


Mel Bartholomew

# Cash from Square Foot Gardening

Companion  
to  
PBS TV Series  
"Square Foot  
Gardening"

 Storey Publishing

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# Cash from Square Foot Gardening

by Mel Bartholomew



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# Do You Really Want a Part-time Business?



Anyone who picks up this book is going to say, "Sure, I'd love to have a part-time business. Why, I can picture it now — my very own piece of the American dream. I'd be my own boss, with no one to answer to, no one to take orders from, no one to tell me what to do or how to do it. And, to top it off, I'd have a separate source of income. This could mean financial security and, with a lot of hard work and a little luck, financial independence.

"Think of all the things I could buy with that money, of all the places I could afford to visit."

If you'll come down to earth for just a minute, I'll repeat the question: Do you *really* want a part-time business? I mean, *really*. Are you willing to spend the time and effort necessary to make it work? Can you discipline yourself so things will get done without a boss checking up on you? Do you have the "stick-to-itiveness" to give your part-time business attention long after the first flush of excitement fades? It's like adopting a new pet: someone will have to feed and bathe it, train it, take care of it when it's sick, let it in and out of the house — all the things we don't think about when we're cuddling it on the way home from the pet shop.

If you're willing to put in the time and want to earn extra cash, then I'll show you how to start the perfect home business. I'll explain in detail how you can earn several thousand dollars a year working in your spare time (just a couple of hours a day) right in your own backyard.

And, what's more, you'll get paid for doing something you love to do: garden. It doesn't matter whether you're a beginner or an expert,

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young or old. whether you live in the city or the suburbs, own your own home or rent an apartment, live in the North, South, East, or West, this program works everywhere and for just about everyone.

### **You Decide the Terms**

I'm going to show you how to start a part-time business on *your own terms*. In other words, you will be the boss. You will decide how many hours you want to work. You will choose the days of the week and the times of the day. You will decide how hard you want to work. Just think, instead of accepting a part-time job on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday nights from six to eleven. when they want you and having to do whatever they want you to do. now you can be the boss and make the decisions. In effect, you can write your own ticket to freedom and happiness.

And if, after starting, you aren't making enough money and want to expand, there's no problem. You can spend as much spare time as you desire with direct, profitable results. On the other hand, if you find yourself spending more hours than you really want to, it's just as easy to cut back to a more comfortable level.

If you find it hard to imagine getting paid for something you do for enjoyment, imagine harder. Believe me, you will soon get used to the idea of earning money for something you love doing. Soon, with a little effort and direction, you will be turning your spare time into cash — big cash.

<b>Why Square Foot Gardening Is the Ideal Business</b>	
Close to home	Flexible hours
Little cash required	No expensive equipment
Enjoyable	Easy to manage
Run business yourself	Few supplies needed
Product is high in demand	Profitable
Little waste	Uncomplicated

"But I have no spare time," you say. Non-spare time. Pick up any magazine—especially women—and I guarantee you'll find an article on spare time. Some will advise you to set aside three or four days a week; some will advise you to set aside your day to pursue a special interest; some recommend two or four fifteen-minute breaks during the day for meditation. All this can be done without interfering with your schedule or your productivity. In fact, it's supposed to increase your production by giving you a new lease on life. Your business can be handled that same way, and if you have a few hours a day everyone has available— you know, after work, after dinner, or even later in the evening when you need it.

In fact, with a cash garden, you don't have to set aside a day. Some people set aside two or three days a week; others use their weekends. Remember, you're in charge, and it's up to you to decide how you want to divide your time.

## **Tax Advantages**

Your part-time business will also bring you a number of tax advantages at the end of each year (more accurately, around April 15th). There are several big income tax deductions. The federal government doesn't allow, but actually encourage you to deduct for the expenses of running your business. A portion of these expenses include: depreciation, repairs, insurance, and gas; garden tools such as shovels, rakes, peat moss, pails, pots, planting six-packs, vermiculite, and so on; special clothing such as gloves and boots; harvesting equipment; containers; electricity, water...why, even the supplies you buy can be deducted. In addition you'll even be able to deduct equipment such as a calculator and a typewriter.



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deductions on your return, you have to earn a profit in two out of every five years.

But you're going to do better than that, I just know it. I am going to show you how to have a profit every year.

### Your Qualifications

Are you qualified to run a part-time business?

