

Bib Overalls

Do you watch for Lucy the Lemon Lady or Zack the Zucchini Man in your neighborhood? Whether their crops appear in a box on your porch or a paper bag in your hands, the whole neighborhood benefits from Lucy's and Zack's labor. Lucy's lemon tree is 8 feet by 8 feet tall and wide, it produces the sweetest Meyer lemons anywhere. Zack's zucchini and raised bed vegetable garden keep his family and neighbors in quality food all year. What makes these gardeners different than others? They have a farmer level of production.

Crops are crops whether they exist on 100 acres or on a city lot. Production comes from knowledge, labor, and patience. Some people have green thumbs that produce pounds of lemons or bushels of tomatoes. Crops may vary from flowers, fruits, vegetables, landscape, and fruit trees. Any of these plants may be a crossover to benefit another. An avocado tree may provide shade for your chicken coop or your patio. Your garden might be home to milkweed to feed the monarch butterflies and create unique plant material in your landscape.

Success in production stems from following a recipe. First and foremost, check out your neighbor's success. If Zack lives next door, peer over the fence for his location of his vegetable garden. Or go knock on his door and ask him; whatever you are comfortable with doing. Putting your garden beds in the same, like position, will provide ample sunlight and wind protection. The right location is important. Those plants that produce vegetables need 6-8 hours of sunlight in order to grow zucchini and tomatoes.

Soil is the mainstay, the support, the backbone and the cohesion that holds the garden together. All those materials and microbes feed and support your plants and you. The quality of your soil will make or break your progress. Feed your soil like you feed yourself, nutrients and moisture build on what exists there already. Compost and soil amendments will help to make your soil into a super environment.

Quality plants are the key to success. If you would like Lucy's lemon tree, go to your nursery and search out a good one. Look for strong branching, prolific blossoms, and a healthy root system. Don't be afraid to ask the nursery person to pull the plant out of the pot to examine the roots. Best to let the nursery person do this so the plant does not get damaged. Just as with poking your head over the neighbor's fence to learn more, don't be afraid to ask the nursery person for help. The one thing all gardeners like to talk about is plants. In purchasing trees, the quality is extremely important; trees are long lived and should be very good from the beginning.

Moisture is another leg to make the table balanced. Watering is a skill. Allowing an automatic sprinkler system to make your decisions will be costly. Like the three bears, watering is either too much, too little, or just right. Know your plants, your soil, and the weather. Learn, then watch for that plant that will advise you that they all need a drink. A Paul Revere plant that calls out for a drink will help you with your timing.

Production is based on all the above plus fertilizing at the appropriate time. The plants, whether vegetables, fruits, or flowers, need energy to grow and build for production. Consistently applying fertilizer as per instructions on the bag will help create the flowers for lemons, zucchini, and zinnias. Flowers on any plant are the first signs of success.

How does one get to this level of gardening? When do you purchase the bib overalls of the Mr. Green Jeans style? Come on, you remember him, right? Timing and consistency will help you fill up those extra boxes in the garage with tomatoes for your family and friends. The quality of plants and labor creates quality food and a useful yard.

Master Gardeners are here to help. Join us at the Demonstration Garden at 251 S. Barretta Street in Sonora for the May 1st Plant Sale between 9:00am and 1:00pm. Plants, advice, and garden treasures are there to enjoy.

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UCCE Master Gardeners of Tuolumne and Calaveras Counties can answer home gardening questions. Call 209-533-5912 or go to: <http://ucanr.edu/survey/survey.cfm?surveynumber=7269> to fill out our easy-to-use problem questionnaire. Check out our website at: http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.edu/Master_Gardeners/ You can also find us on Facebook.