

RANCH DRESSING

And a Few Words of Wisdom From the Sage

BRIAN M. BIGGS

HELLGATE PRESS



ASHLAND, OREGON

RANCH DRESSING

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*For my grandfather,
Herbert Higginbotham (1888–1954)*

My garden challenges me daily
 and no two days are alike.
 In the early spring, when
 weeds have spread
 across the loam
 like waves on
 a beach and
 laugh
 at
 my
 attempts
 to
 eradicate
 them,
 I realize
 that
 they
 are
 now
IN VOGUE!
 But
 I still
 enjoy
 kneeling,
 with
 trowel
 in
 hand,
 to
 dig
 out
 the
 bottom
 of
 each
 root,
 and
 smile
 as they
 drop into:

my Bucket:



Herein lie the ingredients –
verbs, nouns, modifiers,
clauses, punctuations,
prepositions, (just a dash)
and of course, photographs,

For

*Ranch Dressing and a
Few Words of Wisdom from the Sage*

What Others Have Said About *Ranch Dressing* and the Garden Itself

Brian's garden was selected as the "Best Rural Garden" by the *Sunday Oregonian, Home and Garden*, March 30, 2013.



"Brian M. Biggs has written a remarkable garden book. Gardens require time for a whole host of jobs, watering, weeding, taking care of the soil, and other jobs that sound like work. However, Brian wants us gardeners to have fun. We need to enjoy the process and have fun cultivating our garden."

—Paul Hastings, Assistant Manager,
Portland Nursery (Stark Street)

"*Ranch Dressing* is partly the nuts and bolts of a garden, and partly wandering through the seasons of the gardener's heart, with tales of beloved plants to tales of disaster (asparagus!) including the guiding wisdom of beloved gardeners, from Emily Dickinson to Wendall Berry to the gardener's own grandfather. Time with *Ranch Dressing* (as in the garden) is time well spent."

—Joanna Rose, Author of *Little Miss Strange*, *A Small Crowd of Strangers*, and *Cheerful, the Angry Chicken*

"This sweet and satisfying book serves as a guide to growing your own produce, including timelines for planting salad ingredients so everything ripens about the same time. Photos, poems, and recipes are interspersed with advice on watering, deadheading, maintaining the soil, weeding, and other components of cultivating a hearty and productive garden. With his fifty-plus years of experience, Brian pays particular attention to the aesthetics and convenience of his garden. *Ranch Dressing and a Few Words of Wisdom from the Sage* is, ultimately, a love story."

—Laura Stanfill, Publisher, Forest Avenue Press,
Author of *Singing Lessons for the Stylish Canary*

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Acknowledgments

This book would not have been possible without the patience and guidance and love of my wife Vicki. Of course, my grandfather took a special interest in my learning all aspects of creating a garden and made it seem fun, primarily with the food crops.

Our father also helped my brother and me with the intricacies of a garden. He took special care to show us the way to grow all fruits and vegetables, especially the tomato and the numerous varieties of a tomato. And I couldn't have created this book without the help and advice from Laura Stanfill, my editor, who helped me all the way through the writing process.



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Young me with my grandfather.

Also by Brian M. Biggs

Prove My Soul, Another Side to the Vietnam War

Introduction

During the summer of 1952, between the fifth and sixth grades, I lived with my grandparents in San Leandro, California. During those few months my grandfather and I worked in his 50 X 100- foot garden and he taught me some of the most important lessons of my life:

“A garden should combine flowers with the vegetables and fruit. A garden, like life, improves when mixed with a variety of colors. Plants die, sometimes for no apparent reason. And most of all, your garden depends on sunlight.”

I am forever grateful to have spent that summer in San Leandro with my grandparents. Most of what I have done with each garden, nine total, one at each house, has come from what my grandfather taught me while we worked in his 50 x 100-foot garden.

He taught me much more than that. One day I made an ugly face towards my grandfather because I was cranky. To this he replied, “Brian, take that look off your face, if a wind comes by you will have that face for the rest of your life.” I learned my lesson.

