Garden Photo Walks for Mindfulness



Much of the time, looking at life through our phones takes us out of the present moment. However, I find that I can use the phone's camera to practice mindfulness. Garden photo walks are my favorite way of practicing this on a regular basis.

What Is Mindfulness?

All that I mean by <u>mindfulness</u> is the experience of being present in the moment. It's about being with myself, without external noise from something like music or podcasts. It's about noticing what arises within me and around me. Moreover, mindfulness is an awareness that whatever is happening is perfectly okay. I don't need to judge it or change it.

What Are Garden Photo Walks?

There are three obvious components to a garden photo walk:

- A garden. It can be any size. Obviously, I love exploring huge public gardens such as the San Francisco Botanical Garden or our local Japanese Tea Gardens. However, backyard gardens are suitable for garden photo walks as well.
- Photos. For me, it's all about using the lens of the camera to direct my attention to different aspects of the garden. I move between landscapes and close-ups. I try to take photos not in order to share them or even save them but in order to see differently.
- Walking. However, this component can be very minimal. In a large garden, the meandering is a form of walking mindfulness. In a small garden, it's more about the micro-movements. The point is that I'm embodied, rather than in my head.

How The Camera Enhances The Garden Walk

Some people are fully capable of becoming present with the moment simply by sitting in their garden. Others experience it through the act of gardening itself. However, I tend to spend a lot of time in my head. I think the combination of walking while intentionally looking for photo opportunities gives me just the right amount of activity that I'm able to fully get into the moment.

Don't get me wrong; my monkey mind still drifts, of course. I'll find myself thinking about sharing a certain photo. I'll see an unusual plant and think about texting my sister to ask what it is (because she and my mom are far more likely to know than I am.) As with any meditation practice, the mind drifts.

But I keep refocusing, literally, through the lens of the camera. It reminds me to see what is in front of me.

Walking The Same Garden Through The Seasons

Obviously, it's always very engaging to walk in a brand new garden. I visit gardens often on my travels for that very reason. However, there's also something special about walking through the same garden again and again.

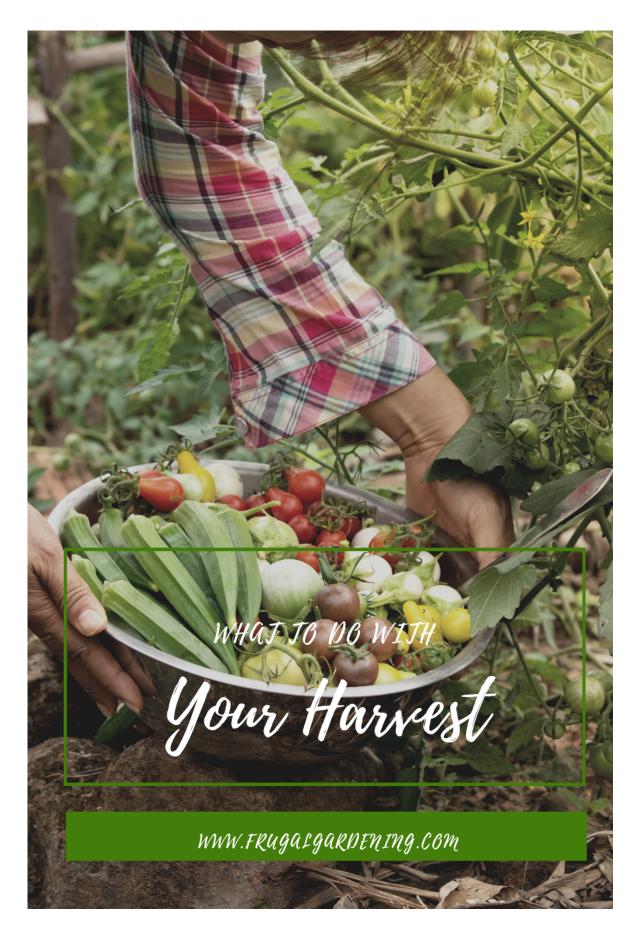
I've done photo experiments while I take a photo from the same point of the same plant every day for weeks. Each time, I'm presented with the opportunity to see it anew. This teaches me so much. It reminds me that we can choose to see our lives freshly each and every day. It reminds me that some days a plant may seem like it's wilting only to brighten up the next day in the sun.

Gardens are fleeting and also permanent in their cyclical growth. So are we. Photo garden walks teach me as much about people as they do about plants.