First of all, don't get scared and jump to the conclusion that you aren't qualified. Read on and let's see whether any fears you might have can't be easily resolved.

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## THREE REASONS MOST NEW BUSINESSES FAIL

Reasons for Failing	How About Cash Gardening?
1. Money: Starting costs too high; not enough money coming in.	Starting costs as low as \$50.
2. Lack of experience or ability.	Square foot gardening is so easy a beginner becomes an expert in no time at all.
3. Lack of business the first year.	This method assures a continuous profit before you start; your customer will buy everything that you can raise.

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Most people say at first, "But I've never run a business. I wouldn't know the first thing about how to go about getting started, how to set it up, or even how to keep it going."

Not true. All of us already run businesses—our own personal businesses, our personal lives. You buy things every day, paying in cash or by check, you charge things and pay when you get the bill, you sit down once a month to look over all those bills and decide which ones to pay now and which ones to hold off on, you mail-order clothing or gifts, you plan meals in advance, you even make big decisions about vacations, make the reservations and then carry them out. And whether you're on a vacation or a quick jaunt to the local shopping mall, you're continually making decisions on where

### 4/Cash from Square Foot Gardening

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to go, whom to buy from, who can give you the best service or products for your money. Every time you eat out, you decide on where to go, what to order, whether the bill is correct, how much to tip. Don't tell me you can't handle a small part-time business. You're doing it right now.

### **What's Involved**

Now that you're no longer worried about being qualified, let's go on to the next question: what's really involved in a part-time business? The answer is there are a lot of things, just as in daily living. If you look at each one separately, one at a time, they're just a lot of simple steps. When you put them all together, they become the daily functioning of a business. Even initial establishment is nothing more than a step-by-step process of recognizing, evaluating, deciding, and then acting. I'm going to take you through each step of the cash gardening business. By the time you finish this book, you'll know all there is to know about it. You'll just have to make slight adjustments for your area, your situation, and your desires.

Ask yourself these questions:

"Do I really want to earn extra cash?"

"Do I enjoy gardening?"

If your answers are "yes," the rest is easy. You have to be serious and willing to apply your full talent, interest, and enthusiasm. Of course, there are bound to be some slow or discouraging times when you feel like giving up, and for these you'll need that "stick-to-itiveness," some determination to get over the rough spots.

Any business requires time, too, and you must be willing to give it that time, especially at first. There will be times when everyone else is off playing and you have to tend to business. At these times, try to remember it's not really business, it's just your old hobby, gardening. You will want to keep adequate records, invest the necessary time on a fairly regular schedule, and be determined to do a good job.

### **Good Boss Needed**

Whether you can be a good boss, much less your own boss, is a question you'll soon be able to answer. As the boss (that's you), you'll want to insist your employee (you again) is on time, productive, knowledgeable, honest, diligent, friendly, and trustworthy. If your employee isn't, it's your job as boss to point them out and to help train that person to do better. Of course, the first step is to recognize that there's something lacking before you can point it out

or help correct it, and sometimes that's very hard when you're dealing with yourself. We don't often recognize our own flaws. They just don't seem to show up in a mirror. You have to be constantly on the alert. One rule of thumb is to ask yourself, "If I hired someone and this is what he did, would I be satisfied?"

### WHEN TO START

A good thing about the cash garden business is that you can start at any season of the year.

If it's winter, you should plan, organize, buy supplies, and sign up your buyers.

If it's spring, you should do all of the winter steps and start planting.

If it's summer, you should gradually convert your garden to a cash garden, and plan on going bigger next year.

Fall is the best time to get your soil and new garden layout ready. It's also the best time to sign up buyers.

Now is the time to decide how much time and energy you want to devote to this new business, and how much space you have available.

### Is It Worthwhile?

Are you asking yourself, "Will it all be worthwhile?" The answer, without question is going to be "yes." Just think of the pride and self-satisfaction you'll have in becoming your own boss — something everyone desires but few actually accomplish. The rewards in self-esteem alone just can't be measured. It's a chance that doesn't come along often; for some people, not once in a lifetime. And the best part is that you don't have to quit your job. No big financial risks, no moving to another state, none of the headaches normally associated with a career or job change. Yes, it will all be worthwhile — if you want to gain control over your financial life by producing some extra income, if you're willing to be your own boss, be independent, and shape your own future. And you'll also be helping others by providing freshly grown, succulent vegetables — a direct link to a better and healthier way of life.