When we moved to the five-acre ranch in Redland, Oregon, just south of Oregon City, I could have any kind of garden I wanted or I could have multiple gardens. I put in three gardens: an herb garden (near the kitchen), a rock garden, and of course, a return of my grandfather’s big 50 X 100-foot garden.

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The similarities between my grandfather and me.

Chapter One

Location, Location, Location

Whether you live on a five-acre ranch in the country or a 50 x 100-foot lot in the city, there are two important factors to consider before you decide on your garden's location: How much sunshine will the garden receive? This is the most important factor for a garden. It's the sun and its 'shine' as it travels across the sky from east to west that gives you your garden.

Check that first. The area that receives the most sunshine during the day should be the location you choose. You may have to cut some branches away to let the sun's rays in but if you need to do that, by all means do it.

The second factor is the soil. If the soil is rock hard and a shovel can't even dig into it, that's a problem, but one that can be rectified. The first solution is raised beds. A raised bed garden is attractive and productive. Or you can break up the soil with a pitch fork or pick axe and mix in a soil amendment. There are a lot of them on the market. I use Harvest Supreme Premium Soil Amendment.

If the soil is too much for you and your pitch fork, you can bring in a back hoe and have that area for your garden dug out. Then bring in top soil or four-way soil. (Components of four-way soil are listed at the end of the book.)

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Another option is to plant flowers and vegetables that do well in hard rocky soil. I went on line and found a list of seventy flowers that do well in rocky soil. Some of them: Black-eyed Susan, cacti, columbine, cone flower, lavender, viola. Vegetables that do well in rocky soil: potatoes, sweet cherry tomatoes, peppers, spinach, chard, zucchini. And herbs: parsley, dill, and chives.

The 50 x100-foot lot in the city provides five choices to locate your garden: backyard, two side yards, front yard, and parking strip. I've seen some beautiful front yard gardens. There are also some beautiful and productive parking strip gardens. You may also choose a small garden in the back yard and another garden along the side of the house that receives the most sun. Be creative, take your time. Your garden or gardens will last the duration of your life at this property.

Once you choose your location, go for it. This will be your hobby, your passion, your place to relax, nap, and work like crazy turning your hands and fingernails black with the soil and grime of taking out weeds and putting in plants. But then, after your work in the garden is finished for the day, you can sit down and enjoy a meal of sliced Brandywine tomatoes, fresh spinach, or corn-on-the-cob steaming on your plate with melted butter, and the dessert: homemade blueberry pie, warmed and accompanied with vanilla ice cream.

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Top: Just before we moved in, August 2009.

Bottom: Spring 2022.

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This is what's inside that fence now. The Mansfield's (*left*) enjoying the garden during a visit to the ranch.

Chapter Two

Planning Your Garden

I've had a garden at every one of my houses or apartments from 1969 to 2009, our present house. Nine gardens in total. Some very small (one blueberry bush and one tomato plant) and some medium sized, depending on the yard and amount of sunlight.

When we moved to the five-acre ranch in Redland, Oregon, just south of Oregon City, I could have any kind of garden I wanted or I could have multiple gardens.

I've put in three gardens: an herb garden (near the kitchen), a rock garden, and of course the big garden.

The previous owners had a dog kennel attached to the barn. Before we could put in the garden where our property received the most sunshine, we needed to take down that kennel. The kennel had a plywood floor raised about eight inches off the ground and my son, Andrew, and son-in-law, Phil, who helped me clean out the barn, volunteered to take down the kennel. When the last sheet of plywood flooring came off, we jumped back and watched a beautiful pregnant mother skunk climb out of her nest and nonchalantly waddle up the slight hill to our forest. Each of us thankful she did not bother to spray.

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After we remodeled the horse barn, remodeled to comfortably house five horses, and demolished the dog kennel, I began planning the big garden.

I suggest you do the projects on the following pages. You've taken care of the location, now it's time to decide what you want in the garden.

