

# Veggie garden in Tahoe? – Yes, it's possible



Bob Rockwell has been growing vegetables in Lake Tahoe for 40 years. Photos/Kathryn Reed

**Publisher's note: *Today begins a random series of stories about growing a vegetable garden in South Lake Tahoe.***

**By Kathryn Reed**

Sun, soil, seeds. Those are the primary elements that make for a successful garden.

Now is the time for Lake Tahoe gardeners to be getting their soil ready. With much of the soil in the basin being decomposed granite, it is necessary to amend the soil. This means mixing in nutrient-rich ingredients in the form of compost.

Compost can come in bags from a nursery or be even fresher if it comes from Full Circle Compost in Minden. Be careful about using steer manure because that can burn plants. Full Circle uses food waste from South Tahoe Refuse to create some of its product.

Bob Rockwell of South Lake Tahoe has used both, but finds the Full Circle product to work best.

Rockwell learned to garden at the side of his mother when he was a boy. When he bought his first place in town in 1974 he started his own garden. Now his primary gardening spot is the lot he owns next to where he lives in the Al Tahoe neighborhood.



A radish pokes above ground.

“I’m learning as I grow,” Rockwell told *Lake Tahoe News* as he perused the compost that still needed to be mixed in with the dirt.

Rockwell doesn’t claim to be an expert. But he is willing to take chances, experiment and to even expand his growing area. In the near-vacant lot his main garden is 16 feet by 25 feet. Just behind it is the secondary garden that is 8 feet by 12 feet. He has another plot behind his house. In a small wood box he is seeing what grows in an all compost mixture. Last week radishes were starting to sprout.

“Tahoe soil is good for growing pine trees and not much else,” Rockwell said. Thus the need to help it out a bit.

Rockwell doesn't count the hours it takes to tend his garden. It's one of those labors of love. He's playing in the dirt nearly every day except during winter and the spring storms.

He used to only use compost from Scotty's. He still has bags of it sitting next to the original shack that came with the property. Now he swears by Full Circle Compost. Rockwell had some delivered last fall that he then spread on top of soil where he knew he would be planting. Soon all of it will be mixed in.



Bob Rockwell mixes compost in with Tahoe's naturally granite soil.

Rockwell uses a shovel for the mixing. A rototiller would speed up the process.

Once the soil and compost are mixed, Rockwell will rake it smooth. Then distinct rows will be created to plant seeds. Mounds will be created for things like potatoes.

He says even if people are just now starting to think about

the soil, that's fine. But amend, amend, amend. And he says loosely packed soil is the best.

Fresh compost isn't something people want to plant in right away because it can be too hot and burn the seeds or plants. That is a reason to get it in the fall and not the spring.

A raspberry plant and onion are coming up in the main area. These are volunteers – things he didn't plant. But he's not about to pull them either. He wants to see how they do.

His eyes, though, are always on the weather forecast. He follows four weather sites. This time of year it's all about determining if he needs to be covering what is growing.

Various greens are a big component of Rockwell's garden.

"When you have a salad with dinner that you grew there is nothing better," Rockwell said.