People will even live longer because of you. That's really a worthwhile accomplishment. Regardless of your present situation

or circumstances, if you want to have your own business, you will succeed. In fact, you can't miss.

### **Making Decisions**

In starting any home business, certain factors must be considered. The most basic is choosing a type of business you think you'll enjoy, as well as one you're going to be good at.

Next, you must consider how much free time you have, whether there is a market for your product, how much competition you will have, and what you need to get started. Will you have to rent a store front to sell your product or will an ad in the paper suffice? Can you work at home or will you have to travel? How much money will be needed to get started, and will you lose it all if the business isn't successful? Will you need help, special services, permits, supplies? Is it a year-round or a seasonal business, and how does that tie in with your schedules and preferences? You wouldn't want to start a wreath business if you like your December holidays free for family activities, or a pool-cleaning business if you like to travel during the summer.

The perfect business would be one that is inexpensive to start, has few government regulations or involvements, is easy to run, and brings top dollar for your product (which, in turn, should have little or no waste or leftovers, and be easy to sell). The most convenient location is at or near your home. This new business should not require lots of special or expensive equipment, staff, or personnel, but should be something you can operate out of your own home. If it is suitable for a majority of the population and will work just as well in any location or state, all the better.

### **The Perfect Business**

I can't think of any home business better qualified than the cash garden idea. Let me tell you why. First, you can start right in your own backyard. Even the smallest of yards will do. Next, it requires little equipment and materials. You probably already have most of them, or can borrow or rent them very cheaply. You can even get such items as harvest baskets and equipment for free if you know where to ask (see chapter fifteen). You'll have the ideal product to sell, as fresh produce is in big demand and will command top dollar. I'll even explain how you can charge full retail price while others are getting wholesale or half price, and I'll show you how to avoid waste.



Backyards like this one offer ample space for cash gardening.

The cash garden is a business almost anyone who loves to garden can run. No special skills or talents are required, and since you're working at home, you don't need to buy extra clothes, travel, hire a babysitter, or worry about your pets. You can hear the phone ring (if you want to) or catch the mailman when he comes. You'll even be home when that plumber finally arrives, but now you can get something done while you wait for him.

### **Little Red Tape**

Persons who start businesses dread looking into the federal, state, county, and local government regulations. You'll be pleasantly surprised to learn that there will be little, if any, red tape, rules, regulations, or government interference connected with a cash garden. You'd think that because you're raising food, that all the authorities would try to get into the act. But unless you've got a really big business, or are shipping across state lines, or are involved in the processing, freezing, or product-making aspects of food, no one will probably bother you.

Just to make sure, call your local county agricultural agent or the county Extension Service. Be right up front with them. Tell them exactly what you plan to do, and ask if there are any regulations you should know about, or permits that might be required. While you're

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talking, ask for a list of varieties of vegetables that do well in your area. The county agents are there to help you grow vegetables successfully. They spend most of their time with farmers, but should be happy to give you all the advice they can. Take down the name of the person you speak with and ask if you can get back to him if you have any questions.



This was a lawn until we established eight 4 X 12-foot beds.

A Part-time Business?/5

## **Your Customers**

You may have the greatest idea going, but it won't succeed unless someone buys your product. The bottom line is this: do you have a market for your fresh produce? Your next step must be to think about customers and markets.

There are many ways to sell your produce, from selling to your neighbors who stop by (they could phone in an order ahead of time, but then they don't get to squeeze the tomatoes) to setting up a table at the weekly farmers' market. However, I'm not going to recommend either of these ideas. Your market is so important; it can easily mean the difference between success and failure. I've devoted a chapter to this subject, and when you read it, several ideas will probably appeal to you. My advice is to consider the choices very carefully and to select a market only after a great deal of study. You want to be successful, and your market will be the single most important factor in reaching that goal.

## **Backup Needed**

Consider your support system before you start your business. What happens when you can't be there because of work, vacation, illness, or some other emergency? Can you count on a neighbor, friend, or family member to help out? There will always be a few people looking over your fence, at first wondering what you're up to, and later telling you how you could do it better. Why not press them into action when the need arises? Ask them if they'd come over to water or cover the plants should you need help, and show them how to do it so they'll be prepared. You may never need their services, but better safe than sorry.

