

*“Hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor”
Pope Francis (#49) Laudato Si*

Straw-Bale Garden

In Laudato Si, the Encyclical on Care of our Common Home, Pope Francis tells us, “The entire material universe speaks of God’s love, His boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains everything is, as it were, a caress of God.” The Pope encourages us to listen both “to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor”. This is what the Care for Creation Ministry has set out to do. You, too, can caress the earth and caress the poor with God’s love by volunteering to work in the straw-bale garden.



In 2014 the Care for Creation Ministry began the cultivation of the Straw-Bale Garden addressing both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor by providing fresh, organic vegetables to the guests served at a meal in Baltimore through the Breaking Bread with the Hungry Ministry,

Each year, the straw-bale garden project has expanded and in 2017 we increased the number of bales to 108 to include SPAN, Serving People Across Neighborhoods, in our outreach. This year we you’re your help March 24, 9:30 am, to prepare the garden area for the fresh delivery of straw. The preparation consists of “unbaling” the 2017 bales to composting bed of straw. So bring the family and a pitch fork and/or shovel and give us a hand. April 7th, we need your help setting up the straw bales at the garden location, which is at the end of the parking area by the pavilion. From April 7th to April 21st, we need your help conditioning the bales. April 22nd (Earth Day) we need your help planting. As soon as the vegetables are ready for harvest, we need your help harvesting. If you already have a vegetable garden we would be happy to accept your vegetable donations that are organically grown. Organic protects the watershed. Only organic fertilizer is used which means there is no run off into the watershed of polluting insecticides, pesticides, and herbicides. These pollutants negatively effect all users of the water table – people, plants, and animals. The poor generally do not have the luxury of filtered or bottled water and so the poor are disproportionately negatively effected by pollution. This is evident by a higher incidence of skin, respiratory, and intestinal diseases, by higher incidence of pre-mature and birth defects, and by resulting higher cost for basic medical needs among the poor.

Setting the Bales – All the straw bales need to be arranged in the garden, aligning east to west for maximized sun exposure. Some of the bales need to be trellised, framed with 2 x 4s and fence posts holding 3 separate lines of 16 gauge wires. Our experience in the past has seen the cucumbers growing horizontally instead of vertically so David Crump is addressing the problem with a trellising solution. Soaker hoses will be put in place on the bales and attached to a timer to water the plants regularly and

consistently so as not to abuse the water supply. From our lessons learned in the past, we are purchasing a water pressure regulator and standard soaker hoses to assist in being more “maintenance free”. A water scarecrow will be put into place to make a water spray when triggered by motion, assisting in keeping critters away from the garden. The setting the bales process will take place the morning of April 7. The 108 straw-bales, purchased from Triple G Farm LLC, are due to arrive at 9:30 am



Condition the Bales – After the bales are set, conditioning can begin. This is a process to saturate the bales with organic fertilizer and water to create an internal composting of the bale. The internal temperature of the bales will rise as high as 100 degrees. The conditioning provides an environment of continual composting yielding nourishment to support the maturation of all the plants. Conditioning is a daily process for a two week period beginning April 7. The daily commitment for the conditioning period for up to 8 bales is approximately a half hour. Because we use organic fertilizer, the first day calls for 3 cups of fertilizer on each bale with forceful watering the bale to saturation. Day 2 calls for water only. Day 3 repeats the fertilizer and water. Day 4 is water only. Day 5 is 3 cups fertilizer and water. Day 6 is water only. Day 7, 8, and 9 is 1.5 cups of fertilizer and water. Day 10 is 3 cups fertilizer and water. Day 11, 12, 13, and 14 is water only. Day 15 the internal temperature of the bales should be 70 to 80 and the bales are ready to plant. No insecticides, pesticides, or herbicides are used.



After 2 weeks of conditioning, the bales were ready for planting. Tomatoes and peppers are seedlings and the rest of the seeds use the large seed method.

Tomato Plantings - Bury Two-thirds of the Tomato Plant Set the plant in the hole deeply enough so that two-thirds of it is buried. Laying the plant on its side is okay, but angle it so that very top remains above ground. Roots will sprout all along the buried stem to make a stronger plant. You can pinch off the lower leaves if you prefer, but it is not necessary. When you're done, two-thirds of the entire plant will be buried; only the top of the tomato plant will remain above ground.

Plantings for other veges – Using a trowel, spread the straw to make an opening in the straw large enough to accommodate the plant. The chart below lists the number of seedlings for each bale, equally spacing the seedlings in the bale.

Large Seed – Using a trowel, spread the straw to make an opening in the straw about 1” deep and wide enough to accommodate the large seed. Put about ¼” organic potting soil in the space, drop the seed and cover with organic potting soil. The chart below lists the number of seeds for each bale, equally spacing the seeds in the bale. The smallest of the large seeds was the eggplant.

Small Seed – Using a trowel, spread the straw to make a row 1” deep and about ½” wide. Put about ¼” organic potting soil in each row and drop the seeds, one at a time, a few inches apart according to the seed packet. Cover with organic potting soil. The chart below lists the number of seeds for each bale, no small seeds for 2018. Make as many rows in each bale that will accommodate the number of seeds, usually 2 rows.





Volunteers to be recruited at hospitality weekends in Feb and Mar. A presentation before all the Masses; Saturday, Sunday and Life Teen Masses, will be made to recruit volunteers. We'll have a table on the patio or in the breezeway in addition to the hospitality location and hope to sign up about an additional 16-20 volunteers, encouraging young people for service credits, scouts for environmental badges, and families.

Check out the videos of the straw-bale gardens on the Care for Creation home page. There are witness stories from our friends in Baltimore at the end of the 2015 video.