

## Keyhole Gardens

Keyhole gardens are a mix between square-foot gardening and [herb spirals](#), blending the best of both practices to create something far more practical. In a word, the keyhole garden could be distilled down to ‘accessibility’. It allows gardeners to access their garden bed from within a small radius located in the centre of the plot.

A keyhole garden offers as its main advantages the ability to tend your beds from the one position. You literally work from within the bed and rotate to access every inch of it. Plus, the bed can be raised so you don’t need to get on your knees when conducting your gardening tasks.

For people with physical disabilities, and the elderly, the keyhole garden is the ultimate way to enjoy this recreational hobby.

### **How do you build a keyhole garden?**

Start by driving a stake into the ground as your pivot point. Then attach a piece of string to the stake with a marker measured out at 50cm and draw your inner circle. This is where you will stand while performing your gardening tasks.

Then, move the marker 1.5m away from the stake along the piece of string and draw another circle on the ground. This will become the outer perimeter of your garden bed and will allow you to reach all areas from your inner pivot position.

You will need to allow an access point of at least 50cm to get into the centre of the garden once it’s been built.

Once this has been done then it’s time to build the raised bed. You could use rocks, bricks, sleepers or any other material that can retain the soil within the beds. The height required will be at least 1m so it will need to be constructed well enough to hold all that soil.

Finally, once the bed has been built fill it with soil, compost and animal manures to create your gardening plot.

### **Why would I bother building one of these?**

The ultimate answer, apart from the accessibility features mentioned earlier, is the efficient use of space. Consider creating a square, raised garden bed that you could access from every angle. It could only be 1m x 1m (3.3ft x 3.3ft) but would take up a space measuring 2m x 2m for access. Therefore, this one garden bed would require 4sq. mtrs but only provide 1sq. m of gardening plot. The arable portion of this plot is only 25%.

A keyhole garden, on the other hand – with the measurements quoted earlier, would take up an area totaling 9 sq.ms and provide a plot size of 5.78 sq.ms. The arable portion of this plot is a whopping 64%.

Even if you were to try and maximise the space used for the square garden beds the best percentage of arable land that you would get would still only be 36%, almost half that of the keyhole garden.

So, it makes complete sense to build these rather than waste valuable space constructing their square counterparts.

Using a creative pattern in the garden will create more edges and often can increase diversity and productivity. The technique called “Keyhole Garden” is beautiful, simple and productive. It can be adapted to the specific needs of the gardener. One of the basic ideas is that it provides easy access with minimum path-to-bed ratio – a “least path” design. The horseshoe-shaped beds are sized so you can easily reach the entire area standing in the keyhole. The beds can be situated near the house for quick access, or along your main pathway.

The beds can be constructed in many ways. For perennials, the raised-bed method works well. For annuals, the sheet mulch method is a great alternative. Instead of tilling or double-digging to prepare the growing space, start with a weed barrier of wet newspaper (black ink only) or cardboard, layered over the entire area. On top of this, use sawdust or straw to define your keyhole pathway. Then around it, put a good layer of compost for your annuals. You can add a bit of soil or sand to hold your seeds. Cover it with straw or old hay to keep it moist. Now you can plant your seeds or transplant your seedlings and your garden bed is done.

The keyholes can be used along a pathway or they can be combined around a circle to create a beautiful mandala or circle garden. The center circle can be planted with herbs, flowers, a small tree or a shrub. The center is also a good place to have a small pond in the garden. It would be a great place to sit and enjoy a meal, surrounded by flowers and an abundance of food. And if you need a little more salad you can reach out and pick a few leaves. Enjoy!