## **Talk It Over**

I would suggest that you talk over your ideas with a spouse or gardening or business friend and see what he or she thinks. You'll probably hear a lot of reasons why you shouldn't start such a business, or why it won't work. Don't let that discourage you. Think through the ideas and objections, determine whether they have any validity—then go ahead and start your business. If you're truly determined to work hard and if you follow my advice carefully, you can't miss. Your business will be a success.

# Cash from the Square Foot Garden



Let's assume that you're beginning to like the idea of starting a part-time business at home, with the goal of earning a few extra thousand dollars a year. Now that you're familiar with the requirements of the perfect part-time business, you may even agree that a backyard cash garden fulfills many or all of these requirements. But why, you ask, should it be a square foot garden? Some of you may even be wondering what a square foot garden is. For those of you who have never read my first book, *Square Foot Gardening*, or seen the nationally televised PBS series of the same name, here's a brief summary of how it all started.

### The Beginning

The idea of a new method of gardening came to me when I retired from my own consulting engineering business several years ago and became involved with a local gardening club. Since I had more free time than most members, everyone always looked at me when the club needed a volunteer. Soon I found myself organizing and running a new community garden. Then I began to teach gardening techniques to its members.

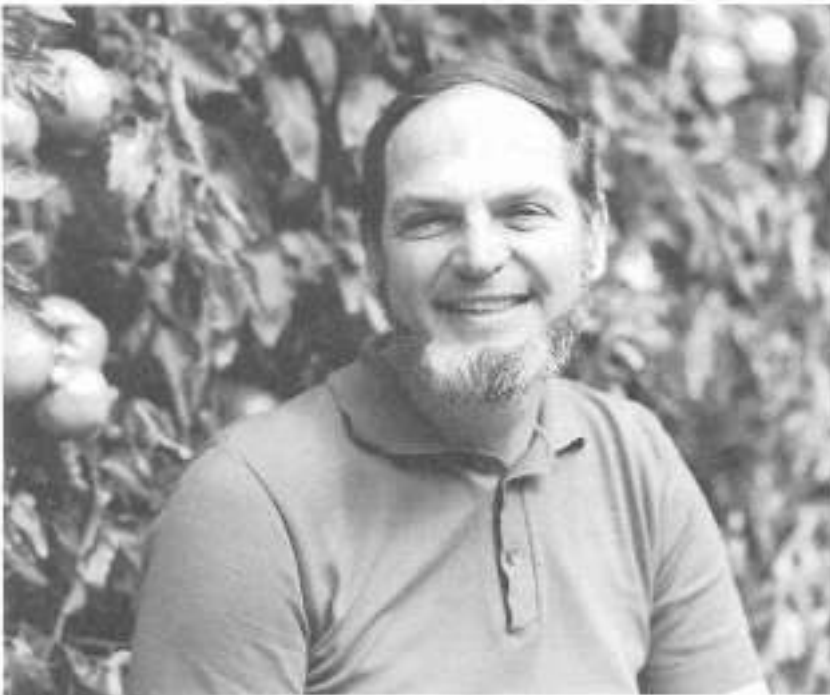
I must admit that at first I taught single row gardening because that was all I'd ever known. But as I watched everyone garden, I began to question that old-fashioned method. I found it to be illogical and inefficient in terms of time, space, cost, production—you name it. After asking all of the experts around the country why we still use the single row method, the only answer I got was,



