

## California AgrAbility Project

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*A partnership between the  
University of California Farm  
Safety Program (Cooperative  
Extension) and Easter Seals  
Superior California.*

## Call Toll Free

**1-800-477-6129**

## For Spanish call

**1-888-877-3257, ext 117**

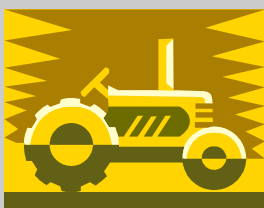
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## *Promoting Success in Agriculture for People with Disabilities and Their Families*

## Enabling Gardens: Raised Bed Farming

As a successful farmer who happens to use a wheelchair, Marshall Loskot has donned many hats: inventor and innovator, carpenter and mechanic, recycler and resurrector-of-reusable goods. Marshall told California AgrAbility staff “I began my ‘dream farm’ in 1991 after I was severely injured in a car crash, which left me with a spinal cord injury at the T10 level. Now I farm and garden using a manual wheelchair, have adapted my land for ease-of-use and accessibility and market my products from my home to consumers across the country.”

One of Mr. Loskot’s avocations is to educate others with or without disabilities on successful farming and gardening for pleasure or profit. “The methods I have pioneered enable me to garden at a height, taking strain off the back, allowing plenty of room for a wheelchair to move freely around or under each bed.” According to Marshall, this is a type of “raised-bed farming.”

CalAgrAbility staff asked him to share some of the low-cost experiments he used to build the garden of his dreams.

Mr. Loskot’s first step in farming with a disability was



*Photo 1: Original raised-beds were created using reusable goods like roofing material.*

to find a reference guide for raised bed gardening. “The book, *Square Foot Gardening*, is one of the best references that I have ever read. Author Mel Bartholomew’s website [www.squarefootgardening.com](http://www.squarefootgardening.com) contains ordering information. Mr. Loskot states that the reference has been “invaluable in building my soil and producing the largest volume of vegetables in a minimal amount of space.”

In creating his raised beds Mr. Loskot had to be innovative with his budget and materials. He focused on accessibility and began experimenting with ergonomically correct raised-bed systems to eliminate further injury.

“Because I was living on SSI disability checks of \$640 per month, most of my experiments were driven by costs.” He became the resurrector-of-reusable goods by using donated cement form boards, discarded roofing tin, and flashing. As you can see in the Photo 1, these materials comprise the base and walls of the bed. Recycled water pipe and fire hoses were placed on top of the sides to eliminate sharp-edge cutting hazards. All were constructed with only four bolts and nuts. The beds are about 22 inches across by 8 to 10 feet long and 24 inches tall. As far as durability is concerned, Marshall says, “The beds are still in use after fourteen years and will probably last another ten.” His only complaint was that “the construction was very labor intensive.” *Continued on page 2*

## Events

### Upcoming Events

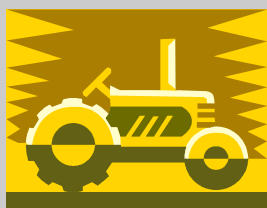
November 12-14, 2004  
Abilities Expo/Northern CA  
Santa Clara Convention  
Center. For a list of  
workshops, exhibitors, and  
free tickets visit the web site:  
[www.abilitiesexpo.com](http://www.abilitiesexpo.com)

November 17 - 21, 2004  
American Public Health  
Association  
Washington, D.C.  
Contact: National Children's  
Center for Rural and  
Agricultural Health and  
Safety, Marshfield Clinic,  
1000 North Oak Ave.,  
Marshfield, WI 54449.  
Phone (800) 662-6900 or  
Visit the web site:  
<http://research.marshfieldclinic.org/children>

Nov. 18-20, 2004  
14th Annual Midwest  
Farmworker Stream Forum  
Hosted annually by the  
National Center for  
Farmworker Health (NCFH).  
Adam's Mark Hotel  
Denver, CO Contact: Lisa E.  
Hughes, 800-531-5120  
[www.ncfh.org](http://www.ncfh.org)

We're on the Web!

<http://calagrability.ucdavis.edu/>



## Enabling Gardens *cont.*

To minimize construction labor, Mr. Loskot found new uses for discarded objects. "I commandeered discarded upright and chest freezers at no cost. These are ready-made beds, no construction required! Now I have appliance repair shops saving broken freezers and contacting me for pick-up." The appliance shops will also drain and recycle the coolant, eliminating environmental hazards. According to Loskot, strawberries, blueberries, bamboo, and especially asparagus love this growing environment. As shown in Photos 2-3 (below), the asparagus is in its harvest stage and new crops of spears are harvested each spring. They use the freezers in sets of two giving them a bed 28 inches across by 10 feet long and 32 inches high. The Loskots planted two-year-old crowns two years ago and now harvest fresh organic asparagus every 2-3 days. They reserve the

freezer beds for cultivars needing containment or for crops that are easily harvested at this height. The only maintenance is adding one cubic-foot bag of steer manure in the fall and shredded computer-paper mulch twice a year. Recycler Loskot loves pointing out other environmental benefits, "appliances are recycled and kept out of our landfills, the freezers keep pesky gophers out, freezing temperatures will not heave plants, and these beds conserve water." To improve eye appeal, they can even be sided with slate or wood.

