Published on *Kitchen Gardeners International* (http://kgi.org)

Hali'imaile Community Garden Sows It Forward and Goes Food Self-Sufficient

Sun, 04/28/2013 - 18:13 -- haliimailegarden

Hali?imaile Community Garden recently received a grant from KGI?s Sow It Forward Grant Program. We are very thankful and have put the funds to good use around the garden! Much Mahalo (?thanks? in Hawaiian)! One recent program is our new Goodwill Garden, a space of 3 plots where we grow food specifically for donation to Hale Kau Kau (?House of Food/Meals? in Hawaiian), a local program that feeds a hot meal to the hungry every night of the week.

The mission of Hali?imaile Community Garden is to build community around food self-sufficiency. While most of us identify with community building and know how to go about it, food self sufficiency is a bit more evasive.

Being food self-sufficient means being able to supply food for your own and/or your families own needs without external assistance from grocery stores, farmers markets, and other food distributors and retailers. Most gardeners plant a crop and when it?s time to harvest, they have more of one or two things than they know what to do with and little variety. In between, there is nothing and food must be bought at the store.

With careful planning, it is possible to reduce and/or eliminate your fruit and vegetable purchase while eating a wide abundance of fresh, organic fruits and vegetables that would escape possibility with even the most generous food budget.

While being food self-sufficient is a big undertaking, it need not be difficult. In fact, with some practice and experience it becomes an automatic routine that is an enjoyable part of life where hands are turned to the soil and nourishing plants are cared for and lovingly tended in a relaxing and nurturing space.

Fortunately, we can grow all year in Hawaii, so we don?t have to think about the complexities of canning and storing sufficient supplies for the winter. We only have to figure out what we would like to eat each week, figure out how much space is required, plant enough to provide the right amount of food for our needs, and plant routinely to ensure a continuous supply.

One standard 10? x 20? plot at Hali?imaile Community Garden is sufficient to provide a continuous supply of most vegetables for one person, while community herbs and fruit trees supplement remaining produce needs.

Here are a few simple steps to get started:

Plant What You Eat ? It?s fun to look at heirloom seeds, and try different gardening principals, but when it comes down it to feeding yourself what really matters is maximizing production in your space. If you like to experiment and try rare plants, consider dedicating one small area of the garden for this while you produce routinely consumed food in the remainder.

Plant Continuously ? If you want to harvest and eat every week, you will need to plant regularly. Many crops that are quickly harvested and needed weekly can be planted in succession, planting a row or bed every 2-3 weeks so that a new crop is continually available. These crops include things like lettuce, radish, and spinach. Some longer lasting plants like chard and kale allow you to remove outer leaves while the inner leaves grow in, thus can be planted every 2 to 3 months. The new crop should be planted in another bed or row of the garden early enough so that when the last crop is finished, the new one is ready. Other crops can be grown periodically and harvested and stored several weeks or months while the next crop is growing; these include beets, carrots, onion, and potato.

Grow with the Season - While we have mild winters in Hali?imaile, we definitely have crops that flourish either in winter or summer. While a summer crop of tomato may produce more tomato than your family can consume, the same crop planted in the winter may produce little to nothing. Consider planting heat loving crops like tomatoes, peppers, summer squash, and corn in May for a nice summer crop and turning to colder weather vegetables such as spinach, cabbage, and cauliflower in the winter.

Be Adaptable ? Sometimes things are out of our control. An aphid infestation may ruin a crop before it can be saved. Succession planting keeps favorite vegetables coming in regularly. Consider floating row covers to ward off pests and limit excess summer sun with shade cloth. Check plants weekly for signs of pests and stress.

Be Consistent ? Consistency is key when gardening for food self-sufficiency. Commit to spending at least half a day in the garden every week. Let?s face it; if you?re not in your garden to harvest at least once a week, you can?t be eating in a self-sufficient manner from it. We all have other obligations to meet, so reserve a regular gardening time on your personal schedule every week to weed, trim, plant, and harvest.