If you are putting in a new garden, or making changes to your existing garden, here is a "Garden Planning Worksheet" to help you through the process. At this point you need to make a list of everything you want to place in your garden. *Everything.*

GARDEN PLANNING WORKSHEET

1. Choose a location.
2. Write out a list of everything I want in my garden.
3. Draw a map showing the boundaries of my garden.
4. Double check the garden map to make sure the measurements are correct. Use a quarter inch scale so I will have accurate measurements. I also need accurate measurements of my proposed plants, raised beds, paths, statues, etc. so I will be sure everything will fit in the space I have given them on the map.
5. Draw in everything I want in my garden. All the plants and ornaments and paths and raised beds, everything. These should also be a ¼ inch scale.
6. Make sure everything I want in my garden will fit in my garden.
7. Purchase my plants, statues, pots, lumber for the raised beds, and all the other material I will need to begin my garden.
8. Save some room in the garden for items I might add in the future.
9. Pour any concrete or lay stones for patios, paths etc. Be sure my concrete calculations are correct. Once it's poured it won't move.
10. Build a potting bench.

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You can plan for more than you can fit in the garden if you want. This is a wish list for you. All these items might not fit in your space, but you can delete or add plants and ornaments as you want on paper. However, once you purchase them, they're yours and you have to find a spot in your garden for them.

My herb garden is a separate garden located next to the house and easy access from the kitchen. It has most of the herbs I use. Rosemary, sage, chives, oregano, thyme, parsley, and there is a bay leaf tree in the upper righthand corner of the photo. You can keep an herb garden separate if you want or incorporate it into your main garden.



What's in the herb garden above? Curly leaf parsley, flatleaf parsley, oregano, rosemary, thyme, chives, sage, and a bay leaf tree that is just visible in the upper right corner of the photo.

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Below is my final list of everything I wanted in my garden prior to purchasing them:

- Seven raised beds for vegetables plus Hood and everbearing strawberries.

- Two 10 x 10-foot patches of soil to use for a variety of flowers or vegetables.

- Ten to twelve blueberry and huckleberry bushes. (Huckleberry bushes did not work at this elevation. I had to replace them with more blueberry bushes. We are at 850 feet elevation and huckleberries need to be above 2,000 feet elevation in acidic mountain soil. I now have twelve blueberry bushes.

- Nine tomato plants.

- Room for three to five rows of sweet corn.

- A ten-foot high and twelve-foot-long hog wire fence for pole beans.

- A patio, surrounded by roses, large enough for 7–10 people, with a table, umbrella, and birdbath.

- Two or three birdbaths throughout the garden.

- A sundial, animal figures, Saint Frances of Assisi. (Buddha came later).

- A potting bench.

- Gravel paths throughout the garden.

- Bulbs scattered around the garden: tulips, dahlias, daffodils, begonias and gladiolas.

- Fencing to keep the deer out.

- Flowers, a mix of several varieties, some listed here, some not.

- a. Flowers to attract Birds and Bees. A must for your garden

- b. Perennial: roses, penstemon, asters, nasturtiums, hibiscus, daisies, salvia, sunflower, lavender.

- c. Annual: marigolds, petunias, daisies.

(As you can see daisies have a variety that are annual and a variety that are perennial).

A WORD ABOUT THE BIRDS AND THE BEES

It is important to have bees in your garden. Bees are pollinators. A pollinator is anything that helps carry pollen from a flower's stamen to a flower's stigma. Bees do this job on purpose as they fly around the garden. Birds do it by accident since pollen can rub onto birds and off onto the stamen.

START YOUR DRAWING

Once you have your list, you need to draw everything from the list onto a blank piece of tracing paper taped onto the top edge of the garden photo. Place everything on your list inside your garden area. Remember, this drawing has to be to scale. I use a ¼ inch scale and I know that if all the raised beds will fit into this plan, they will all fit in my garden.

The drawing of your plants and other items does not have to be perfect, but keep in mind, zucchini and butternut squash (other vegetables too) spread out to about five or six feet from the original seed hole or seedling (start) that you buy. So, you need to compensate in your drawing for plants to spread out. Strawberries, on the other hand, grow out to form a six or seven-inch circle and stay pretty much the same throughout the growing season.

