend the useful life.

Getting Started: Location, Tools, Supplies

Location is one of the keys to getting the most from your new container gardens. Select a convenient spot close to your home and a water source. The ground should be level;

otherwise water will pool in the corners of the frame. Select the sunniest spot for April-June 15, move your garden to a shady spot from June 15-Sept. 15, and then back to full sun from mid-Sept. through November. Salad greens will grow best with maximum sunlight during the cooler spring and fall months and light shade during the heat of summer.

The only items you'll need are seeds, growing media, fertilizer, scissors, and a watering can, or hose and nozzle.

What Can I Grow??

- Broccoli family-arugula, kale, mustard greens, radish, broccoli raab, mizuna, komatsuna
- Beet family- spinach, chard, orach, beets
- Lettuce family- lettuces, endive, escarole, chicory
- (Note: 'Deer Tongue', 'Red Sails', 'Bronze Arrow', 'Jericho', and oak leaf types are good for summer.)
- Parsley family- chervil, parsley, cilantro
- Mint family- basil, thyme, anise hyssop
- Other crops- leafy amaranth (callaloo), sorrel, purslane, corn salad (mache)

Growing Media

Your choice of growing media is very important because your salad greens are dependent on a relatively small volume of growing medium (only 3" deep!) Unlike their cousins growing in garden soil, containerized plant roots cannot grow around obstacles or mine the soil far and wide for nutrients and water. Growing medium has three main functions-

1) supply roots with nutrients, air, and water, 2) allow for maximum root growth, and 3) physically support the plant. Your growing media should have large particles with large pore spaces between the particles. This will make it light and fluffy (well-aerated) encouraging fast seed germination, strong root growth, and good water drainage.

- Fill your table or box with 100% soil less growing media (contains peat moss, perlite, and vermiculite), or a 50-50 mixture of soilless growing media and compost.
- Always pre-moisten soil-less mixes containing sphagnum peat moss.
- Soil-less growing media will settle quite a bit because of the large pores.
- Avoid garden soil because it is too dense and contains weed seeds.
- It's best not to re-use your growing media a second season for the table or box. Weathering will cause particle size to decrease, leading to poor aeration and inhibited root growth. Instead, spread the old growing media around garden plants.

Fertilizing

Commercial growing media and compost do not contain enough nutrients to produce high yields of salad greens over a growing season. Incorporate a dry fertilizer into the growing media—one that contains nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium. If the growing mix used is 50% compost, reduce fertilizer amount by 1/2 and don't fertilize until plants are up and growing. Examples are cottonseed meal and slow-release fertilizers such as Osmocote. These products will provide nutrients for many weeks depending on the nutrient content, weather, and crops grown. Fertilize according to label directions. Liquid fertilizers, like compost tea, kelp and fish products, and soluble "plant foods", are also suitable but will need to be applied more frequently than the dry fertilizers.

How to Plant

- Fill your frames with growing media and level it off (don't pack it).
- Make shallow furrows across the length of a section. Furrows are spaced 4"-5" apart.
- Sow seeds 1" apart in the row and then cover very lightly with growing media.

- The seeds of most salad greens will germinate in 2-4 days. It will take longer when growing media temperature is below 50° F or above 80° F.
- A floating row cover can be draped over the frames to promote faster plant growth in spring and fall. The cover raises temperature and humidity and protects plants from wind damage.

Watering

In the beginning, water only when the growing medium feels dry. After the plants are up and growing well the Salad Table™ will need about one gallon of water daily, either from a watering can or a nozzle attached to a hose that delivers a soft water spray. The Salad Box™ requires about one quart of water daily. Less water is required during cool, overcast weather. Never use hot water from a container that has been sitting out in the sun.

Continuous Planting and Harvesting

- Sow salad greens continuously from late March through the first week in October.
- Salad greens will grow 4-6 inches in height in 25-40 days, depending on the crop, time of the season, and weather conditions.
- The "cut-and-come-again" harvesting method is very efficient. Use scissors to cut all plants close to the growing media level. The plants will re-grow and can be harvested again. Sometimes it is possible to get a third cutting.
- One Salad Table™ will produce 16-32 oz. of greens from a single cutting.
- When plants become weak, bitter, and unproductive they can be "turned under" or pulled out by hand.
- The growing media can be replenished and fertilized, if necessary, and the next crop is sown. The Salad Table™ can produce three crop cycles between late March and November.
- An alternative harvesting method is to thin plants so they are spaced 4-6 inches apart and harvest outer leaves or entire plants.

3/2007; revised 3/2009, 3/2012

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