Read More:

- A Garden to Dye For
- <u>5 Fun Ways to Use Yarn in the Garden</u>
- DIY Squash Trellis Under \$10

What To Do With Your Harvest



Winter weather is right around the corner. But if you're anything like me, your garden is still bursting with produce. At the tail end of the season, gardeners can sometimes feel

overwhelmed by the amount of produce they have on their hands. Here's what to do with your harvest.

What to do with your harvest

Before the cold weather sets in, it's a good idea to get almost everything out of the ground and into your house. But what are you supposed to do with your harvest once you've picked it?

Here's how to handle different veggies:

Kale

While kale can survive in cold weather (and actually gets sweeter after frost exposure), you might not want to leave your entire kale harvest outside, especially when hungry critters are desperate for sustenance during the winter months.

I like to leave one or two plants (or more depending on how many I initially planted) to overwinter and go to seed. The rest, I'll harvest and bring inside.

Of course, the best way to make use of your harvest is to share with others. But if you still have some leftover, freezing is the next best thing. You can freeze kale without blanching, which is my preferred way to do it—I'm a lazy gardener, what can I say! Unblanched, frozen kale will last several weeks in the freezer. If you want to keep it longer, blanch it first.

And don't forget to keep some aside for dinner □

My favorite recipe for using up kale is one my grandmother used to make often. It's still one of my fave comfort foods. Here's a recipe for <u>Caldo Verde</u>, a Portuguese soup that includes greens, potatoes, and chorizo. If you're vegetarian, leave out the chorizo and add beans.

Carrots

Did you know you can leave <u>carrots</u> in the ground through the winter? The soil acts as a mini-refrigerator and keeps them fresh. But if you live somewhere with frigid winters (like me), you're probably better off harvesting them since a hard freeze makes it tough to pull out these tasty root veggies.

Carrots keep for a while if properly stored in the fridge, so I don't usually bother freezing them—though, you can if you blanch them. Just make sure to remove the green tops since these wilt and spoil much faster than the root portion.

Onions

Properly cured onions will last all winter long in storage. Just make sure you have a cool dark place to put them in.

Salad greens

Some lettuces can be left alone to deal with winter weather. With a little bit of protection, you can keep harvesting from your lettuce plants for a while. Delicate, summer lettuces and greens need to be removed before a hard freeze, though.

The key to keeping lettuce longer in the fridge is to store it unwashed in a plastic bag with a teaspoon of water to maintain humid conditions.

But I don't follow the rules. I prefer to prep my lettuce before storing it. I'll wash, dry, and cut it, so it's ready to go when I'm preparing dinner. If it's already ready for me to use, I'm much less inclined to let it go to waste or put off using it until another day.

How do you store your harvest? Do you keep a winter garden and harvest things outdoors year-round? Tell me about it in the comments!

What Is the Real Cost of Growing Your Own Food?



What's the real cost of growing your own food? This is a loaded question with a lot of answers. You'll have to spend some initial cash to set up a garden, but ultimately, it can

be as expensive as you want it to be. Here's a breakdown of the costs to expect when setting up a garden to grow your own food.

The real cost of growing your own food

Let's start with the basics. These are the things you absolutely need to grow food—the bare minimum required involves:

- Soil. You can get this for free if you're digging up inground beds. The cost goes up if you plan on DIY-ing raised beds or buying pre-fab containers. The benefit of in-ground beds is that they're free to install. But they do require some manual labor. Also, not everyone has high-quality soil on their property. Starting a garden in very poor soil can actually end up costing you more in the long run because you'll need to add nutrients and work hard to improve fertility. In some cases, DIY or storebought beds are a better, more economical option.
- Seeds. Obviously, you can't start an edible garden without seeds! Buying starter plants from a nursery is a possibility, but you'll get way more bang for your buck with a packet of seeds. On average, a packet of seeds typically costs less than \$5, depending on the variety. And most packets include enough seeds to grow many plants.
- Water. The cost of water depends on where you live. Where I'm located, water is free to use with minimal restrictions when it comes to gardening. But I'm also cognizant that wasting it has a huge impact on the environment. Cost analysis doesn't just involve factoring in real \$\$\$ but the potential for harm. In some places where drought is an issue, the cost of growing your own food involves calculating the cost of water.
- Light. If you're growing outdoors, sunlight is free!

