

A Greener View: Greenhouse can be answer to growing veggies in winter

by Jeff_Rugg

I have wanted to build a greenhouse on the back of my garage for many years. I plan to have some of it about 3 feet below ground to help insulation; therefore, the roof to ceiling height can be taller without needing as much glass. In the back of my mind, I have figured out many of the details on how to do it, but I am worried that it was a little bit unconventional to have it partially buried in the ground. I haven't started digging because the location is close to a silver maple that would probably have to be cut down. Removing the tree would open up a large area of my landscape to more sun for better vegetable gardening.

I am less afraid of building the greenhouse now that I have a new book titled: "The Earth Sheltered Solar Greenhouse Book." It describes how to build an energy free year-round greenhouse. The author Mike Oehler also wrote "The \$50 and Up Underground House Book." He has many years of experience living and building homes and greenhouses in northern Idaho, where the winters are so cold most people would expect them to be heated with expensive fossil fuels.

He is in the part of Idaho near the Canadian border, but he is able to keep growing tomatoes into the middle of December as well as kale and other more cold tolerant vegetables through the winter without additional heat. Following his advice and the principles in the book, most of the country would be able to grow warm weather plants like tomatoes through the majority of winter, if not year after year. Adding a little heat would keep crops alive all winter; his design would save a lot on the heating bill.

The book is written in an easy to read style. Oehler freely admits to design flaws and errors that he found through trial and error, but because he has been doing this since the 1970s, he has also discovered what works well. The reader should not be put off by pictures of some eccentrically built structures with odd sized materials. The basic information found throughout the book is sound. By the time you start reading the last few chapters on designing and building your own greenhouse, you will know what to expect.

The next book also includes practical garden wisdom. Niall Edworthy has gathered quotes, facts, recipes and trivia from all time periods and all regions of the world in "The Curious Gardener's Almanac." Even though the book has an English author, the book is not specifically oriented toward the British gardener. The book is not meant to be read in one sitting, but does make delightful reading in small bits here and there.

Here are a few things I found as I read: Americans eat 30 pounds of potatoes a year, including about 8 pounds of French fries. The wheelbarrow was invented as a military transport tool by the Chinese in about 200 A.D. There are more insects in a square mile of rural land than humans on the whole earth. Insects eat about a third of all food crops grown. The Greek word for the herb fennel is marathon; it was used by Greek soldiers to build stamina and courage.

Golf clubs used to be made from apple, beach, holly and pear tree wood, and drivers are still called woods. Your clarinet and other wood wind instruments may also be made from pear wood.

The book is broken up into chapters for easier reading. There is a chapter for children that is full of fun projects and quotes for the young at heart. For instance, you can learn how to have your initials show up on the skin of an apple as it ripens, or that worms are a thousand times stronger than humans relative to their size.

The last book you should consider is the "Organic Lawn Care Manual" by Paul Tukey. It could just as easily have been titled "Just Say No to Lawns on Drugs." Tukey describes the benefits to using an organic lawn care system without only using an organic product. Lawn problems are diagnosed not just for what they are, but why they are. By looking into the history and conditions that caused the problem, it is often possible to bypass the short-term synthetic product for a long-term sustainable change in the local environment that reduces or eliminates the problem.

The book describes how a landscape based on organic soil that is alive won't use or need synthetic fertilizers that can kill microorganisms.

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