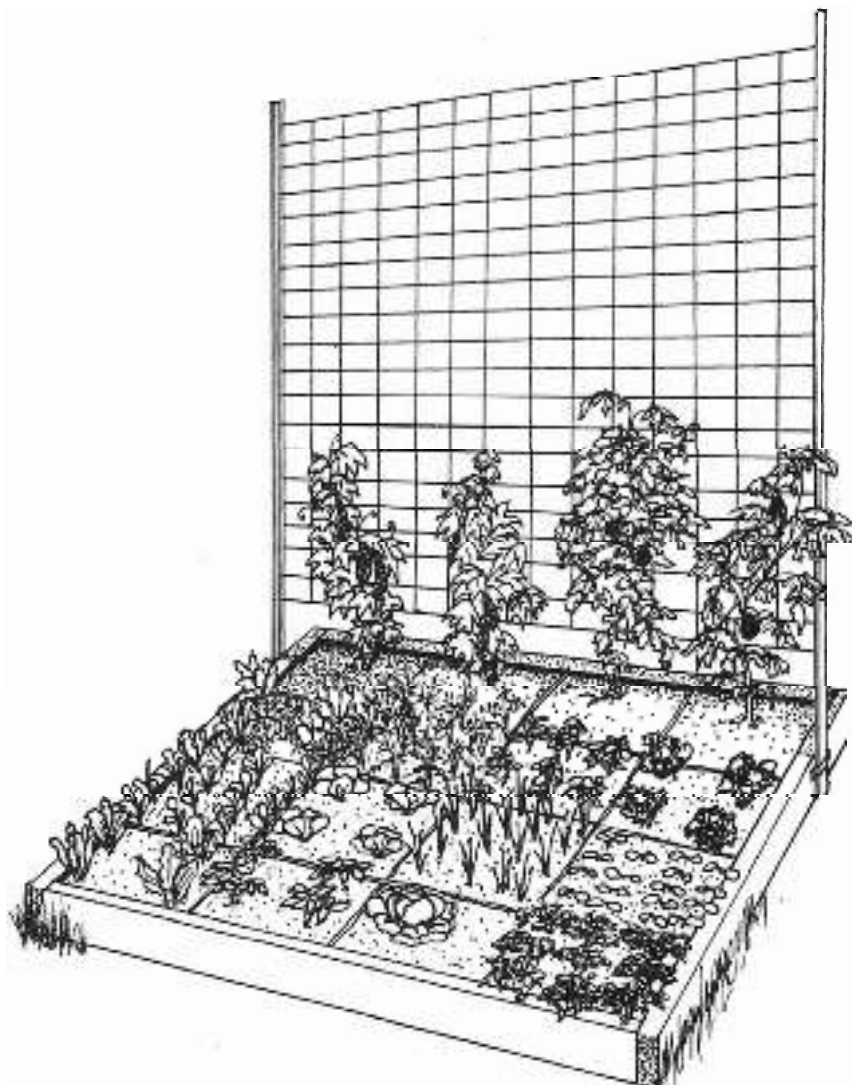
"Because that's the way we've always done it." That alone was enough to make me say, "There's got to be a better way."

### **BASICS OF SQUARE FOOT GARDENING**

1. Create permanent four-foot square garden blocks. with narrow aisles all around.
2. Put a border—lumber is fine—around each one.
3. Loosen existing soil and fill with the best soil mix possible.
4. Add metal frames to north side of blocks to support vertical vegetables—cucumbers, tomatoes, squash, and melons.
5. Plan and plant your garden in single square-foot units.
6. Harvest when crops are at their peak.
7. Enrich soil and plant new crops immediately.



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A typical square foot garden offers a variety of vegetables.

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## The New Method

After a few years of experimentation, I came up with the square foot method, a system so simple a beginner can catch on in just a few hours. It takes only 20 percent of the growing space of a conventional garden. Drudgery is out, for by eliminating 80 percent of the space you automatically eliminate 80 percent of the watering, weeding, fertilizing, and all the other chores that get people very discouraged by mid-summer. Taking care of that remaining 20 percent becomes so easy that it's hard to convince old-timers that it works. In fact, I don't even try to convince them anymore.

It's the beginner, the person who has always wanted to garden, the person who tried but gave up because the work became drudgery—it's *those* approximately 45 million Americans I want to reach, to show them how easy and fun square foot gardening is. Through the weekly national PBS-TV show, this has happened. Oh, I still get an occasional letter from someone, one of those old-timers (I don't necessarily mean old in years, just by habit and attitude) saying it just won't work, it's too easy. So I say they're probably right (but don't tell the millions of Americans who are already enjoying their square foot gardens).

While I was experimenting and developing the square foot system, I ran into a lot of people who were having trouble making ends meet. This was in 1975, in the days of a national recession. We had high unemployment and extreme inflation, and the price of gas shot up from thirty cents to over \$1.30 per gallon. I kept thinking that one answer would be for everyone across the country to start a home food garden as they did during World War II. But many people came up to me and said, "You know, I was a kid in the forties. My parents made me work in our Victory Garden, and I've hated gardening ever since."

Even though our Victory Gardens may have helped us win the war, they also helped give gardening a bad name. Memories of hoeing long single rows of corn and beans, getting hot and dusty, lugging pails of water, picking and shelling peas until we could scream... it was just too much.

