



The Salad Table or Salad Box

By Lisa Hickey, Extension Agent and John Dawson, Master Gardener 2007

This fact sheet provides information and construction details for two types of container gardens that will enable you to produce fresh, flavorful greens close to your backdoor. The Salad Table is essentially a shallow wooden frame with a large surface area and a mesh bottom that allows water to drain. You can attach legs of any desired length or set it on saw horses or other supports. They are portable, versatile, easy and inexpensive to build, and terrific for gardeners of all ages, sizes, and abilities. The Salad Table can be moved to capture sunlight in spring, fall, and winter and avoid the sun and high heat of summer. Best of all, you can garden comfortably at waist level (for those confined to a wheelchair or physically unable to kneel or bend down) and avoid problems with certain animals and insect pests.

The Salad Box is the baby version of the Salad Table and works especially well for kid’s projects and folks with small spaces.

Materials for Building a Salad Table (33” wide x 58” long):

- Untreated, framing lumber: Any length to accommodate cuts
- Exterior wood screws –assorted lengths of 3”, 2 1/2”, 1 5/8”
- 1/2” staples
- Roll of 1/2” or smaller mesh hardware cloth
- Window screening (a great way to recycle old materials)
- 4 casters (wheels) - optional

Suggested Tools:

Saw/Handsaw	Tape Measure
Hammer	Staple Gun
Tin snips	Gloves/Safety Goggles
Drill/Screw gun (easier installation)	Marker
#2 Phillips screw bits/ Screwdriver	

Directions: (See also alternative construction methods)

- Cut (2) 58” sections of 2 x 4 (long sides)
- Cut (4) 30” sections of 2 x 4 (cross pieces)
- Cut (4) 31 3/4” sections of 2 x 4 (inside support legs) Note: ADA requires a minimum of 27” for wheelchair access. You may have to adjust both leg heights to accommodate specific chairs.
- Cut (4) 36” sections of 2 x 4 (outside legs)
- Cut (4) 58” sections of 1 x 4 (screen support)

- Attach the long sides (58") to the cross pieces (30") using the 3" galvanized screws (2 screws/cross piece). The two interior cross pieces are attached 18 3/4" from each end of the long piece. (This makes for three roughly equal sections.)
- Center the hardware cloth screen on the outside bottom of the frame. Stretch it taut and staple it to the frame bottom and sides using a staple gun. Use 1x4's lengthwise to hold screen in place and attach with 1 5/8" screws.
- Build four sturdy legs by attaching each of the 31 3/4" legs to a 36" leg using the 2 1/2" galvanized wood screws. (Figure 1)
- The table will rest on the shorter piece of each 2-piece leg. Attach the legs on the four corners, by driving three 3" screws through the top of each leg and into the long side of the frame. (Figure 2)

Tips:

- 1) Drill pilot holes with a 1/8" drill bit before driving in the galvanized screws. Use wax or soap on screw threads for easier assembly.
- 2) Use a wood rasp/sand paper to clean up rough edges after cutting your wood pieces.
- 3) Cut window screen to line bottom of each section to hold in growing media. You might consider placing weed guard or newspaper on top of the screen to slow water loss.

Alternative construction methods:

- 1) The Salad Table can be made any width and length as long as the weight of the growing media, water, and plants can be supported.
- 2) You can substitute 10d galvanized nails for the screws. If you prefer, you can have your lumberyard or store make the required lumber cuts. You can substitute 2 x 6 boards for a deeper growing bed (good for snap beans), or 2 x 8 boards (good for peppers, determinate-type tomatoes, and bush cucumbers) or add 2 x 4 sections atop and fastened to the original design to extend the growing height.
- 3) Legs can be made from 4 x 4s (with a 1 1/2" x 3 1/2" notch cut out to support the frame) or you can set the frame on two sawhorses, or other supports. Attach casters to the legs to make it mobile.
- 4) You can eliminate the hardware cloth and just use window screen for the bottom. Be sure to attach four 1 x 4 boards, each 58" long, over the window screen to prevent the bottom from sagging.
- 5) If you just want a hardware cloth bottom with no window screen, you'll need to cover the bottom of each section with newspaper, weed guard or a paper grocery bag to prevent the growing media from sifting out. Or use a plastic bag with small holes cut with a knife for drainage.
- 6) You could make the frame with one divider instead of two or add more.
- 7) For a more beautiful Salad Table, paint/stain it (externally) with an exterior paint.

