



## **Plans for Converting a Hog House into a Greenhouse and Systems and Crops for Production\***

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\*This conversion plan is based on the hog houses at a farm in Lillington, North Carolina, but the concepts can be applied to or modified for other hog houses.

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## I. Description of Current Facilities

- The farm consists of 10 hog houses that are currently in production.
- The houses are 50' x 150'.
- The houses have metal roofs, roll-up curtains on the front and sides, and exhaust fans at the rear, but they do not have heaters, since they are used to finish hogs and not for farrowing.
- The houses have metal-lined ceilings, most likely with wood framing.
- The floors are slatted concrete.
- Throughout the houses are metal fence panels used to create stalls, each with automatic feeders and waterers.
- The farm has multiple wells for water, solar panels, and a methane-powered generator.
- The houses are in overall good condition and have potential for conversion to horticultural use.

## II. Steps to Convert the Structure to a Greenhouse

Although a greenhouse is typically constructed with a metal frame, a wood-framed hog house can be converted into a greenhouse through the process below.

Remove the metal ceiling, any insulation material present, the metal roof, the feeders and waterers, and the metal stalls, leaving only the framework and floor of the structure in place. Leaving the roof in place and installing sole-source lighting inside is another option. We recommend this only for the production of leafy green crops in hydroponic systems. Even then, the costs and benefits of sole-source lighting over sunlight must be carefully considered. The metal from the roof, ceiling, and stalls could be repurposed or sold to offset the cost of conversion to a greenhouse. Specifically, the metal stall panels could be used as bench or table tops for growing crops.

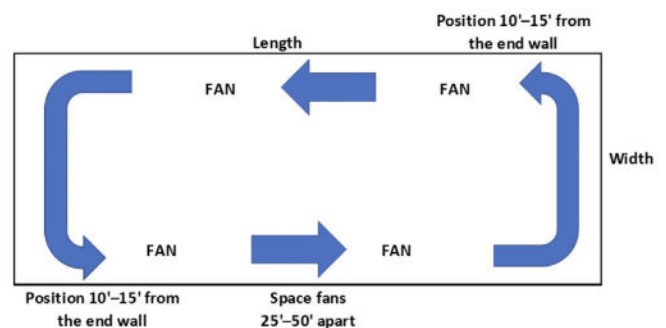
Clean the framework and floor, pressure-wash to remove dirt, disinfect, and paint the framework white to reflect light and protect wood from moisture. A variety of disinfectants are available.<sup>1</sup>

Clean and disinfect the fans, and ensure they are in proper working order.

We recommend replacing the existing white roll-up curtain material with clear polyethylene film for greater light penetration. But the white curtains can be retained if they remain open most of the time.

Recover the roof of the structure with the following:

- Polycarbonate panels
  - ♦ Most expensive but longest lasting.
  - ♦ Single-wall panels are less expensive but also less energy efficient than double-wall panels.<sup>2</sup>
- Double layer of clear polyethylene film
  - ♦ Moderately expensive and energy efficient.
  - ♦ Must include an inflation fan for air insulation between the layers.<sup>3</sup>
  - ♦ Must be replaced every three to five years depending on thickness and quality of film.<sup>4</sup>
- Single layer of clear polyethylene film
  - ♦ Least expensive option to install.
  - ♦ Shortest life span.
  - ♦ Least energy efficient (most expensive to heat).
- Glass is also an option, but we feel it would be cost prohibitive and without significant benefits in this application. The choice of covering material may be influenced by the crops grown and the production season. If crops will be produced through the winter, a double layer of inflated polyethylene film or double-wall polycarbonate panels will retain the most heat and reduce energy consumption compared with a single layer of polyethylene film. If crops will be produced only spring through fall, then minimal heat will be required, and a single layer of polyethylene film would be sufficient.<sup>5</sup>



To determine the total fan capacity needed in CFM, multiply the length x width x 2. This will give the total CFM required. Then divide the total CFM required by the CFM of the individual HAF fan chosen to determine the number of fans needed. Then space these fans in the greenhouse as shown above.