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## Why Grow So Much?

Which brought me to my next question: why did we grow so much and why was it all ready to harvest at the same time? There must be a better way to garden. We're still being taught by most experts to grow crops in long, single rows, and now the latest fad is double or triple rows or even wide rows, as if a single row fifteen feet long didn't produce enough lettuce all at once. What's a home gardener going to do with thirty heads of leaf lettuce in one week? Now we're supposed to grow triple rows and raise ninety heads. Come on, America, let's wake up and **throw** all that lettuce back at the experts.

Single row gardening is merely a hand-me-down of commercial farming. All those single rows with a three-foot path between them, on both sides, no less, were planned so the tractor could get in.

But most Americans don't own tractors and don't even want to, so why waste so much space? If leaf lettuce can be planted six inches apart in a row, why does the next row have to be two or three feet away? It doesn't, of course.



**A lot of space is wasted when vegetables are planted in single rows.**

**Cash from the Square Foot Garden/15**

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## How It Works

Square foot gardening offers you a controlled method of planting and wastes no space. Your garden has several four-foot squares of planting space, each with an aisle all the way around it. You reach into your planting area, you don't step on it. By walking only in the aisles, you keep your growing soil loose and friable, instead of being packed down.

Then you work your garden one square foot at a time. If one square foot of radishes (sixteen) isn't enough, you plant two square feet and get thirty-two radishes. It's that simple. If one square foot of ruby lettuce (four heads) isn't enough for one week, plant two square feet and get eight heads. Cabbage is larger than lettuce and each head requires a square foot, so plant the same number of square feet as you want cabbage.

If a cutworm gets one or two of those plants, have a few extra transplants standing by, or plant a few extras, just in case. But not a whole thirty-foot row of them. If you feel you can accept the loss of one or two plants, then immediately replant that square foot with another crop. Either way, your garden will remain full and continually productive with every square foot being planted, grown, harvested, and then replanted with a second and even a third crop. Depending on your choice of crops and your area of the country, you might get four or five crops per year from every square foot.

### Controlled Harvest

Controlled planting means a controlled harvest: four heads of lettuce a week, nine bunches of spinach, sixteen radishes, one head of cabbage.

This is more in keeping with today's way of shopping and eating. It just doesn't make sense to grow more than you need, then to hurriedly try to can, freeze, or worst of all, eat' all those extra vegetables.

That's the basic idea of the system. There are some adaptations we'll discuss later for growing a cash garden.

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## **Grown Locally**

As I was developing, testing, and perfecting my square foot system, the economy kept going downhill, and folks were having it harder than ever. I began to wonder. Why not have a small, local home business selling vegetables? Why should farmers grow crops in one state and ship them in refrigerated cars clear across the country when the same produce could be grown locally and delivered fresh just a few miles to its destination? It seemed logical that combining square foot gardening with the concept of selling vegetables locally could provide a solution to the economic crunch we're all hearing about.

## **Need a Market**

But how to sell, and to whom? That was the next question. As a businessman, I knew you had to have a good market or you didn't have a business. It doesn't matter whether you knit sweaters or grow spinach, if there isn't someone, or better yet a lot of people, who want what you're producing and are willing to pay for it, you have a hobby, not a business.

So I sat down and approached the problem from the purely business standpoint. Since the first step usually is to see what others have done, I checked all the books I could find on selling garden produce. What a collection. They all promised dramatic results, including cash, but I soon found out that they weren't very practical. One was a collection of a company's magazine articles over the past ten years, put together as the chapters of a book. Boy, was that outdated. Another went into great detail on how to design and pave a parking lot for a roadside stand. Can you imagine how few people would find that information useful? The rest of the stories told how someone took a bushel basket of huge zucchinis into a restaurant and asked, "How much will you give me for this?" The answer was usually \$2.50.

So again, I knew I had to find a better way, one that just about anyone could use. I first named it backyard farming, and I set out to prove it would work. After raising the vegetables in a square foot garden, I tested every market I could think of, with the sole exception of driving down the street in my vintage truck, ringing a bell. After making a few adjustments and a few more trials, I came up with the requirements for a foolproof system and named it Cash from Square Foot Gardening.