The small cards that come with the plant you buy from the nursery (*see page 14*) will tell you how high and how wide the plant will turn out to be plus other important information.

Look at my garden drawing for examples (*see page 16*). Use all the space. When finished putting all your plants and ornaments on your tracing paper, try to visualize how your garden will look with the actual plants and ornaments in place. Once you have drawn in everything on your list, take a long look to approve or disapprove.

It took me twelve drawings to finally have what I wanted. Once

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Garden cards that come with each purchase of a plant. Notice the one on the left, a Moneywort, will only be 2 inches high but it will spread out 3 feet. The one on the right, the broccoli, needs to be 18 inches apart from the other broccoli and planted in rows 24 inches apart.

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I had what I wanted on the design, I needed to create the design I had on paper onto the empty field, as an artist might do with a blank canvas when using a photograph as a guide.

My ideas flourished, I visualized the massive and shocking beauty of hibiscus here, roses there, marigolds that danced along borders, on guard for aphids, and the tomato plants with their red and dark blue orbs hanging like ornaments.

You may have to cut out some of your plants or ornaments depending on the size of your garden, but once you are working with the actual plant or ornament you can move the pots and containers around until you have exactly what you want.

As a ten-year-old boy, I had an absolute love for the total experience of bringing life to a garden. In the time I lived with my grandparents, the tiny seeds and miniature vegetable starts I planted seemed so insignificant. But I watched them every day, and rejoiced when the plant poked through the soil. I measured the new height of each vegetable, watered them, protected them, and encouraged them with my presence. I believed then, as I believe now, seventy years later, that flowers, vegetables, even trees, are affected by our care. They sense our touch and breath as our aura envelopes them.

Just before I left San Leandro to return home and go back to school, all the plants in my little garden had sprouted. They all looked robust, some only about three inches high but I could see life that came from the tiniest speck of a seed. A few of them were taller, vibrant, full of life, like gangly teenagers anxious to have fun and join the party.

The garden on our five acres has turned out to be 50 x 100 feet and borders the upper horse paddock. The deer, seemingly members of our family, and as welcome as our black lab, Boo, gave the impression they were waiting for a future smorgasbord. So, a fence seemed

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mandatory or the deer would eat all our flowers and fresh vegetables.

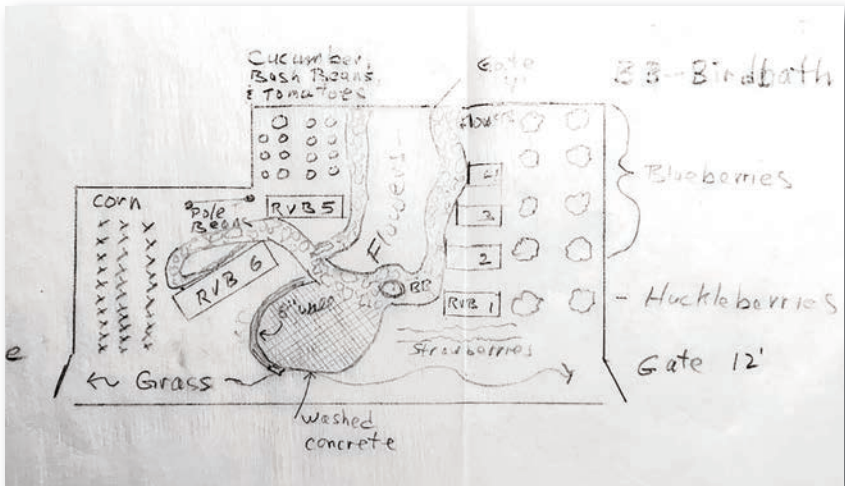
However, once we fenced the entire five acres, the deer quit sleep overs. But they can jump the fence and nibble at the grass on their way to the forest next to us. We

love the deer and we get a rare glimpse of a coyote or two but luckily, no skunks.