Yay!

• Nutrients. Even if you start with perfectly fertile soil, you'll need to feed your plants and replenish the soil at some point. Starting a compost pile involves minimal costs, but it can take a while for organic matter to break down. If you don't want to start a pile, check with your town. Many municipalities give away free compost to interested citizens. Some farms also share compost for a small fee.

Oher costs of growing your own food

If you only factor in the basics, you'll conclude that growing your own food is ultra-cheap. But gardening also involves a lot of challenges and unexpected events. Pests, for instance, can quickly turn a gorgeous edible garden into a leafy patch full of holes. Last year, I spent money on pest covers. I didn't anticipate needing to do this, but it was an additional cost I had to factor into my budget.

Are there any other real costs of growing your own food? You betcha!

When someone asks me about the real cost of gardening, I make sure to mention the time aspect. Consider the time and effort you put into your garden as a type of cost. A garden doesn't just produce food that ends up automatically onto your plate. You need to harvest and prep ingredients once they've matured. You need to be willing to put in the time and effort. And in today's modern world, time and effort often go hand in hand with \$\$\$.

Where To Buy Seeds for Microgreens



Microgreens are ultra-trendy right now. But where do you buy seeds for microgreens?

Microgreens have been popular for a while, but lately, there's been an enormous burst of interest in these tiny, tasty sprouts. Here's why you should consider growing them at home and how to buy seeds for microgreens.

What are microgreens?

Microgreens aren't a variety of plants. They are very young plants harvested when they are in a micro-growing stage before they get much taller than a few inches.

Microgreens offer a burst of flavor that you'd get with a full-sized plant but without the lengthy growing season requirements. They're also packed with nutrients and easy as pie to grow.

Ideas for using microgreens

You might be wondering about how to use microgreens. Why grow tiny sprouts when you can have a full-sized broccoli plant?

Microgreens have a unique fresh taste and texture that you can't get with a full-sized plant. They're great for using as a garnish, but they also taste delicious in salads, sandwiches, and stir-fries.

Where to buy seeds for microgreens?

Not every plant works well as a microgreen. A few edible plants that work well as sprouts include:

- Leafy greens like kale, lettuce, and mustards
- Herbs like cilantro and basil
- Brassicas like broccoli and radish
- Flowers like sunflowers

You can use regular seeds to grow microgreens. But you need to make sure you choose untreated seeds when growing microgreens.

Some companies sell <u>unique microgreen seed mixes</u>. These mixes simply contain a variety of seeds that germinate at similar times. They've also been tested for maximum germination rates and flavor.

That said, because you'll need many seeds for a decent harvest, it's best to buy microgreen seeds in bulk.

You can buy regular seeds to grow microgreens or special mixes. Both are typically available from popular seed retailers like Johnny's Seeds or High Mowing Organic Seeds.

Want more info on how to grow microgreens at home? Take a look at this video:

How To Get Free Seeds From The Government



At first glance, seeds seem like a relatively inexpensive purchase. However, when buying several varieties, the cost can really add up quickly. A frugal gardener knows that there are plenty of ways to find seeds for cheap or <u>free</u>. Here's how to get free seeds from the government.

Getting Free Seeds From the Government

The <u>U.S. National Plant Germplasm System</u> is a website managed by the USDA. It allows users to search for and order seeds. Type in 'kale,' for example, and you'll see a slew of varieties. Available seed varieties will have a shopping cart icon to the right.

But hold on. There's some important fine print on the website that's worth mentioning:

"Distribution of germplasm from NPGS collections to fulfill requests from individuals seeking free germplasm strictly for home use is generally considered inappropriate use of limited resources and conflicts with U.S. Government policy of not competing with commercial enterprises. Requestors can be asked, in an appropriate manner, to justify the use of specific NPGS germplasm instead of suitable commercially available germplasm."

That said, the USDA encourages educators, scientists, seed savers, and public gardens to use the service. Like the USDA, I encourage home gardeners to find other ways to source seeds. Supporting heirloom seed sellers, for instance, is an important way to encourage seed saving and biodiversity.

Other Ways to Get Free Seeds

Here are a few ways to source seeds for free (or cheap):

• Online gardening forums and Facebook groups. Lots of home gardeners are eager to share or trade <u>seeds</u> with like-minded people. Want to get your hands on a certain variety? Ask the people in a Facebook gardening group. You may be surprised at how many people answer your request.