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## **The Final Test**

To make sure it wasn't just a fluke, or the results of my own ambition and drive, I rented a vacant lot and hired three people to grow and sell the vegetables. They were a newlywed young woman, a middle-aged housewife, and a retired gentleman who had been a concert pianist. They worked with great enthusiasm and quickly learned the system. None was an expert gardener. In fact, two were fairly new to gardening, but they all loved what they were doing, and it worked. The results: more than \$1 per square foot profit. And remember, this was several years ago. It worked so well that I knew I would have to write a book about it, to share this experience with all who love gardening and want to earn some extra money from their backyards.

This book would have been written four years ago, except for one thing — television. No, not because I spent too much time watching football games or soap operas, but because I ended up on PBS television with my own weekly program. Some say that the book should have been called, "How to Get on TV When You're Just a Retired Gardener Puttering in Your Yard." It's been extremely exciting, but very time-consuming. When the TV show was on around the country year-round and everything was going smoothly, I knew the time had come to write this book.

## **Works Again**

But before I began writing I tested again to make sure the idea was still good. This time it was in another part of the country and with different people. It worked even better and with dramatically increased results. The profits were up to \$4 and \$5 per square foot.

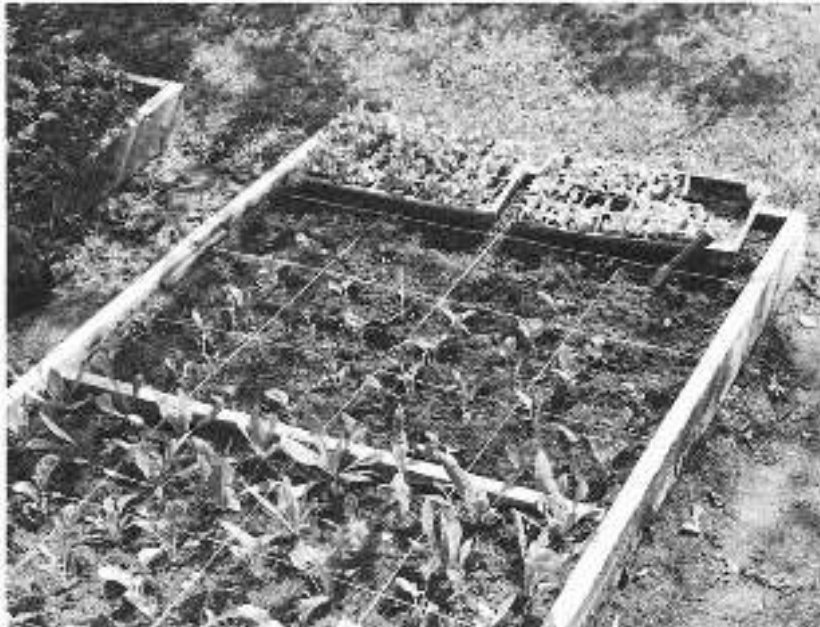
I'm so convinced that this method works in any part of the country that I want you to try it. You don't have to make it a big deal or a large operation. Some people start with only one crop, such as radishes or lettuce, while others start small with a selected variety of salad crops. The main thing is if you wanted to do something like this, now is the time. If you list all of the conditions of your present situation, and then review what you consider is a perfect part-time business, I think you'll agree that this could be it, whether you're looking for extra money, companionship, involvement, success, or simply something to fill your leisure time.

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This system will work for you while all others are impractical for most people. Why? This is the first system designed by a businessman rather than a farmer or gardener. All the others tell how to raise crops, then, almost as an afterthought, tell how to sell them, suggesting a roadside stand or a farmers' market, methods that just aren't practical for most gardeners.

This system is aimed at a common, readily available, yet virtually untapped market. That makes it a sound business. The second point is that by following the square foot system, you eliminate 80 percent of the drudgery, work, expense, and space of conventional gardening, yet reap the same amount. That makes it practical for just about anyone, young or old, busy or with time to spare.

To those of you who ask, "Why square foot gardening?" the answer is, "Because it is the most foolproof way of growing the largest and most uniform harvest in the least amount of space with the least amount of work." If you do not have a square foot garden, read the next chapter in detail as well as the original Square Foot Garden book. If you are already growing a square foot garden, the next chapter will bring you up to date with the innovations and improvements as well as the special adaptations for cash growing.



For easier planting, strings mark the square feet in this garden.



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