Figure 1. HAF fan positioning and direction of airflow.

Install horizontal airflow (HAF) fans to circulate air, which will help control humidity and minimize temperature differences throughout the structure.<sup>6</sup>

The following are optional points to consider, which may be referenced in the specific crop sections below:

#### *Heating*

Many crops can be grown spring through fall without a heating system, though some crops could require a heating system in early spring or late fall. All crops require a heating system if they are produced during winter. We recommend forced-air heaters with the air ducted into perforated poly tubes hung from the rafters to distribute heat evenly throughout the structure.<sup>7</sup>

#### *Supplemental Lighting*

Although the sun is the primary source of light for plants in a greenhouse, supplemental light can help by providing consistent light from day to day and increasing plant growth when sunlight is limited. LED and HPS are the best options for supplemental lights. LED fixtures are typically more expensive, but they have a longer life span, are more energy efficient, and come in a variety of spectrums for a variety of crops and applications. HPS fixtures are typically less expensive, but they have a shorter life span, are less energy efficient, and have a fixed spectrum. HPS lights do produce heat, which can be beneficial when running lights during winter. The type of light, specific fixtures, and layout will be based on the crops and growing system chosen. We recommend consulting a greenhouse lighting manufacturer or supplier.<sup>8</sup>

#### *Integrated Greenhouse Control System*

Growers have several options when it comes to climate control. The simplest option is to have two thermostats. One controls the heating system, and the other controls the cooling-ventilation system. This is a basic but moderately effective method of controlling the greenhouse climate. But this method presents potential problems, such as wide temperature fluctuations, running the heating and cooling-ventilation systems at the same time, and excessive energy consumption. A solution is to install an integrated greenhouse control system. Such a system provides the grower with more control over the greenhouse environment by integrating the heating and cooling-ventilation controls and often includes outside weather monitoring to inform the system, since the outside environment significantly impacts the greenhouse environment.<sup>9</sup>

#### *Shade Cloth*

While greenhouses are normally designed to allow maximum light penetration, some crops and stages of production can benefit from limiting light or reducing temperature during periods of high light. Shade cloth can be installed externally over the top of the house or internally above the plants. Ideally, shade cloth is installed in a way that makes it easy to remove or retract when it is not needed.<sup>10</sup>

#### *Partitions*

Since the hog houses are relatively large (50' x 150'), installing a partition may be desirable to section off part of a house for conversion to a greenhouse or other uses. This would also allow for a house to be converted in sections over time as money permits. A partition would reduce the volume of air that has to be conditioned in order to grow plants, which would reduce associated energy costs. If a partition is installed, all the required environmental systems and controls (heating and cooling-ventilation) must be contained within the space used as a greenhouse.

### **III. Crop Production in Raised Beds**

#### **Introduction**

A wide variety of crops can be grown in raised beds, including a range of cut flowers and a number of vegetables, herbs, and fruiting crops. Adjustments to infrastructure and the width of raised beds will be noted as needed.

When choosing a crop, the time from seeding or transplanting to harvesting and the seasonal needs or availability of crops are important considerations. Growing in a greenhouse can facilitate the production of crops outside their normal field-production season. Some vegetable crops to consider are leafy greens, such as lettuce varieties or chard, tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, root vegetables, and squash.

Many cut flowers can be grown in raised beds in a greenhouse. Growing cut flowers in a greenhouse enables you to have a variety of flowers available all year. The space within the greenhouse is limited, so growing perennial flowers would result in long seasons of only foliage instead of flowers; therefore, it is better to frequently rotate annual varieties after the final harvest of the preceding flower crop.

## Steps Involved

### Flooring

Since the raised beds would be constructed on top of the slatted concrete floor, we recommend installing a thick polyethylene liner or several layers of ground cloth under the beds.<sup>11</sup>

### Constructing Raised Beds

The raised beds can be constructed using wood, composite materials, or concrete blocks. Choice of wood is important. Treated wood will last a long time, but most of the chemicals used in the treatment process cannot be used in certified organic farming, so looking into policies regarding treated wood before selection is important.<sup>12</sup> Some varieties of wood, such as cedar, black locust, redwood, Douglas fir, and cypress, are naturally resistant to rot and insect damage. Availability of wood will vary by location. Depending on the type of wood chosen and whether the beds are lined, the wood may need to be replaced every seven to 15 years.