- Etsy. There are many seed sellers on Etsy that offer seeds for a steal. You might have to take some time to browse through tons of listings, but eventually, you'll find something that fits your needs.
- **Promotions**. Many towns offer free plant material around Arbor day or other environment-related holidays or events. Promotional materials may include live plants and seeds.
- Friends and family. Ask people that you know whether they have any seeds to spare. I often have a lot of excess seed each year, and I love giving it away to eager gardeners—especially people who are new to the hobby.
- Ask for them as gifts. Birthday coming up? Ask people to give you seeds instead of other junk you don't need! It's an inexpensive but very thoughtful gift for a gardener.
- Seed swaps. Spring is usually the time when seed swap events are popping up all over the place. Because of the pandemic, it'll be harder to find in-person events where you can source cheap or free seeds, but some organizations are going virtual and carrying on the yearly tradition anyhow.
- Save your own seeds. What better way to save money on seeds than to save your own! It's a rewarding process that requires a bit of know-how, but if you can master seed saving, you'll always have stock on hand and ready to go.

4 Reasons to Grow Flowers in

Your Garden



Cut flowers in the garden are the height of luxury. I used to think flowers were pointless. When I was younger, I didn't find them particularly romantic, and when I began gardening, I thought of them as wasted space. Now I know better.

There are plenty of reasons to grow flowers in your garden. Each time I plan my garden, I always save plenty of room for flowers. This year, I even set aside space for perennial flowers right inside my garden beds. Why should frugal gardeners consider growing flowers in addition to tasty edibles?

Reasons to Grow Flowers

Here are the main reasons to consider growing flowers in your vegetable garden.

Free cut flowers

Planting flowers in my veggie garden has a few advantages, but none is more rewarding than a free crop of cut flowers. When we moved into our house, I became obsessed with making space feel like a home. For me, a home is a place that's full of life, including flowers. Unfortunately, vibrant bouquets were outside of my budget. I simply couldn't afford to buy a steady supply of flowers to adorn my kitchen table or living room credenza.

Instead, I grow my own bouquets. Flower seed is a tiny initial investment (even more so for perennial varieties) that provides an abundant return. My favorite cut flowers to grow are zinnias. These annuals are easy to grow, and they literally don't stop blooming until a killing frost. I used to keep them relegated to a single spot in my garden, but now they bloom among the vegetable plants.

Natural pest repellents

My garden flowers are great for cutting and displaying indoors, but they also serve another purpose. Some blooms have pest deterring qualities that make them great companions for a litany of edible plants. Marigolds, which feature prominently

in my garden, keep away a host of annoying bugs. They're the prettiest form of pest control, and they hardly require any maintenance.

Pollinator haven

I scatter flowers throughout my garden because they look beautiful and sometimes keep away pests. They also attract a host of pollinators. Without flowers to entice pollinators, my garden would be a sad place. Bright blooms and native flowers welcome bees and butterflies. They come for food and help me out with squash and tomatillos. Without them, I would have to hand pollinate, which I've never had much success with.

Aesthetic bonus

Lastly, flowers look beautiful. You could add all sorts of expensive adornments to your garden, but growing flowers from seed is an almost-free way to add a touch of beauty to your garden. This year, my garden is overflowing with flowers. They are tucked between kale plants and bursting among tomato plants. The garden is more full of color than ever, and it's never been more beautiful!

Flowers to grow from seed

If you're not sure where to start, here are a few easy-togrow, low maintenance flower varieties that I enjoy growing from seed:

- Zinnias
- Poppies
- Bee balm
- Hyssop
- Daisies
- Marigolds
- Coneflowers
- Sweet alyssum

7 Tips for Getting Through a Heatwave in the Garden



It's been hotter than ever in the garden these past few weeks, and getting tasks done is no longer an enjoyable experience. Thankfully, the heat let up yesterday, and I manage to spend an hour and a half replacing empty spots and sowing seeds for a fall harvest. The respite is temporary, though. Dealing with a heatwave in the garden is tough, but not impossible.

As someone who is particularly sensitive to the heat, I detest gardening during a heatwave. It slows me down, keeps me from doing frequent garden checks, and stresses out plants. I'm incredibly diligent with watering, but I can't seem to keep

up. We usually get plenty of rain all year round, but this year feels drier than ever—evidenced by raging wildfires in forested, rural parts of the province. If you need help with your lawn, check out https://www.lawncare.net/service-areas/arkansas/.