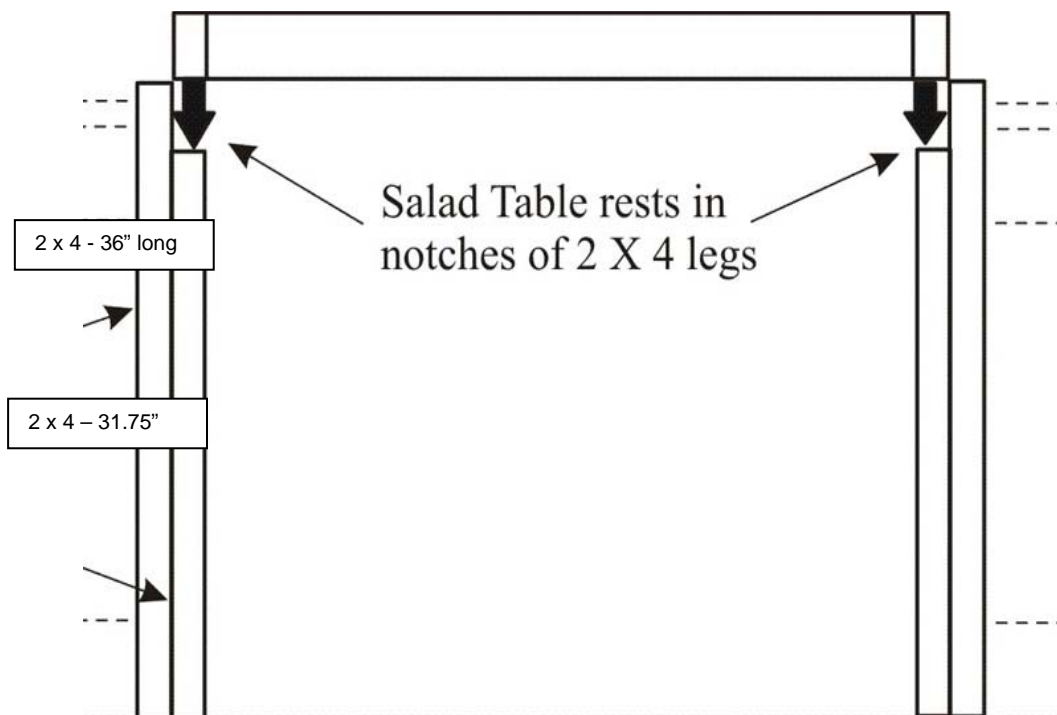


Figure1. Salad Table on 2 x 4 Leg (End View) nailed to 2x4 - 32 1/2 "long to form two-piece notched leg
Salad Table rests in notches of 2x4 legs. 4"x4" legs can be used but will require notching.



