

Lennar has a plan with you in mind.

Starting from the \$100s to the \$800s



Miami Herald > Lifestyle > Home & Garden

Posted on Saturday, 09.14.13

A A

Share email print comment reprints

FAIRCHILD'S TROPICAL GARDEN COLUMN

Ready, set, grow: Start an edible garden now

Like

0



A raised bed at Fairchild's edible garden. Kenneth Setzer / Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden

Fullsize

◀ previous | next ▶

Image 1 of 2

and pulling weeds to reveal a compact and manageable area 2 1/2 feet deep by 8 feet wide. The area gets almost a full day's exposure to sunlight (it should get at least six hours).

It's important to cultivate the soil in a typical South Florida yard, where much of it may be compacted and consist of rocks and construction landfill. Using a three-tined hand cultivator, I worked out as many large rocks as possible while loosening and aerating any compacted areas. I had been adding compost, as well as pine shavings and natural fertilizer thanks to our pet rabbit — he's been a prolific provider — all summer, so the area's soil is a little richer than normal for South Florida backyards. (If you haven't been composting, you can purchase what you need.) Even so, the nutrient-rich layer is not very deep, and the area is prone to flooding, so I constructed a raised rectangular bed from lumber.

It's exquisitely simple. I purchased two pre-cut 2 inches by 8 inches by 8 feet pieces of untreated wood and cut another board into two 2 inches by 8 inches by 2 1/2 feet. (Do not use pressure-treated or insect-resistant wood. It's chemically treated.)

In the garden, I positioned the boards, and using bendable mending plates (i.e. metal straps) and screws, connected each corner. That's all it is! You can even directly screw the wood ends together, or hold the wood in place with steel rebar hammered into the ground, or with cinder blocks. You can use just about anything with sides and an open bottom as a raised bed: recycled plastic lumber; cinder blocks; bricks; hay bales; old tires. I've seen cinder blocks used quite artfully for raised beds, with the open spaces within the blocks planted with flowers.

What to plant? I am no expert gardener. I need a plant that promises a fair chance of yielding something I can eat. I tend to be overly optimistic after drinking strong coffee. So after a large mug I bought tomatoes online. Not seedlings for transplant, but heirloom "Cherokee purple" tomato seeds.

This variety is considered "indeterminate," meaning it'll grow — big. Determinate varieties on the other hand are bred to stay compact, set all fruit at about the same time, and thereafter die. The hearsay, however, is that the smaller, determinate varieties aren't as flavorful. And indeterminate, though requiring a support as they grow six to 10 feet tall, set fruit throughout the season.

It's hard to pin down when to plant tomatoes in South Florida. The packaging always states "plant after the last frost." Ha! That's funny. The key is planting after the intense heat of summer and after the risk of a torrential downpour that might destroy young plants. The general consensus seems to be mid to late October is safe for tomatoes.

If you're planting seeds, grow them for five to six weeks before planting in the raised bed. They need to be hardened to full sun before planting. Start with an hour of full sun exposure and increase each day for a week. Keep a close eye on them to make sure they aren't wilting. Or just buy seedlings — instant garden! Since some tomato varieties may need 80 days or more to set fruit, plant by December so they can thrive before the hot weather of spring returns.

But this is about starting your garden, not just growing tomatoes. So start by building a raised bed now. A good trick is to cover the soil with layers of newspaper to keep down weeds until you are ready to fill the bed with garden soil, compost and whatever you decide to grow.

To learn more about not only how to grow, but what to grow this fall, the University of Florida's "Florida Vegetable Gardening Guide" is an understandable yet detailed resource written specifically for Florida gardening. It includes lists of plants and the ideal time to plant them, days until harvest, irrigation, fertilizing, pest control and other tips. View it at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/vh021>.

Kenneth Setzer is writer and editor at Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden

Like

0

Tweet

2

g +1

0

Share

✉

✉



SUMMER CLEARANCE EVENT!

NEW 2013 KIA

OPTIMAS
\$149

AS LOW AS
PER MONTH



WE'RE SELLING
OVER 87 NEW
KIA OPTIMAS!

CLICK HERE FOR GREAT SAVINGS!



Bidding Documents are available to all interested parties to participate in the Competitive Bidding Process LPI N° ETESA 04-13

To participate in the Bidding Process, the interested parties should pay for the Bidding Document the amount of fifty Balboas (B/.50.00) plus the ITBMS charge, both non-refundable, at the cashier's office of ETESA's administrative headquarters, located on Avenida Ricardo J. Alfaro, Sun Tower Building, Tower B, Third Floor, during business days, from 8:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., and from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

For more information about the bidding process, the interested parties should contact:

Eyleen Espinal, Engineer / Della Garcia, Engineer
Telefonos: (507) 501-3948
E-mail: comprasenergia2@etesacom.pa

Get the Deal!

\$199 for a 1-night hotel stay and 2 tickets to any NASCAR® event in the U.S. (up to a \$400 value)



\$199.00

Buy Now!

Value: \$400

Discount: 50%

You Save: \$201

dealsaver.com

Sign up for the daily deal email:

Enter your email here

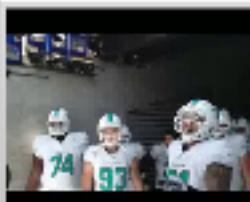
Get Deals!

MORE HOME & GARDEN

- Two designers give advice on how to decorate for the seasons
- Reverse mortgages tightening up
- Ready, set, grow: Start an edible garden now
- Home security doesn't have to be expensive
- It's only natural that fishtail palm dies
- Variety's a virtue when it comes to pet food

More

VIDEOS



Dolphins at Colts - Dolphins head to the field



Miami Dolphins Report: Indianapolis Colts preview



Week 3: Miami Central 49, Coral Reef 0

More

VIDEO