Some days it feels impossible to head outside. I can't abandon my garden, though, and neither can you. So what can a frugal gardener do to keep the garden alive when temperatures soar to an uncomfortable level?

Here are a few tips for getting through a heatwave in the garden:

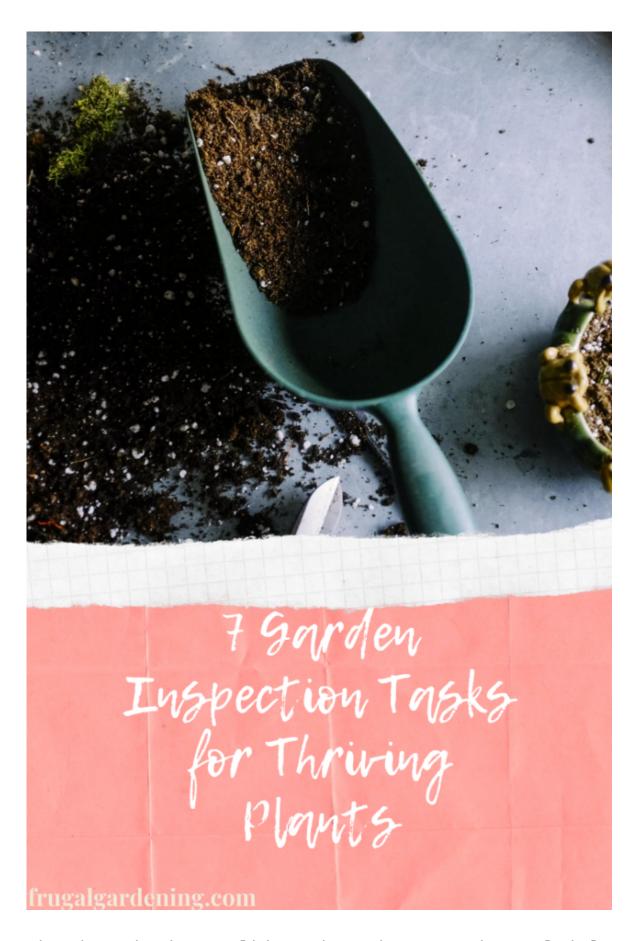
- 1. **Hydrate**. It's been so hot that I've been sweating just standing in place watering the plants. All that moisture needs replacing. I make sure to fill up a water bottle and keep it close by when I'm in the garden.
- 2. **Avoid going out at noon**. Don't go out during the hottest part of the day. If you're not an early riser, water and check on things in the evening.
- 3. **Mulch**. Without <u>mulch</u>, my plants would all be toast by now. Ultra-hot dry weather and drought have wreaked havoc on the garden. Lawns across town are crinkly messes (Boy, I'm glad I don't have a traditional lawn!). Mulch helps conserve moisture and is especially handy during times of extreme heat.
- 4. Focus on essential tasks. When it's cool outside, I spend a lot more time out in the garden just hanging out and working on things here and there. When it's super hot outside, don't dilly dally. Get right to the most important stuff (e.g., watering).
- 5. **Harvest early or late**. Don't harvest stuff in the middle of the day. You'll end up picking wilted, limp produce. Do it at the crack of dawn or in the evening, instead.
- 6. **Use shade cloth**. I'm still growing <u>lettuce</u> during the heatwave thanks to shade netting that keeps the sun from burning tender leaves. My lettuces are slower to bolt

- with the shade cloth, but it's also imperative that you select bolt-resistant varieties for summer growing.
- 7. Water right. Spraying the hose every which way isn't a productive way to water the garden at any time. During a heatwave, though, your plants are especially thirsty. Water deeply and aim the hose under your plants instead of spraying them from above.

It's possible to get your garden through a heatwave. It just takes a bit of extra patience and care. Don't forget to take care of yourself, too. If you can't handle the heat for whatever reason, ask a friend or neighbor to help you water temporarily.

I'm looking forward to more rain. Here's hoping it arrives soon!

7 Garden Inspection Tasks for Thriving Plants



Why do I bother walking through my garden multiple times a day? Let's talk about my top garden inspection tasks.

We're in the midst of a heat-sensitive plants have all bolted and been pulled in favor of heat-loving edibles. I make it a point to visit the garden at least twice every day—even when it's sweltering hot outside. I swear I was sweating just standing there while watering this morning!

