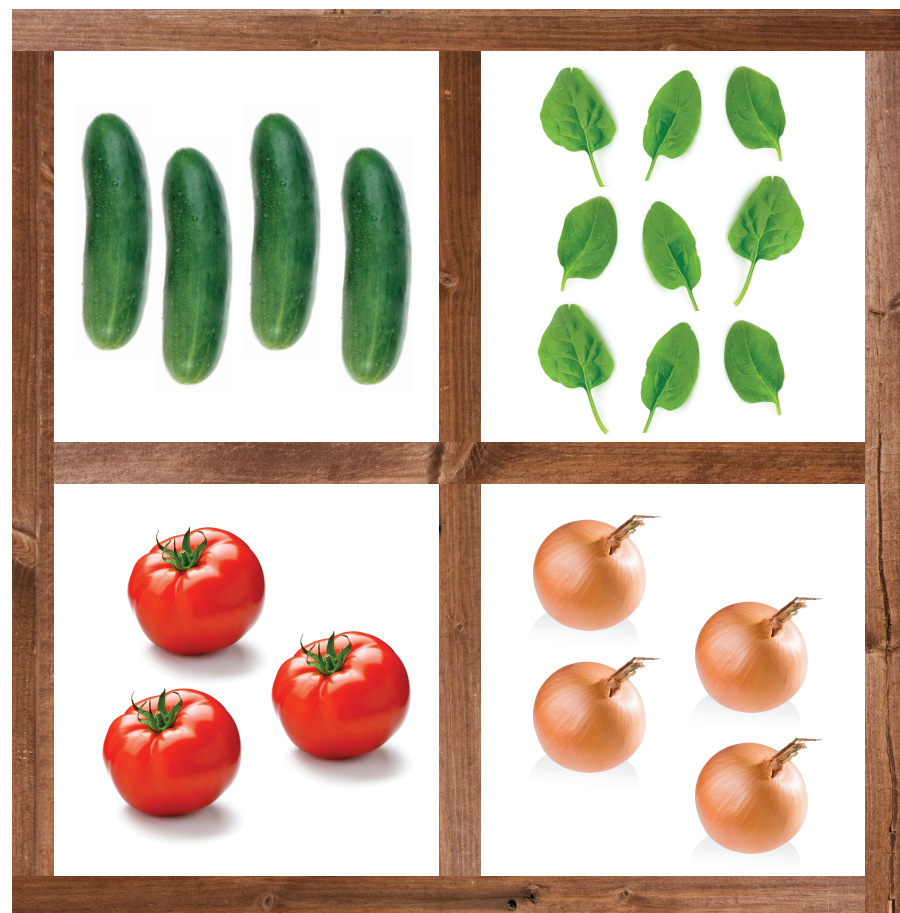


THINK *inside* THE BOX

WRITTEN BY SANDRA C. LIEBLER



“During World War II, for health and economic reasons, Americans were encouraged to establish what were called Victory Gardens to grow their own vegetables.

The public responded, and it was estimated that those little gardens produced a remarkable 30 to 40 percent of the country's food supply during that period.

That was a long time ago, but the rationale for such gardens is timeless, and your backyard vegetable garden today can still contribute not only to your well-being but to the nation's as well.”

—Raymond Nones, author of *Raised Bed Vegetable Gardening Made Simple, The Three-Module Home Vegetable Garden*

No matter what the impetus, small-scale gardening is on the rise. Our suburban small-yard lifestyle, our aging Boomer population, concerns about where and how our food is grown, a need to feel self-sufficient, economic concerns, or just plain love of the outdoors—spring brings out the would-be gardener in each of us.

To research this topic, I attended a class on Square Foot Gardening, taught by James City County Master Gardener Wayne Moyer and offered through the Williamsburg Area Learning Tree (W.A.L.T.). During this three-session course, Moyer taught the basics of starting and maintaining a raised-bed garden, using Mel Bartholomew's *All New Square Foot Gardening* as the textbook.

As with most gardens, planning and preparation are paramount—starting with a raised bed, measur-

ing 4 feet by 4 feet, with a soil depth of 6 to 8 inches. The garden will need at least six hours of sun a day, and should be located away from trees, shrubs or traffic areas. The sides can be anything as simple as four planks secured at the corners or as elegant as a carpenter-built box with decorative posts. Lining the bottom with landscape fabric or wire mesh deters voles, weeds and insects. The box is then filled with soil, leaving a few inches of space at the top. Author Mel Bartholomew, who first wrote his best-selling garden book, *Square Foot Gardening*, in 1972, and revised it in 2005, recommends using a soil blend of 1/3 compost, 1/3 vermiculite and 1/3 peat moss. He says that fertilizer is rarely needed with this rich medium, which he dubs “Mel's Mix.”

The box is then divided into one-foot squares, and each square is planted with a chosen vegetable. Moyer says to

