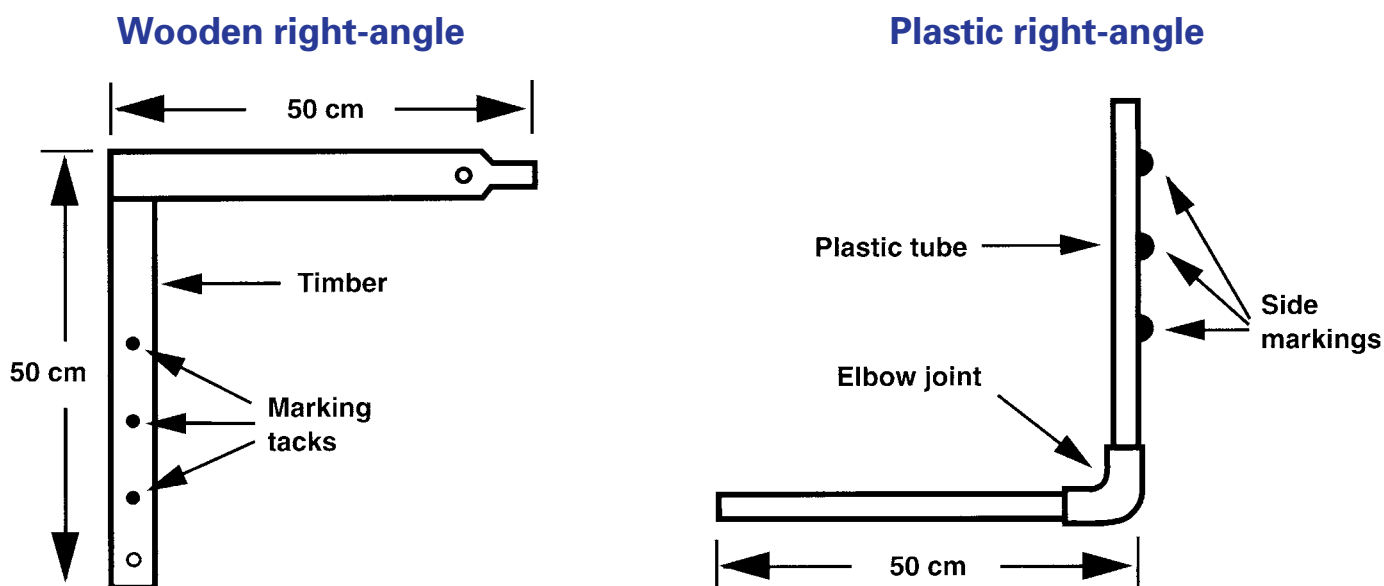


These guides have a number of uses and are particularly helpful when you are working in larger areas of the garden. They can be used on an area of soil for digging, weeding and planting out, and also on the lawn to help with raking and feeding.

Right-angle guides which can be made from plastic or wood, were invented a totally blind gardener in the late 1960s. The idea has proved so reliable and useful that many blind and partially sighted gardeners now regard the guide as an essential gardening tool.

Figure 1



The guide consists of two right-angles which are laid flat on the ground flush with a straight edge in the garden plot or bed. The lengths of the right-angles are marked with studs which provide a point of reference when working out planting distances. Here are a few ways that you can use a right-angle guide in the garden:

- Two right-angles, placed at opposite sides of the flower bed, can be joined by another straight section of plastic or wood or with a cane or length of string, to aid measurement of planting distances, both inwards from the straight edge of the bed and sideways between the plants.

- Used singly or together they can assist in the planting of shrubs.
- They can be used to help to square corners.
- Joined by a connecting bar, they form a guide to enable a gardener to work straight when digging, forking and raking.
- Placed together they will mark an area for lawn maintenance

Using the guide

The right-angles and the connecting bar form a piece of equipment that can be used either in parts or as a whole. Some people do like to use a one-piece guide – two right-angles fixed at the end of a two-metre length. If you can manoeuvre this large size and can

store it when not in use, it will save having to fix the three pieces together each time.

Read Thrive's leaflet *How to make a right-angle guide* for instructions on how to make your own guide.

This leaflet is on www.caryyongardening.org.uk

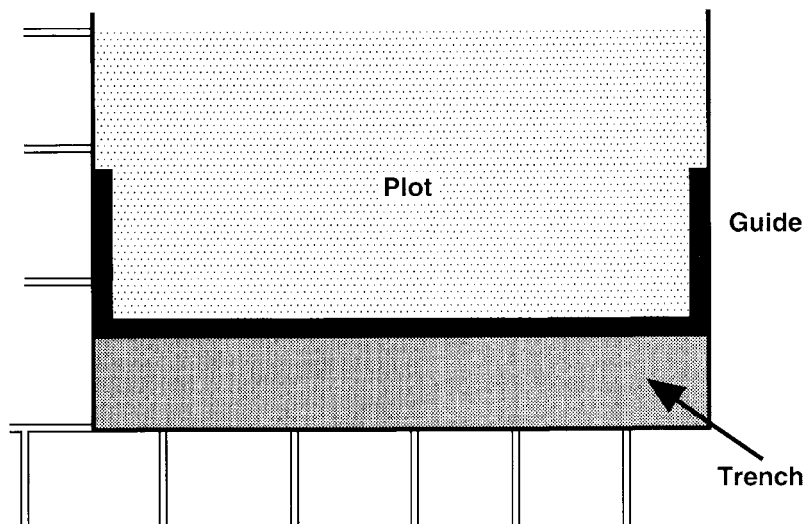
Using the guide to prepare a vegetable plot

With a guide of two metres long by half a metre deep, the internal area of ground will be one square metre. This is useful if you are applying fertilizers as they are spread at a rate per square metre.