No matter how hot it is, though, I make sure to get out there as much as possible.

Most important garden inspection tasks

At some point, the garden goes into autopilot mode. All that you have to do is make sure your plot gets enough water. In my region, Mother Nature helps with that quite a bit. For those with irrigation systems set up, watering is another task that's on auto.

But even if your garden is doing a-okay, you still need to check on it from time to time. Regular visits are essential for a thriving garden.

And when I talk about checking on your garden, I don't mean a quick pop-by. When I head outside to talk to my plants, I'm there for at least 10-15 minutes. My garden checks consist of thorough visual inspections.

Here are the garden inspection tasks I think are most important:

Plant stress: Are any of my plants showing signs of stress? Are they wilting? It may mean they need more water.

Signs of disease: Are leaves browning or are my plants looking sickly? The plant might have a disease. If there's any sort of visual anomaly, I also check for signs of pest activity.

Signs of pest activity: Some pests (like striped potato beetles) are easy to spot. Their orange carapaces and eggs are

easy to find among lush green foliage. Some pest eggs are hidden on the underside of leaves, so don't forget to check there. Check closely for pests even if there's no visible plant damage. Squish and remove eggs before the bugs ever have a chance to do any damage.

Water pooling: Is there an area of your garden where water tends to pool? You might need to reconsider planting in that area since most plants don't do well in waterlogged soil.

Tall plants: It's incredible how quickly plants grow at the height of the summer. I swear my <u>tomatoes</u> shot up several inches overnight. Tall, quick-growing plants like peppers, beans, and tomatoes need support. Upon inspection, pluck suckers from tomatoes and make sure to provide your scraggly plants with support structures like cages or bamboo poles.

Bolting: It's an unfortunate side effect of summer heat and plants require your immediate attention. Once you spot bolting, it's possible to save nearby plants that have yet to send up flower stalks by providing extra shade and mulching to cool the soil's surface. If you notice everything has already bolted, the sooner you pull everything, the sooner you can plant something new in the same spot.

Things that are ready to harvest: The more often I check on my garden, the sooner I'll notice things that are ready for harvest, which helps to cut down on garden waste.

Seed Starting with Recycled

Materials



There's no need to use fancy equipment to <u>start seeds</u>. You have plenty of perfectly suitable materials lying around the house—probably about to end up in the trash or recycling bin. Seed starting with recycled materials is easy!

Don't spend a ton of money on trays and flats. Save your hardearned money and reduce, reuse, and recycle. A little bit of frugal know-how is all you need to germinate and sprout seeds for free.

Starting seeds now?

You might be wondering why I'm talking about seed starting when summer is on our heels. Isn't seed starting reserved for the late winter and early spring?

Of course not!

If a productive garden is what you seek, you should always

have something ready to replace harvested plants. Think of it cyclically. The wheels are always turning in the garden. If they stop, you'll have less to harvest.

Now is the perfect time to start thinking about what the fall garden will look like. It's also important to consider succession sowing.

I'll offer up an example. In the spring, I planted spinach seeds in a patch of my garden. Last week, I harvested them because they were starting to dislike the hot weather and most were mature and ready to pick. That left the squares previously occupied squares empty. Uh oh!

There are two options when this happens; one requires a bit more prep than the other.

- 1. Replace the harvested plant with transplants that are ready to go (which involves seed starting)
- Sow seeds (this time of year, quick-growing plants or stuff that will be ready for harvest in the fall is ideal)

For this spot, I chose to sow <u>kale</u> and carrot seeds, but I also have several seedlings growing in a tray to put in the next vacated garden square.

Recycled seed starting

Okay, you're ready to prep seedlings and do some seed starting with recycled materials. Here are some free, DIY container ideas to consider:

Yogurt and applesauce cups: Small single-serve containers are ideal for starting small plants like lettuce. Use big tubs for larger plants like tomatoes.

Fruit clamshell packaging: These are perfect for seed starting because they feature built-in drainage.

Solo cups: Or any type of party or paper cup, for that matter.

Egg cartons: Don't toss these in the recycling bin. Use them to start seeds!

