

# Homegrown veggies

LOCAL GARDENER SHARES HOW PEOPLE CAN FEED THEMSELVES FROM HOME-GROWN ORGANIC FOOD

BY TIMOTHY SEXAUER

“Can’t grow food here: soil’s bad, not enough space,” is what many folks in town have to say on the topic of urban gardening here in Avalon, but resident Scott Sturges and others have a different story to tell.

In Feb. 2011, Sturges turned a rocky weed habitat in the corner of his backyard in downtown Avalon into an organic garden that produces more food than he can eat throughout each season of the year. “A little effort, you can do anything,” he said. And he wants to share with others how to do it as well.

Sturges has been developing his green thumb and mind since childhood. He was raised learning how to productively sow and lovingly tend edible plants in the family garden. He developed these skills throughout life as he grew into a mature and productive business owner in Avalon, always having a food garden to nurture. He started a landscaping business in his twenties, through which he was able to make a living productively sowing ecosystems. He says that he loves working with plants because he simply loves nature.

Sturges has learned quite a few tricks on growing food over the decades of his love affair with nature. One of them involves how to conceptualize the space of your garden, because here in Avalon, as Sturges put it, “Spacing is the deal.”

Rather than thinking in terms of rows like a farmer, he says to think in terms of square-feet. For instance, carrots and radishes only require one square-inch of space to grow into dinner, which makes for quite a bountiful crop in only one square-foot.

This way of working with the garden in terms of square-foot

sections turns the task of changing crops throughout the seasons from an occasional labor fest into an ongoing and easy relationship, with the amount of compost needed to recondition the soil just a few scoopfuls a week.

“Another trick to productively re-conceptualize space,” Sturges said, “is to think vertically as well as horizontally.” He has attached trellises to his fence on which he now grows peas, cantaloupes, watermelons, and more. The trick to growing melons vertically, says Sturges, is nylon stockings.

“Again, is the spacing OK? Watermelon, cantaloupe, squash, they need a lot of room and they use a lot of room,” he said. “I run my vines of cantaloupe and watermelon up through the trellising. When the fruit starts to form, you get a nylon stocking, and you put your fruit in there, and you tie the nylon stocking up to your trellis, and it supports the melon, you see what I mean?”

“So it’s not going to fall off and break off the plant because it’s just hanging there, you know? And you’re going up, you don’t need ground space, you see what I mean?”

This way, melon vines do not have to crawl along the ground to reach for the sun, which is what plants tend to do one way or the other. On the topic of sunlight, Sturges says that for some plants six hours of direct sunlight is ideal, while others like lettuce only require 4 hours to get their fill of solar energy.

Even a well-fed plant, however, is in danger of salad-eating insects. In order to harmoniously counteract this threat, Sturges uses companion-planting ideas. He plants basil, garlic, and onion throughout his garden to ward off insects, while planting marigold in the outskirts to give them something else to chew on. He is not just working with a crop; he is co-creating with an ecosystem.

Using these methods and



Scott Sturges, right, prepares to plant more vegetables in his garden. Above, a fan of the foodgarden lends a helping hand. Courtesy photo,



others, Sturges and his garden provide him with so much food that he gives most of it away to friends. As Sturges said, “You can feed a whole family in eight square feet.”

It is the bountiful productivity of his methods that leads Sturges to his idea of how all in town can get in on the fun, including those who do not have any space that receives enough sunlight. Sturges says that while some people may have useful space, others may have useful time, and can come tend the garden here and there and share in the bounty.

This involves community, and to help foster such community of people in Avalon who wish to eat food from within their own spaces, Sturges wants to start up a regular gathering of gardeners and would-be gardeners to enjoy each other’s company and discuss gardening, including problems unique to Avalon such as spacing difficulties and

foraging deer. He invites all who are interested to email him at [realharmony@att.net](mailto:realharmony@att.net) in order to coordinate the first meet-up. He is hoping someone might have a space available that would be free so everyone can gather as friends without having to pay. He would have it at his house, but, as is quite common in the beautiful close-knit town of Avalon, he has very little space.

Sturges will be writing more for *The Islander* with gardening tips, planting suggestions, and recipes for what is being harvested. If you

would like to see a slideshow of the creation of his garden you can find it at [www.ahumanjourney.com/videos](http://www.ahumanjourney.com/videos).

## BIRTHDAYS

- Friday, March 9**  
Wendy Harp  
Ivan Rodriguez  
Jenny Tucker
- Saturday, March 10**  
Cindy Rinehart Lazaris  
David Montano
- Sunday, March 11**  
Gina Hill  
Lisa Saldana  
Alex Morand
- Monday, March 12**  
Wendy Hernandez  
Colby Cushing  
Jethro Flynn  
Loreen Saldana  
Raul Cazares
- Tuesday, March 13**  
Judy Hibbs  
Diana Burke  
Sara Hernandez  
Julie Glass  
Anna Garcia
- Wednesday, March 14**  
Marc Beaumont  
Cole Saldana  
Nora Reyes
- Thursday, March 15**  
Evelyn Cano  
Adam Del Torto  
Maria Elena Martin

## ANNIVERSARIES:

- Sunday, March 11**  
Adam & Rosie Hernandez

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