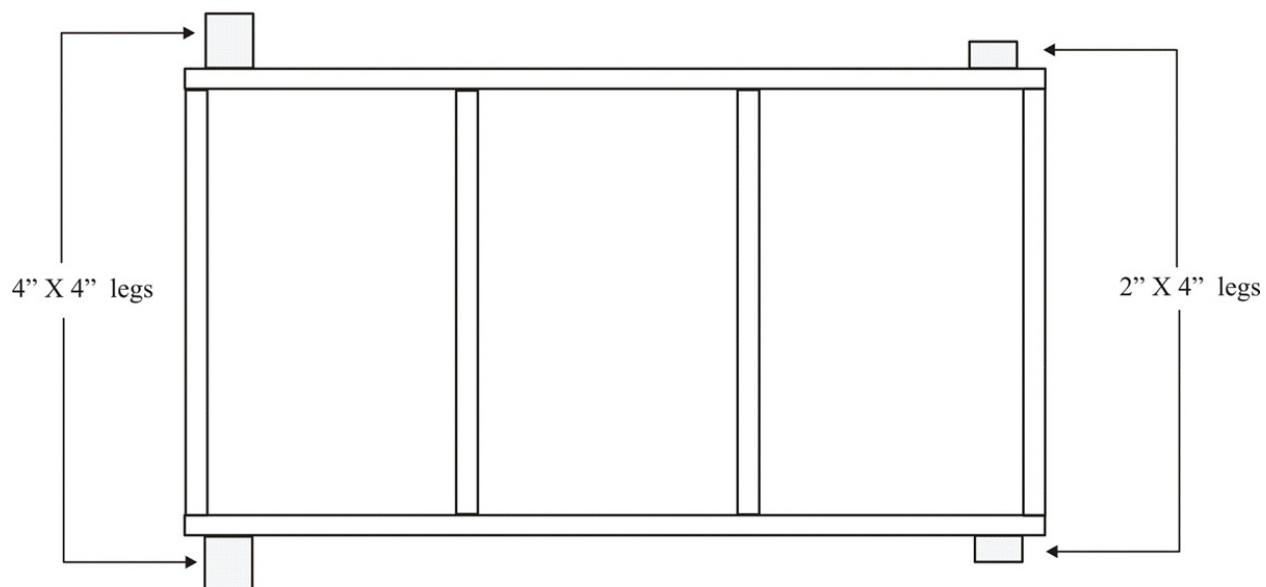


Figure 2. Top View of Salad Table

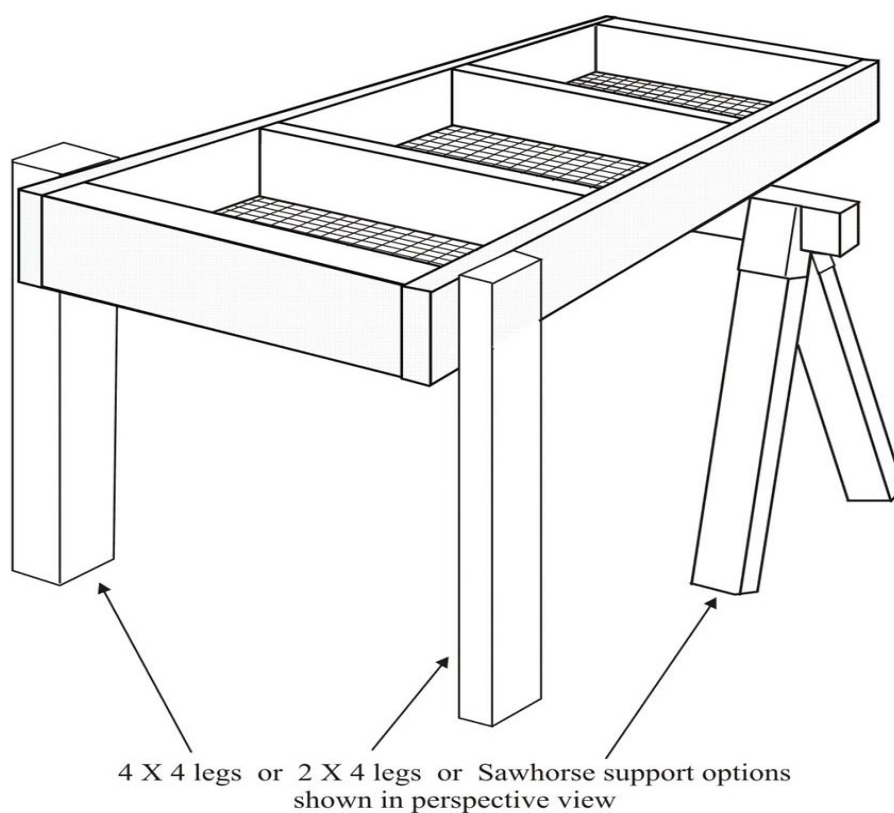
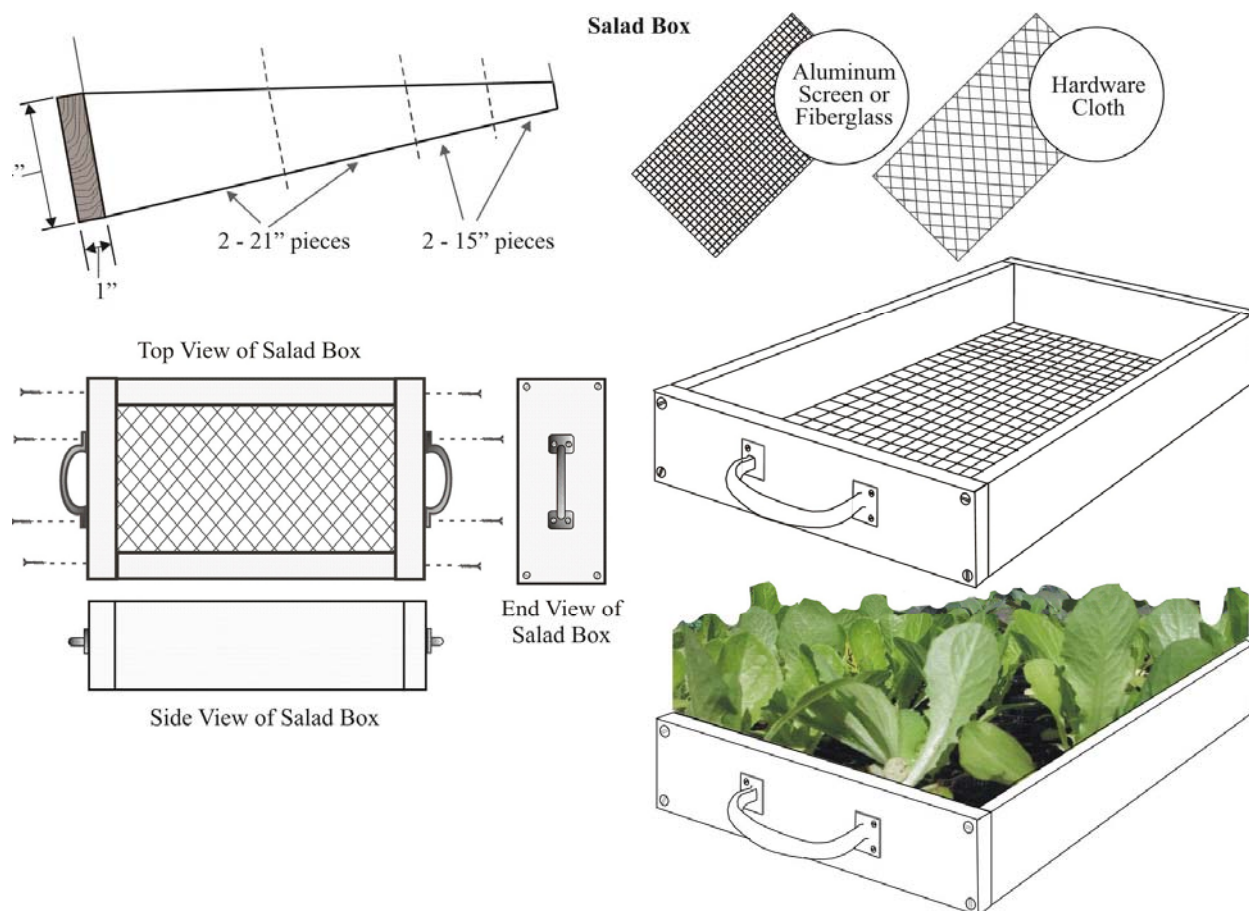