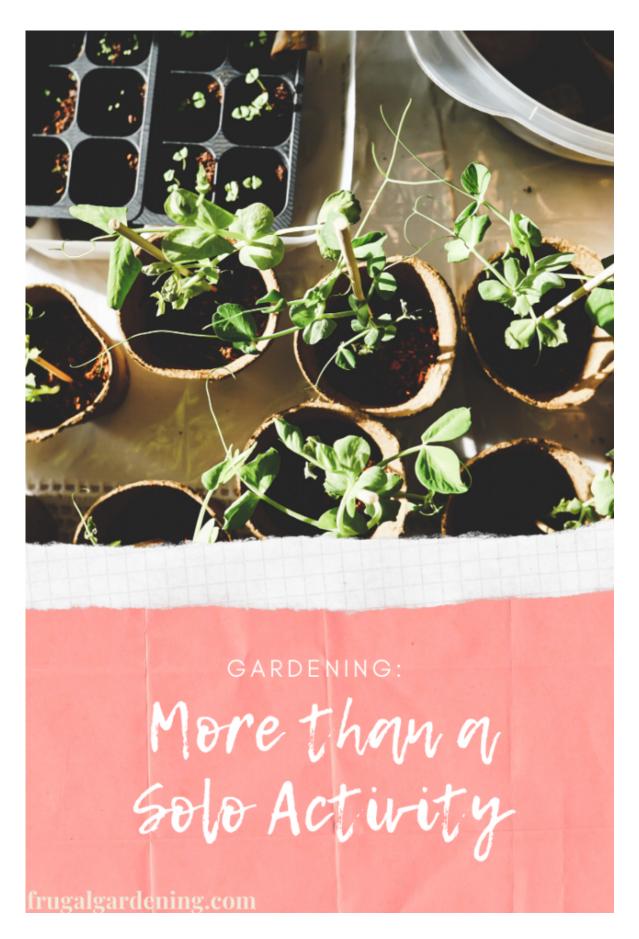
Drink cartons: Whether for milk or juice, cartons are great because they provide a bit more real-estate than other recycled seed starting options. Just be sure to clean the cartons thoroughly before adding soil and planting seeds.

Recycled plant trays: When you buy plants in bulk at the nursery you'll usually gain a few free plant trays in the process. If you don't have any on hand, ask around. Most people toss these out without a second thought. In the late spring, you might even find plenty of these on the curb.

Takeout containers: Next time you indulge in takeout food, don't throw away the containers. Wash them by hand (if they're sturdy enough they might survive the top rack of your dishwasher) and use them to start seeds.

A quick note that many recycled seed starting vessels don't have any drainage holes so be sure to poke a few to prevent root rot. Set your containers on some kind of tray to prevent water from pooling on the counter, table, or other surfaces.

Gardening: More than a Solo Activity



The pandemic continues to affect everyday life despite lockdown protocols being lifted, and I've spent a lot more time in the garden because it's currently one of the few

things I can control (albeit barely!). For more than a decade, I've continued to make mistakes and discover tiny miracles in my outdoor oasis. It's almost always been a solo activity for me. I am physically alone when I garden, but that's hardly a good description of what gardening is to me. It's much more than a thing I do by myself. On quiet mornings when the only friends I have around are the birds and rabbits, I am thinking about all the gardeners I've encountered and conversed with.

I think about the gardener who just came up with an ingenious idea to block squirrels from digging up his beds. I think about the gardener who just had her first child—a child who will no doubt dig in the dirt at some point. I think about the friend who is moving soon to a new home with a small outdoor garden space, and I'm so thrilled to see it bloom. I think about the people who aren't even gardeners yet but who may well one day become part of the green-thumbed community. I think about the people who grow and supply most of the food I eat, the local farmers, the migrant workers—and everyone else who works to bring food to people's plates. I think of the people who don't even call themselves gardeners but who have more knowledge than I'll ever glean from my pitiful forays into the world of dirt and greenery. They are all with me when I'm plucking suckers from tomatoes and grumbling about flea beetles on my radishes.

This morning as I watered my garden, I thought about the recent protests happening across America (and even a few in Canada—Toronto, Montreal). As a white person, I cannot fathom the lived experience of a black person, but I can be an ally. So today, instead of writing about something gardening related, I'd like to amplify the voices of black gardeners and point you in the direction of people to follow, learn from, and get to know. People I'll think about, too, when I'm alone in the garden, but not really alone at all. People we should listen to, hear out, and hold up not just now when they are screaming in agony for someone to listen, for something to

change but always.

It's not enough to be against racism. We must be actively anti-racist.

#blacklivesmatter

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