The Google Earth shot of the area I chose for my garden. I put tape on one side of the blank tracing paper and carefully put it over this 8 ½ x 11 inch photo of my future garden. I designed my garden on the sheet of tracing paper. It took twelve drafts before I had what I wanted (*see photo top of next page*).

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Tracing paper draft #12.



A 2020 Google Earth shot of our property. The road is to the right, the forest and round pen are to the left. The two barns are to the right of the round pen. The big garden, with clay colored patio, is south of the two barns.

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“The garden is an excellent analogy of interdependence. We can see and feel how the life of flowers, vegetables, weeds, react to the elements, sun, wind, frost, and to each other and to other beings, just as we humans do. The garden shows us clearly that everything is impermanent. To find peace, one can sit and observe the garden on any given day while it is producing.”

—George Myrus

Chapter Three

Building a Raised Bed: Some Guidelines

One way to build a raised bed for the garden, the way I learned, is to go on line and watch a video of the process. The quality varies but I'll list my preferred videos at the end of the book. Plus, they will be added to my blog, www.brianmbiggs.com, so you can click on each video site for easy access.

Here are some important points I've learned from my experience building raised beds. These are not directions for building a raised bed, those are at the end of the book. These are what you can use in building the raised bed from the directions:

1. Use deck screws for all connections. They will not rust out.
2. The common dimension for a raised bed is 8 x 4 feet. The lengths can vary and the height can vary, depending on the room in your garden, the look you want, and how many vegetables you want to grow in your raised beds. The width of 4 feet is standard and you should keep to that width. You can reach clear across the bed from both sides.

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3. Use redwood boards, western red cedar boards, or common cedar boards. Common fir will decay and rot within four years. You don't want to empty out the soil and build a new raised bed every three to four years. I recommend redwood boards if you can afford it. Otherwise, use cedar since it is easier to find and cheaper. Home Depot has it in these dimensions: 12 x 12 x 2 (12 feet long, 12 inches wide, and 2 inches thick.) The actual dimensions are slightly less due to the drying process of the wood prior to selling. If you have the money, use the Western red cedar.

4. To make a raised bed higher than 12 inches, buy another cedar board the dimension you want to raise it above 12 inches. For example, a 2 x 4-inch cedar board on top of a 2 x 12-inch cedar board, will give you a raised bed 16 inches high.

5. If you are making multiple raised beds, cut all the boards to the right dimension before you start building the beds. Mark the inside of all the boards on each individual raised bed with their raised bed number and the board's position on the bed so you know where to put each board when you take them outside. I like to cut the boards on saw horses in the garage. Then take them outside to put them together.

6. Use hardware cloth at the bottom of your raised bed. It keeps moles and voles from eating the roots off your root vegetables and causing other problems. Hardware cloth is a metal sheet with $\frac{1}{4}$ inch squares. It comes rolled up in various widths and lengths. You should buy four foot-width cloth and the length depends on the length of all your raised beds added together.

7. After you cut your hardware cloth to the right length for your raised bed, you can just drop the cloth into the bed. Make sure the bend from the wire roll is facing

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down and not up. If the sides of the hardware cloth are touching or close to touching all the sides of the raised bed, and the hardware cloth is mostly flat, you can load in the soil. The hardware cloth will stay in place.

8. If you want the hardware cloth to be more secure, have your finished raised bed upside down and next to its permanent location. Then staple the hardware cloth onto the edges of the bottom boards. Once the cloth is stapled on, you can flip the raised bed over and maneuver it into its final place.

9. If you build a raised bed longer than 8 feet, you need to put a brace in the middle of the bed (five feet in on a ten-foot bed). Secure a 2 x 4 about four inches down from the top on each side of the raised bed. You can also put one at the bottom on top of the hardware cloth if you would like more protection from bowing out due to the weight of all the soil.

10. I do not recommend putting any kind of sealer on your raised bed boards to make them last longer. Use the sealer money to buy better wood.

Videos I suggest to watch are at the end of the book.