Figure 3. 4 x 4 legs or 2 x 4 legs or sawhorse support options shown in perspective view



Building a Salad Box:

- Cut one 6' pine or cedar board (1 x 4) into four pieces - (2) 15" pieces and (2) 21" pieces.
- Use 1 5/8" galvanized screws to attach one long piece to the two short pieces.
- Repeat with other long piece and then attach window screening and 1/4" hardware cloth to the bottom with a staple gun. Attach handles if you like.
- This weighs about 12-15 lbs. when filled with moist growing medium and plants.

Growing your new Salad Table Garden:

Location is one of the keys to getting the most from your new container gardens. Select a convenient spot close to your home and a water source. The ground should be level; otherwise water will pool in the corners of the frame. Leaves, twigs and other debris will land on the Salad Table or Salad Box if located under trees. If possible, select a sunny spot in cooler months, move your garden to a semi-shady spot in hotter months or place in conditions specified by the crops you wish to grow. Salad greens will grow best with maximum sunlight during the cooler months and minimum sunlight during the hotter months. The only items you'll need are seeds or transplants, growing media (see detailed section below to define growing media), fertilizer, scissors, a watering can or hose and nozzle (consider micro-irrigation for water conservation). Another useful tool is an inexpensive hand seeder that will help you evenly space small seeds.

