APPALACHIAN TRADERS

MILITARY SURVIVAL GARDENING FIELD GUIDE

Standard Operating Procedures for Food Independence

DISCLAIMER: This field guide is provided for educational, informational, and preparedness purposes only. Survival gardening success depends heavily on local climate, soil conditions, and environmental factors. Always consult local agricultural guidance or cooperative extensions when planning your crops. Appalachian Traders assumes no liability for crop failure or misapplication of these techniques. Adapt these guidelines to your specific operating environment.

1. THE MISSION: CALORIE PRODUCTION

When the supply chain breaks, you can't live off a few salad greens. Your mission is simple: grow enough calories and nutrients to keep yourself and your people alive. Survival gardening isn't about making your yard look pretty; it's about efficiency, reliability, and maximum yield for the space you have.

FOCUS ON CALORIE CROPS

Prioritize crops that are dense in carbohydrates, easy to store, and provide high energy. If space is limited, don't waste it on low-calorie vegetables like celery or radishes.

- **Potatoes & Sweet Potatoes:** The ultimate survival crop. High calories, grows in poor soil.
- **Dry Beans:** Provides essential protein. Easy to dry and store for years.
- **Winter Squash:** High yield, stores for months without refrigeration.
- **Corn (Field or Dent):** Excellent for grinding into meal or feeding livestock.

2. SITE SELECTION & SOIL PREP

CHOOSING THE GARDEN SITE

Treat your garden site like a strategic outpost. It needs the right conditions to function:

- **Sunlight:** You need 6 to 8 hours of direct sunlight a day. No exceptions. Watch the shadows across your property before breaking ground.
- **Drainage:** Avoid low spots where water pools. Roots will rot in standing water.

- **Proximity:** Keep it close to your water source and your home for easy defense and maintenance.

SOIL PREPARATION & COMPOSTING

Dirt is just dead rocks. Soil is alive. If your soil is poor, you must build it up. Double-digging is the old-school method: dig a trench 12 inches deep, loosen the soil at the bottom, and mix in compost. This allows roots to drive deep.

> ***Compost SOP:*** *Save every scrap of organic matter. Mix "greens" (grass clippings, kitchen scraps, weeds without seeds) with "browns" (dead leaves, straw, shredded cardboard). Turn the pile every week and keep it damp like a wrung-out sponge. This is free fertilizer.*

3. GARDEN SETUPS

You fight with the terrain you have, not the terrain you want. Adapt your setup to your environment.

RAISED BEDS

If your ground soil is toxic, solid clay, or mostly rock, build upward. Frame beds using untreated lumber, cinder blocks, or scavenged logs. Make them no wider than 4 feet so you can reach the center without stepping on the soil and compacting it.

CONTAINER & SMALL-SPACE GARDENING

If you live in an apartment or need a mobile food supply, use containers. 5-gallon buckets with drainage holes drilled in the bottom are perfect for tomatoes, peppers, and potatoes. In small spaces, grow vertically. Use trellises, fences, or netting for beans, peas, and cucumbers to maximize square footage.

4. SEEDS & SEED STORAGE

Your seed bank is your currency. Always buy **Heirloom or Open-Pollinated** seeds. Hybrid seeds (often labeled F1) will not breed true if you save their seeds for the next year. You need plants that produce viable seeds you can replant indefinitely.

SEED STORAGE PROTOCOLS

Heat, moisture, and light are the enemies of stored seeds. Store them in airtight containers (like mason jars) in a cool, dark, dry place. A root cellar or basement is ideal.

CROP TYPE	AVG. SEED LIFESPAN	STORAGE NOTES
Tomatoes, Peppers	3 - 5 Years	Must ferment tomato seeds before drying.
Beans, Peas	2 - 4 Years	Ensure completely dry; prone to mold.
Corn	1 - 2 Years	Low shelf life; rotate stock frequently.
Squash, Pumpkins	4 - 6 Years	Wash and dry thoroughly before storing.
Onions, Leeks	1 Year	Very fragile; buy or save fresh yearly.

5. EXECUTION: PLANTING & MAINTENANCE

PLANTING & SPACING

Follow the spacing guidelines. Crowded plants compete for water and nutrients, leading to weak crops that are vulnerable to disease. Dig trenches for seeds, place them at the correct depth (usually twice the diameter of the seed), and cover gently.

CROP	PLANTING DEPTH	SPACING (INCHES)	DAYS TO MATURITY
Potatoes	4-6 inches	12" apart	90-120 days
Bush Beans	1 inch	4" apart	50-60 days
Winter Squash	1 inch	36-48" apart	90-110 days
Carrots	1/4 inch	2" apart	70-80 days

SUCCESSION PLANTING

Don't plant all your seeds on day one, or you'll have a massive harvest that rots before you can eat it. Plant a new batch of quick-growing crops (like bush beans or greens) every two weeks. This guarantees a continuous supply of food throughout the season.

WATERING

Water deeply and less frequently to encourage deep root growth. Shallow, daily watering creates weak surface roots that die during a drought. Water at the base of the plant—wet leaves invite fungus and disease.

6. THREATS & DEFENSES

WEEDS

In a survival situation, weeds are the enemy. They steal water, sunlight, and nutrients from your food. Pull them when they are small. Use a heavy layer of mulch (straw, grass clippings, or leaves) around your plants to block sunlight from weed seeds and retain soil moisture.

NATURAL PEST CONTROL

Without commercial pesticides, you must rely on manual and natural defenses:

- **Physical Removal:** Walk your perimeter daily. Pick off tomato hornworms, squash bugs, and cabbage worms by hand and drop them in soapy water.
- **Barriers:** Use lightweight row covers to keep flying insects from laying eggs on your crops.
- **Companion Planting:** Plant marigolds and garlic near vulnerable crops to mask their scent from pests.

7. HARVEST & FOOD PRESERVATION

Growing the food is only half the battle. If you can't preserve it, you will starve in the winter. Harvest vegetables in the morning when their moisture content is highest.

CROP	SIGNS OF READINESS	BEST PRESERVATION METHOD
Potatoes	Vines turn yellow and die back.	Cure in dark for 2 weeks, store in root cellar.
Dry Beans	Pods are dry, brown, and rattle.	Thresh, dry completely, store in airtight jars.
Tomatoes	Fully colored, slightly soft.	Water-bath canning, sun-drying.
Winter Squash	Rind is hard (can't pierce with fingernail).	Cure in sun for 10 days, store at 50-55°F.

SAVING SEEDS

Always leave your best, strongest plants in the ground to go to seed. Do not eat them. Let beans dry completely on the vine. For wet seeds (tomatoes, cucumbers), scoop out the seeds, let them ferment in a jar

of water for 3 days to remove the gel coating, then rinse and dry them on a paper plate.

8. SURVIVAL GARDEN CHECKLIST

Use this pre-deployment checklist to ensure your site is ready for operation.

☐ **Site Secured:** Location receives 6-8 hours of direct sun daily.

☐ **Water Source:** Reliable water access within 50 feet (rain barrels, well, or stream).

☐ **Basic Tools Procured:** Shovel, hoe, rake, trowel, and 5-gallon buckets.

☐ **Soil Prepped:** Ground cleared, double-dug, or raised beds constructed.

☐ **Compost Active:** Pile established and actively breaking down organic matter.

☐ **Seed Bank Stocked:** Minimum 1-year supply of heirloom calorie-crop seeds stored dry.

☐ **Pest Defense Ready:** Mulch gathered, row covers or natural deterrents prepared.

☐ **Preservation Gear:** Mason jars, lids, canning equipment, or dehydration racks secured.