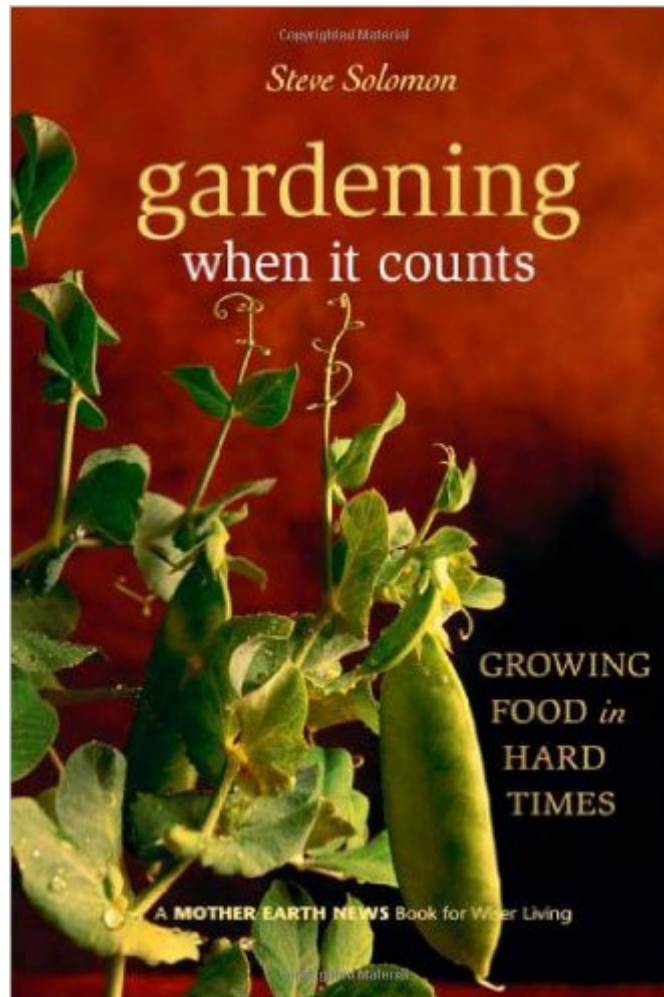


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# Gardening When It Counts: Growing Food In Hard Times (Mother Earth News Wiser Living Series)



## Synopsis

The decline of cheap oil is inspiring increasing numbers of North Americans to achieve some measure of backyard food self-sufficiency. In hard times, the family can be greatly helped by growing a highly productive food garden, requiring little cash outlay or watering. Currently popular intensive vegetable gardening methods are largely inappropriate to this new circumstance. Crowded raised beds require high inputs of water, fertility and organic matter, and demand large amounts of human time and effort. But, except for labor, these inputs depend on the price of oil. Prior to the 1970s, North American home food growing used more land with less labor, with wider plant spacing, with less or no irrigation, and all done with sharp hand tools. But these sustainable systems have been largely forgotten. *Gardening When It Counts* helps readers rediscover traditional low-input gardening methods to produce healthy food. Designed for readers with no experience and applicable to most areas in the English-speaking world except the tropics and hot deserts, this book shows that any family with access to 3-5,000 sq. ft. of garden land can halve their food costs using a growing system requiring just the odd bucketful of household waste water, perhaps two hundred dollars worth of hand tools, and about the same amount spent on supplies — working an average of two hours a day during the growing season. Steve Solomon is a well-known west coast gardener and author of five previous books, including *Growing Vegetables West of the Cascades* which has appeared in five editions.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book is written as if Steve Solomon is the grandfatherly type telling those who know nothing of gardening what's what. Initially, I was a bit put-off by this tone, but the author has earned a right to that tone and his opinions. I quickly became very interested in what he has to say, in that he rejects many ideas and fads on intensive, hyper dense garden production. Steve Solomon has been around long enough to have tried some of the high density, intensive gardening ideas and found them wanting. I had to really chuckle when I read his rudimentary back to basics tool list consisting of a shovel, a bow rake, a hoe and a file to keep them sharp and useful. A simple wheelbarrow, buckets, knife and stone fill out his recommendations. He's so very right when he suggests that it doesn't take an armada of gadgets and do-hickies and specialty tools to make a very successful garden. And his comments on using some commonly sold garden gadgets make for humorous images for those who have suffered too short handles, stooped backs and the associated aches and pains. Many folks pondering the latest garden knick-knack catalog could do well to remember Solomon's basic tools will get the job done advice. Admittedly, he does sound like what MY grandfather would've said in the tool chapter. ("Put down that dreambook, pick up that hoe, and get to doing something useful." ... )What I particularly thought useful was the idea of returning to planting based on choosing plant spacing not for intensity of harvest if thoroughly irrigated, but rather choosing less dense spacing based on potential for drought.

This book claims to tell you how to 'garden when it counts' and specifically mentions gardening during times of economic hardship (i.e. Peak Oil). Yet, it's not nearly as comprehensive or as down-and-dirty survivalist as I had hoped. I wanted simple to follow, bullet point format, but the book did not deliver. Sometimes the narrative left me behind and I didn't follow. Gardeners in general (not just this book) tend to gloss over details as if we're just supposed to know. For example, the fertigation section of the book doesn't have a really good definitive statement of what the heck fertigation is. Nor do I recall any specifications being provided on the size of the hole or how you make the hole in the first place. Good definitive (and idiot proof) topic sentences would've been a huge help. Also, it was frustrating for a book that purported to teach gardening for hard times to say it's not worth it to garden in clay soil or rocky soil. I would've thought there would be a focus on things that can be done to maximize growth in all conditions. This is Gardening When It Counts, not Gardening In Ideal Conditions. That and gardening is more expensive than I thought. Especially as the author notes that once oil prices go up so will the cost of all the fertilizers he advises you will need. Can I afford to garden when it counts? I'm not sure. Plus, unless you can buy seeds at least

every other year, you are S.O.L. (which I would've hoped there would've been more discussion on alternatives, perhaps some discussion of exchanging seeds with local gardeners etc...)In addition the author recommends at least 2700 square feet of garden space times two (so you can rotate your crops). This is not practical for most of suburbia.

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