Fertilizing:

Most commercial growing media and compost do not contain enough nutrients to produce high yields of salad greens over a growing season. Incorporate a balanced dry fertilizer into the growing media, one that contains nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium. Examples are slow-release fertilizers, cottonseed meal, and manure products that have been composted or heat-treated to kill human pathogens. These products will provide nutrients for many weeks depending on the nutrient content, weather, and crops grown. Always follow label directions. Liquid fertilizers like compost tea, kelp and fish products, and soluble “plant foods” are also suitable but will need to be applied more frequently than the dry fertilizers.

How to Plant:

- Fill your frames with growing media and level it off (don't pack it).
- Make shallow furrows across the length of a section. Furrows are spaced 4"-5" apart.
- Sow seeds 1" apart in the row or as directed on the seed packet and then cover very lightly with growing media.
- The seeds of most salad greens will germinate in 2-4 days. It will take longer when the growing media temperature is below 50° F or above 80° F.
- A floating row cover can be draped over the frames to promote faster plant growth in cooler months. The cover raises temperature and humidity and protects plants from wind damage.

What Can I Grow?

Broccoli family- arugula, kale, mustard greens, radish, cress, broccoli raab, mizuna, kyona, komatsuna;

Beet family- spinach, chard, orach, beets;

Lettuce family- lettuces, endive, escarole, chicory (Note: ‘Deer Tongue’, ‘Red Sails’, ‘Bronze Arrow’, ‘Jericho’, and oak leaf types are more heat tolerant);

Parsley family- chervil, parsley, cilantro or culantro;

Mint family- basil, thyme, anise, hyssop;

Other crops- leafy amaranth (callaloo), sorrel, purslane, claytonia (miner's lettuce), corn salad (mache).

Growing Media:

Your choice of growing media is very important because your salad greens are dependent on a relatively small volume of growing medium, only 3" deep! Unlike their cousins growing in garden soil, containerized plant roots cannot grow around obstacles or mine the soil far and wide for nutrients and water. The growing medium has three main functions: 1) supply roots with nutrients, air, and water, 2) allow for maximum root growth, and 3) physically support the plant. The growing media should have large particles with large pore spaces between the particles. This will make it light and fluffy (well-aerated) encouraging fast seed germination, strong root growth, and good water drainage.

- Fill your table or box with 100% *soil-less* growing media (contains peat moss, perlite, vermiculite, and maybe composted pine bark), 100% high quality compost, or a combination of the two.
- Always pre-moisten soil-less mixes containing sphagnum peat moss.
- Soil-less growing media will settle quite a bit because of the large pores.
- Avoid garden soil because it is too dense and may contain weed seeds and garden pests.
- It's best not to re-use your growing media a second season. You can recycle it into your turf or landscape beds.

Watering:

Salad Tables require about one gallon of water daily, either from a watering can or a nozzle attached to a hose that delivers a *gentle* water spray or use of a micro-irrigation sprayer. Less water is required during cool, overcast weather. Never use hot water from a container that has been sitting out in the sun. More water can be retained by slowing drainage (use of newspaper or weed cloth under the growing media).

Continuous Planting and Harvesting:

- Sow salad greens continuously from last frost through the first heat of summer.
- Salad greens will grow 4-6 inches in height in 25-40 days, depending on the crop, time of the season, and weather conditions.
- The “cut-and-come-again” harvesting method is very efficient. Use scissors to cut all plants close to the growing media level. The plants will re-grow and can be harvested again. Sometimes it is possible to get a third cutting.
- One Salad Table will produce 16 ounces or more greens from a single cutting. Be prepared for 32 ounces or more!
- When plants become weak, bitter, and unproductive they can be “turned under” or pulled out by hand.
- The growing media can be replenished and fertilized, if necessary, and the next crop sown. Each section of the Salad Table can produce several crop cycles.
- An alternative harvesting method is to thin plants so they are spaced 4-6 inches apart and harvest outer leaves or entire plants.

For more information on container vegetable gardening, including the Salad Table and Salad Box, please visit the Manatee County Master Gardener website http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu/lawn_and_garden/master-gardener/index.shtml or call the Manatee County Master Gardeners daily (except Wednesday) from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at (941) 722-4524.

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