### Raised Bed Layout

In a 50' x 150' hog house, a suggested dimension for the beds is 2' x 27' with a crossbar for support at the halfway point to prevent bowing of the wood. If the beds are constructed horizontally facing south, this would allow for 20 beds about 8' from each other lengthwise and 6.5' apart widthwise. Bed spacing can be adjusted as desired, but be sure to leave enough space between beds to prevent shading, allow room to work, and maneuver equipment. Bed height should allow the crop sufficient room to grow. It is suggested that the beds be a minimum of 8" deep for crops such as leafy greens, beans, and cucumbers and 12"–24" deep for crops with a deeper root system, such as peppers, tomatoes, or squash.<sup>13</sup>

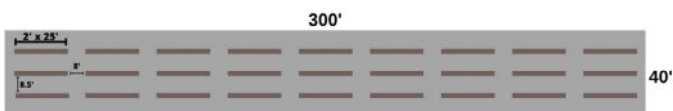


Figure 2. Raised-bed greenhouse layout.

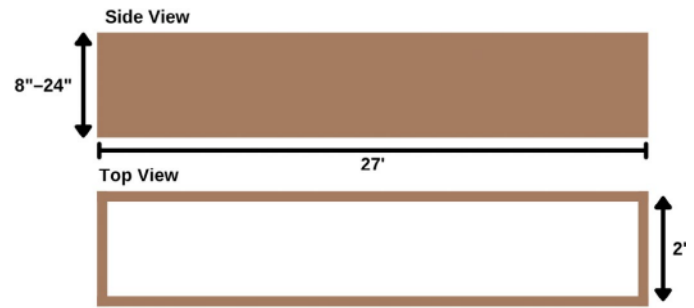


Figure 3. Raised-bed dimensions.

### Growing Media

The sides or walls of the raised beds should be lined with black, woven ground-cover fabric.<sup>14</sup> Do not line the sides or walls of the beds with plastic or polyethylene film, since this would prevent proper drainage. Then the beds can be filled with soil or media. The soil or media can be topsoil or a mixture of topsoil and soilless mixes, such as peat moss, compost, coconut coir, vermiculite, or rice hulls.<sup>15</sup> An advantage to using composted or soilless mixes is a reduced need for weed control. Organic Materials Review Institute has published a list of USDA-approved potting soil for organic production.<sup>16</sup>

### Irrigation System

Once the beds are installed, an irrigation system should be installed. Options include the following:

- **Drip Irrigation:**<sup>17</sup> Irrigation pipes are thin-walled tubes that have evenly spaced drip emitters built in. Drip tape<sup>18</sup> lies flat when empty, but when swelled with water it allows for low-flow and low-pressure watering of the individual plants directly at the roots. Drip tape can be laid in the rows within the raised beds, and the individual plants can be planted next to the emitters on the tape. Another option is to buy drip tubing and install emitters as needed.
  - ♦ **Pros:** is relatively inexpensive, allows for precise watering of individual plants, helps prevent foliar diseases, uses water efficiently (reduces waste).
  - ♦ **Cons:** emitters may clog easily, system may need to be replaced more often than others, low volumes of water applied can lead to nutrient buildup and pH rise.
- **Overhead Sprinklers:**<sup>19</sup> Overhead sprinklers supply water to the media surface and plant foliage. These systems can be as simple as fixed sprinkler heads spaced evenly, hanging from a pipe running the

length of the structure, running along the ground and mounted on risers, or automated using an overhead boom<sup>20</sup> with many sprinkler heads that run on a track or rail above the crops. We recommend that you consult an irrigation company once the crop and layout are chosen so the company can specify the best system type and layout.

- ◆ **Pros:** can be automated, may last longer than other systems.
- ