

# Fresh vegetables all year round

## Rigby man grows dozen of plants in subterranean garden

By NATE SUNDERLAND  
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RIGBY — It may be the dead of winter, but Rigby native Joseph Smith still eats freshly grown vegetables and herbs straight out of his garden.

A lifelong gardener, Smith, 75, maintains a large garden outside his rural home every growing season. He grows everything from orchids to fennel to tomatillos.

But he's most proud of his winter crop.

For several years, Smith has grown plants during winter in an underground greenhouse he designed and built with repurposed plywood and glass panels.

"I wanted to use up the glass (lying around) and make a greenhouse," Smith said. "I just thought it up — it was inspiration."

Although he didn't know at the time, Smith had created a walipini, an underground greenhouse warmed by solar heat reflecting through glass and the earth's ambient temperature.

While still rare in North America, walipinis have been used in South American countries for decades, said Wendy Infanger, a Brigham Young University-Idaho horticulture professor.

Smith's subterranean garden is 12 by 12 feet and rises from a depth of 4 feet on its far side to 7 feet at its entrance. The roof is a diagonal lattice of glass and plastic, held together by a wooden frame.



Monte LaOrange / mlaorange@postregister.com

Joseph Smith is able to feed his passion for gardening year round with his walipini greenhouse. Smith started his "experiment" several years ago at his home in Rigby. The greenhouse is partially underground, and the sloped glass roof faces south.



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Smith grows some 60 plants in the greenhouse with relative ease. "In the spring and fall,

it's a jungle. You can hardly get in there," wife Dorothea Smith said.

The garden's success

ly stay above 60 degrees.

Temperatures reach higher than 150 degrees on a hot, sunny day, necessitating air vents to prevent overheating. Smith also stabilizes temperature by placing sleeping bags over the glass to insulate in the winter and ward off heat in the summer.

At night, temperature is maintained by dark-colored barrels of water near the entrance, which absorb heat during the day and release it at night.

Joseph Smith spends many winter hours sitting in the walipini and smelling his underground flora.

"It's his winter getaway, his cheap holiday," Dorothea Smith said.

Joseph Smith believes walipinis can benefit eastern Idaho gardeners.

"This is great for preparedness; I like to think that if anything ever happened I'd have something to eat," Smith said. "It's amazing what you can do with a little bit of effort."

He has drawn up blueprints and hopes to sell his walipini design at local nurseries starting next year. He estimates construction costs at less than \$500.

Last week, Infanger's horticulture class visited Smith's walipini to gauge the possibility of building a subterranean garden at BYU-Idaho.

"It's an exciting idea and it's workable for anyone that wants to garden and prolong their harvest — especially in this environment," Infanger said. "It's very viable for homeowners and it will be interesting to see if it can also work on a commercial level."

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## Women in Ag conference focuses on markets, finance

By CINDY SALO  
For Farm & Ranch

TWIN FALLS — Novel markets for farm products and new sources of financing were the themes of the first Idaho Women in Agriculture Conference on Saturday in Twin Falls.

Organized by Cinda Williams, the University of Idaho's Latah County Extension educator for small farms and sustainable agriculture, and Kelly Olson, administrator of the Idaho Barley Commission, the keynote speaker was state Rep. Maxine Bell.

Bell warned that with fewer farmers able to produce more food, "we forget to tell people what we do." Other speakers reviewed the roles of Idaho women in agriculture, explained how participants can share their stories with the public, and described new funding programs.

Celia Gould, director of the Idaho Department of Agriculture, pointed out that Idaho women voted and served in the Legislature years before these

milestones were reached at the national level. This tradition of leadership by Idaho women continues, she said, with many of the state's agricultural boards and commissions are now led by women.

The University of Idaho Extension Director Charlotte Eberlein, highlighted some of the agricultural issues women are working on at the UI. Researchers are finding ways to manage zebra chip disease in potatoes, testing new varieties of wheat and barley, and evaluating dairy compost as fertilizer for organic alfalfa.

Connie Falk, professor of agricultural economics and agricultural business at New Mexico State University told of an Iowa study on the national trend of fewer mid-sized farms. Only small farms producing specialty crops and large commodity farms are increasing. Falk cautioned that small commodity farms are in a "death zone," where survival is difficult. These farms can improve their chances by getting

bigger or by switching to specialty crops.

One of the most successful agritourism operators in Idaho told participants what has worked for them. Hillary Lowe owns The Farmstead in Meridian with her husband, Jim. Their corn maze and pumpkin festival draws thousands of visitors each fall.

Barbara Huguenin, who retired to Emmet after a career as a financial adviser, now promotes Gem County business on Facebook and sets up similar pages for other groups. She urged everyone to connect with their customers on Facebook, including farmers selling directly to the public and university extension offices.

Arlie Sommer, who manages the Boise hub of Idaho's Bounty, a nonprofit food delivery system in the Treasure Valley, Magic Valley and Wood River Valley, said the elevation range across their area helps extend local food seasons. Producers use the group's website to sell their crops online before harvest.



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