Keep Records ? It may seem overbearing, but keeping track of what was planted when and whether you ran out or had excess can be immensely helpful when determining when to seed the next planting. There is no tried and true method as we all eat differently amounts and types of food based on our personal dietary habits, time dedicated to food preparation, and preferences. Keeping a journal can not only help with quantity, but also with determining which variety of seeds does best or is most enjoyed by the family.

Let?s take a deeper look at planting continuously. Succession planting is an agricultural term for a planting method that increases crop availability and makes use of space through efficient timing.

Let?s say you like to eat salad every night. How many heads of lettuce do you need to eat the sized salad you want for each member of your family. Take a look at your grocery purchases and determine what you usually buy each week. Chances are you buy less than you?d really like due to the high cost of food. What do you really need?

Once you?ve determined the number of heads of lettuce you need, take a look at the seed packet to determine how long the crop needs to grow to reach maturity. Most lettuces require 4 ? 8 weeks to reach maturity.

So you picked a variety that matures in 6 weeks and you use 6 heads of lettuce a week. To ensure a continuous supply of lettuce for your family, you would want to plant a row of 6 heads of lettuce now, and 6 more heads every week. In 6 weeks, you will harvest the first row. As long as you plant a row of 6 heads of lettuce each week, you will have 6 heads to harvest each week. It?s that simple.

At first, working out the spacing may leave empty rows. Once you harvest the first row, if you immediately

plant another row where you harvested the last one you will have a total of 6 rows of lettuce planted at all times that provide you with weekly lettuce. But, remember to rotate the location of crops from time to time also.

What else do you want to eat? How much of it do you need each week? Now lay out a map of your garden and plan space for each of theses items so you can begin succession planting. Keep in mind some crops may be harvested less frequently. Carrots, for example, hold in the fridge for several weeks, so you might plan your succession planting so that there is a harvest of a one month supply of carrots once each month. This will cut down on the weekly labor to plant, harvest, and wash your food.

Are there other variables? Of course!

One variable here on Maui is our colder winters and warmer summers, even though the weather is mild all year. Lettuce matures faster in the summer, so you might only need 4 rows. Yet in the winter it takes longer to mature, so you might increase the number of rows. If you find that you have extra or run out, make a note so you can adjust as you go and plan better the following season.

Another variable is unexpected damage from pests, wind, heavy rains, or irrigation problems. While it seems easy to plant and leave things to grow, frequent monitoring is essential to avoiding pest damage and irrigation problems. Checking on the garden twice a week is usually sufficient to spot and take action to correct these problems.

A good rule of thumb is to always plant more than you really need. The gardener in the above example might plant 8 ? 10 heads of lettuce a week, rather than the 6 they need to put food on the table. This way when the potato bugs chew at the root of a few heads of lettuce, there will be enough other heads of lettuce to keep salad on your table. And if all grows well, you?ll just have extra to share with neighbors, coworkers, and friends. The food bank is always looking for fresh produce as well.

As you can see, food self-sufficient growing requires your presence at least once a week, not only to harvest your groceries for the week, but also to plant the next set of seeds and starts, weed, and check for irrigation and pests. For a standard sized plot at Hali?imaile Community Garden, this can be done easily in 2 ? 4 hours a week once everything is established.

For more information about Hali?imaile Community Garden, please visit our website at http://www.haliimailegarden.com/ [1]

Image (optional):

Free tags:
Gardening [2]
food self sufficiency [3]
hali'imaile community garden [4]
Type:
how-to [5]
Topics:
community gardens [6]
Sow It Forward grantees [7]
Group content visibility:
Use group defaults

Source URL: http://kgi.org/blog/haliimailegarden/haliimaile-community-garden-sows-it-forward-and-goes-food-self-sufficient

Links:
[1] http://www.haliimailegarden.com/
[2] http://kgi.org/free-tags/gardening
[3] http://kgi.org/free-tags/food-self-sufficiency
[4] http://kgi.org/free-tags/haliimaile-community-garden
[5] http://kgi.org/blog-type/how
[6] http://kgi.org/topics/community-gardens
[7] http://kgi.org/topics/sow-it-forward-grantees