*Visit Marshall's website:*  
<http://herb-blossom.com/>.  
*CalAgrAbility NEWS will be publishing other articles featuring Marshall and his unique farming ideas.*



*Photo 2: Recycle freezers as raised beds. Shown above with asparagus spears.*



*Photo 3: Freezer with computer-paper mulch.*

### Recommendations For Raised Bed Farming

- Install even surfaces for wheelchairs: concrete, decomposed granite, compact level dirt.
- Brick walks are discouraged because they may heave.
- If a grassy area is desired, openwork paving stones, which have holes for the grass to be seeded through, are available.
- A traditional lawn is too uneven and not appropriate for person in a wheelchair or with impaired walking.
- All gates or doors must be wide enough (at least 36 inches) for a wheelchair to pass.
- Gates and doors should slide rather than swing, and light enough to move easily.
- Ramps, along with gates, doorways, walks, and space between raised beds, should be a minimum of 3 feet wide for single-person and 6 feet for two persons.
- Full sun or at least 6 hours a day is recommended for raised planters and containers, 8-10 hours for vegetables.
- Mulching is a must with larger raised planter. It slows the evaporation and helps keep the soil cool for the roots.

*[From Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University, Blacksburg, VA 24061, Publication 426-020]*

December 1-2, 2004  
California State Rural Health Association 4th Annual Rural Health Conference Meeting Rural Needs: Putting People First Sheraton Grand Hotel, Sacramento, California.  
[www.csrha.org/conference/2004/](http://www.csrha.org/conference/2004/)



### Need for Electric Wheelchair Donation

Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens, Northern California's Garden by the Sea, 18220 North Highway One - Fort Bragg, CA 95437  
Have Electric Carts for guests but need an Electric Wheelchair.  
501c3 Organization  
Contact: [mcbg@gardenbythesea.org](mailto:mcbg@gardenbythesea.org)  
(707) 964-4352



We're on the Web!

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## Marshall Loskot

Our featured farmer, Marshall Loskot, The Wheelchair Gardener, has been farming in Shasta County in Northern California for 20 years. CalAgrAbility staff met him about 2 years ago. He has been more of a resource to us than a consumer. His wife, Marilyn, and he operate a registered organic farm called Herb Blossom Express. The resident three cats, one dog, and seven rabbits (give or take twenty!) help out as much as they can. Their two daughters and five grandchildren visit the farm frequently. Herb Blossom Express specialty crops include three types of Asian pears, Bartlett pears, Newtown Pippin apples, gourmet European red garlic, culinary herbs, thornless blackberries, timber bamboo, tomatoes, chilies, strawberries, chard, white zucchini, blue lake green beans, and Oregon peapods II.

Since Marshall farms using a wheelchair, the Loskots have made modifications for accessibility by building their own wheelchair and tractor lifts. Marshall has also devised steel farm gates, portable garden beds and stands, accessible rabbit cages, and air peelers for his garlic. He also manufactures,



Marshall & Marilyn Loskot

by hand, the spice racks for the culinary herb blends shipped throughout the U.S.

For the past 4 years as President, Marshall, has overseen the activities of the Board of Directors of the Northern California Independent Living Centers. He is also founder of Farms and Gardens for the Handicapped Inc., a 501c3 nonprofit established about five years ago. Marshall sa "Our goal is to place five to starter gardens per year at tl homes of challenged individuals in Northern California. To accomplish this much of our time goes seeking funds. We are collaborating with CalAgrAbility on some training ideas that will help these gardeners."

### About CalAgrAbility ...

The California AgrAbility Project began in 2002 and is part of a nationwide network of USDA-funded Farm Bill programs. CalAgrAbility's primary goal is to help farmers, agricultural workers, ranchers and their families to continue working in agriculture regardless of physical limitations, impairments and disabilities. Staff will help conduct on-site assessments and identify appropriate assistive technologies to make the job safer and easier. For more information visit our website.

**1-800-477-6129**

### Did You Know...

The ballroom dance the "turkey trot" was named for the short, jerky steps that turkeys take.



Turkey breeding has caused turkey breasts to grow so large that the turkeys fall over.

