



# dig in

by Adrienne Diaz



**W**ho would have ever thought that I would be gardening? I certainly have had a very UN-green history, killing every houseplant I ever owned! But three years ago I bought a really great house in a really great neighborhood with one really challenging problem: it had a really horrible yard! All the grass was dead, the bushes and shrubs were sad and shabby and very ill-placed, and there were 13 very large Areca palms that were completely neglected and overtaking the pool cage to the point that not even one ray of sunshine made it onto the lanai. Everything needed to be removed and replaced. So the question was, “What did I want my landscaping plan to look like?” Hmm...good question. Alive would be nice!

And thus began my gardening adventure.

Florida is known for its fruit trees, and I knew I wanted a lemon tree. My motto is you can never have too many lemons, but getting them at the grocery store was becoming more and more expensive. I figured if I grew them

in my backyard I could save a few dollars. Which led to my thinking, “Could I make my entire backyard a little more productive, so it would give me something back instead of just taking from me?” I heard you could grow blueberries here and I knew they look like a shrub. Oh good! Out with the old shrubs and in with some that I could eat. I heard that was called edible landscaping.

I knew I could plant lemons and blueberries and other fruits and vegetables, but could I actually keep them alive? That was the challenge that launched my gardening education journey.

I read a ton of gardening books and blogs, went to several garden shows and seminars, and I gathered lots of information. I was seeking the “user friendly” version and the Southwest Florida version. At one point I came across the Square Foot Gardening method and decided to try it. It worked! For the first time in my life, I was able to successfully grow all kinds of plants!

Square foot gardening is the practice of using a small space, and just a little bit of work, to achieve great gardening success. It is a raised-bed method and is particularly well-suited to beginning gardeners and areas with poor soil.

I started with

a 4-by-4-foot space in the leftover sandbox from a removed play structure. I put in new soil, portioned it off and, voila! I was able to grow lettuce, spinach, cabbage, carrots and some radishes - I grew my own salad! How fun it was going out into the yard and picking homegrown ingredients to make dinner. I also was picking blueberries in the morning to put on my cereal.

Over the last three years, I have played and experimented with lots of fun fruits and veggies in my yard. I now have 26 different fruits, and nine vegetable boxes. I do not have to spray any chemicals, I use very little fertilizer, and I spend maybe two to three hours a week total on the upkeep of the edible part of my garden. Square Foot Gardening is a great way to get outside, de-stress, and remove myself from the usual hustle and bustle of a busy lifestyle, while producing something healthy and yummy to enjoy on my table. Investing in a garden benefits our community, our environment and our body!

I am fully convinced that if I can garden, anyone can garden! It has become my mission to help others who may feel like gardening is a mystery or is too hard, or can't be done in a small space or in the Florida heat. I have become a certified Square Foot Gardening Instructor for that very reason. Please contact me if you would like to hear how to



