

Mike Albano's Experimental Gardening proves successful with results

One of Acton's most-known citizens, Mike Albano, is not only a Halton Hills councillor but also an avid gardener who likes to experiment with different methods in growing vegetables.

This past growing season, in his backyard, Albano made the decision to try his green thumb at growing parts of his garden from square straw bales, specifically bales made of barley straw. Barley straw is ideal as it contains more nutrients over wheat straw.

In order to prepare the bales for planting, Albano spent the first couple of weeks watering the bales and sprinkling the surface with a nitrogen source and fertilizer, repeating the process a number of times. This process ensures that the bales are substantial enough for growing vegetables.

Despite some challenges starting out, Albano says the experimental bale gardening turned out to be quite a success and plans to do it again next year.

"After a slow start experimenting with straw bale gardening, I have had great success. The zucchini plant is full of blooms and as you can see from the zucchini the plant produced. I have also harvest tomatoes, egg plants and peppers. I will certainly try this type of gardening next year."

Along with growing a variety of vegetable plants from straw bales, Albano also tried gardening in reusable cloth shopping bags, which also proved to be a success.

"I planted potatoes in reusable grocery bags. I just happen to have Walmart bags. Any bags that are made from cloth or porous material will work fine. I had a great potato harvest."

Overall, the benefits of gardening from a straw bale are

that it eliminates the need for soil, uses less water after the initial setup (as the straw bale retains moisture), requires less bending and no weeding, and the bale can be used as compost at the end of the season. Additionally, the cloth bag method is ideal if you do not have ground to grow in, especially if you have an apartment balcony.



Albano with his square bales, and an insert (right) of the zucchini that grew from them.



The harvest of potatoes, poured out on the ground, after Albano had success of growing them in reusable cloth shopping bags. He was able to grow from a total of 6 reusable shopping bags. Submitted photos

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