To use your guide correctly, your plot must have one straight edge. This edge will give you a straight line

as a home base. You may wish to have your plot two metres wide and whatever length that will fit your garden. The plot can be bordered by paving or lawn and the guide will fit neatly across it (see Figure 2).

Figure 2



Forking and raking

When you come to plant up your plot in spring, you will need to go over the ground, lightly forking it over and raking it. Peg the guide down with the arms touching the home base of the plot. This 50cm deep space inside the guide is where you will begin forking.

Again working backwards across the plot, keeping one foot in contact with the guide, fork over the soil.

When you have finished forking this area, you can start raking. If you are using a short-handled rake, kneel outside the guide, facing the area you have just forked. Rake using a sweeping action backwards and forwards over the soil, removing any large stones into a bucket. You can use your free hand to check what progress you are making. With each sweep of the rake, lift it towards the end of the sweep. In this way, you will smooth over the soil, breaking it down further without raking a hole into it!

You may wish to use a long-handled garden rake. To do this you will need to stand at one end of the worked strip and rake forwards and backwards, occasionally checking that the soil is being kept even.

When you are satisfied that the area is fairly level, move the guide on to the next section as follows:

Remove each of the pegs from the arm ends of the guide and press them gently into soil on the inside corner made by the right-angles. Remove the other two pegs and slide the guide towards you (further down the plot) gently until the ends of the arms of the guide are next to the pegs left in the ground. This is the new position for the guide and it can be pegged down again.

When you are finished raking, your plot is ready for planting.

Planting

All gardeners like to have nice straight rows of vegetable. Again your guide comes in useful here. It should be pegged down in the same position as for forking and raking, at the end of the plot.

Studs on the guide arms mark 10, 20, and 30cm in from the end of the plot. A garden line can be taken right across the plot at one of these marked places.

Use this line as a guide for planting, at distances suitable for the eventual size of your vegetables.

Planting distances are commonly given in gardening books or on seed packets. What will make planting even easier is to have knots in the string at 7.5cm (3") intervals. Use these knots as a guide to measure your planting distances.

Another useful idea is to attach a loop of strong haberdashery elastic – 2.5cm (1") wide – to each end of the string. With careful measurement, the whole item should fit neatly, and slightly stretched, across the plot. The benefit of having the elasticated ends is to ensure that the string springs back into a straight line if it is moved.

Having positioned your string, you are ready to plant. Kneeling outside the guide and facing the area to be planted, feel along the string the required number of knots and plant your vegetable plants to the correct spacing. Plant with the string between you and the plants so that you do not drag the plants out when you come to move the string. You may wish to plant using a trowel, a bulb planter or a dibber.

One of the most important aspects of planting is to make sure that each plant is well watered in. This applies especially if the soil is fairly dry but also if it is already wet. So that you do not have to find your way back to the plants to water them later, water in each plant as soon as you have planted it. This is made easier if you have a bucket of water close by and a plastic beaker. A beaker or two of water for each plant will be sufficient.

Once you have planted the area inside the guide you can move it to the next position in the same way as described for forking and raking. Remember to have the correct tools and equipment, to work methodically and to plant and water in each plant before moving onto the next.

Your vegetable plot will need continuous attention. At the very least the plot will need some weeding. Weeds compete with the crops for food and



moisture. Having planted your vegetable plants at regular intervals, they will be easy to locate – any other plant material that you find is likely to be a weed and can either be pulled out or hoed out gently, using your free hand to locate the vegetables and thus avoid damaging them. Remember that it is easier to weed frequently than to wait until the weeds have grown large and are more difficult to remove.

The only vegetable plants that you cannot start off growing in modules or pots are the root crops – carrot, parsnip, beetroot, radish, etc. These should be sown directly into the ground. Try to gently press one or two seeds into the ground at each knot position. This will give adequate spacing for the crop to grow.

Alternatively, use the ready-spaced Suttons seed tapes of root vegetables. These are seeds within soluble tissue-paper and are easier to plant than loose seed.

Lawn maintenance

Raking, feeding and aerating the lawn are all jobs that can be done using the right-angle guides.

Use whichever size of connector between the right-angles that you wish, although having a 1 metre connector between the two right-angles will provide an internal guide area of 1 square metre – helpful when applying feed, etc.

Peg your right-angles down next to the path, so that the guide faces into the lawn.

Work within the guide and thoroughly rake the lawn with a lawn (springbok) rake. You will need to put pressure on the rake to drag out the thatch. Rake working backwards from one end of the area inside the guide. The lawn rake should almost fill the width of the guide. When you reach the end you will find that there is plenty of thatch to be gathered up into a bucket.

Now go back to the beginning of the guide and using a garden fork – or the smaller border fork (sometimes called a ladies' fork) push the fork in to a depth of a couple of inches. Gently pull it out straight and press it in about 15cm (6") further back. A useful way of doing this is to put your foot against the prongs of the fork then move your foot back 15cm before pressing the fork in. When you pull it out, slide it till it reaches your foot, which again marks the next position. Carry on in this way until you have covered the area within the guide.

Apply the fertilizer evenly over the area covered. You have now completed that area and are ready to move the guiding frame onto the next position.

Although it may take rather a long time to cover your whole lawn, the end results will be well worth it. In autumn, don't allow fallen leaves to lie about on the lawn for long. A lot of leaves can choke the grass and encourage diseases.