

**All Gardens
Great & Small**
by
York Co.
Horticultural Agent
Tom Becker



Outdoor gardening can be therapeutic for the healthy or the disabled. The simple activity of weeding can strengthen people physically as well as mentally. One of the most poignant memories of my childhood is helping elderly neighbors weed and tend to their garden chores. Laboring together in the sun-warmed dirt brought not just the rewards of more exercise but the larger lessons of how to care for living things.

I've learned too that for many "older" gardeners physical limitation does not mean abandoning the garden. Healthy gardening means experiencing the pleasant garden sensations of smell, sight, touch, taste and often sound. Here are suggestions provided by a book entitled: "Backyards and

Butterflies: Ways to Include Children with Disabilities in Outdoor Activities" by Doreen Greenstein.

The key to making gardens accessible to all ages with or without a handicap is organizing the space to mesh with the physical limitations of the gardener. Proximity to the house — so it's easy to get to and fro — is the first consideration. Integrating the plot with the rest of the family garden, so everybody can work together, is the second.

For adults and children who use wheelchairs, make a path that leads to the garden and to wherever tools are stored. It should be at least 36 inches wide. A 60-inch in diameter space is needed for wheelchair turn-arounds. Form the path with two rows of scrap lumber (spacing the rows to match

the distance between the wheels of the chair) or with plywood sheets, conveyor belting, or any material that provides a smooth surface.

The traditional raised bed — where soil is built up inside a wooden frame (often made from stacks of railroad ties) — can offer additional reach to those in wheelchairs. For others, elevating the garden to waist level works best. A homemade planting table, which allows a wheelchair to slide underneath the table, makes it comfortable to work the soil in a seated position. Seeds or seedlings are planted in large plastic dish pans with holes drilled for drainage. Purchase extra large pans at restaurant supply stores.

Five-gallon plastic food storage buckets hung from the sides of the planting table (again with holes drilled for drainage) make ideal containers for growing herbs. Cover protruding nails with a slit tennis ball.

Smaller raised beds made of stacks of tires bolted together, even window boxes attached to a porch or deck railing, make workable miniature gardens. Old wooden barrels can be used to grow strawberries, tomatoes, and vine crops. Vegetables can also be grown in plastic trash bags set out on an old picnic table or bench.

Choose plants carefully for maximum success. Consider the

size of seeds or transplants (big ones are easier for weak hands to manage) as well as the garden's location. Seed tape is easier to handle for lettuce and other vegetables where the loose seeds are fine.

Check varieties. Certain ones do better in containers; ask for recommendations at your local nursery or county extension office. Dwarf fruit trees can be pruned or trellised so the fruit is within easy reach. Vining varieties also make for easier picking. Of course, avoid all poisonous plants, parti-

cularly those with toxic substances in the flowers.

Those who are vision impaired often enjoy fragrant plants including aromatic herbs and flowers. Consider texture, too. There's a remarkable diversity in feel of leaf and stalk.

Toting tools around is a hassle. Bags and buckets of various shapes, sizes, and materials can be attached by Velcro to a wheelchair or walker, keeping paraphernalia easily within reach.

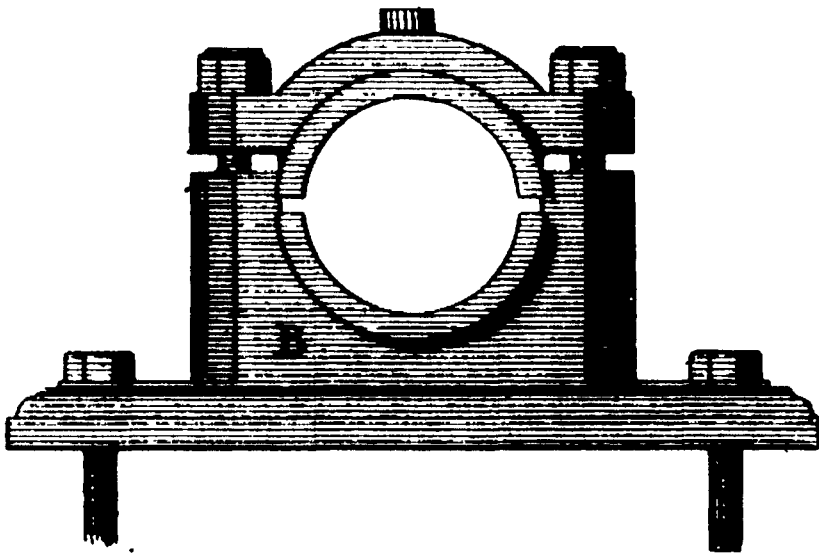
Food Service Sanitation Course

LEESPORT (Berks Co.)—The National Restaurant Association Applied Food Service Sanitation Certification Course is planned for Monday, June 12 and 19 from 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m. and on June 26th from 8:30 a.m.-12:00 noon. The two and a half day course will be held at Berks County Agricultural Center. Lunch will be provided on the full days. The third day will end upon completion of the National Restaurant Certification Examination.

Registration will be on a first-come, first-serve basis. Course will require reading of textbook and independent study. Cost for the course is \$85.

Registration is requested and is due on or before June 3. Please send a check made payable to Berks County Extension Special Account. Mail to: Food Service Course, Berks County Cooperative Extension, Berks County Ag Center, PO Box 520, Leesport, PA 19533-0520. Please include your name, address and phone number.

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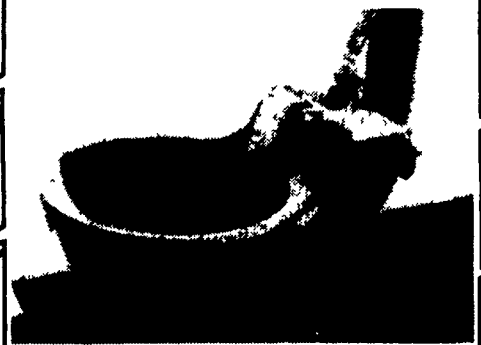
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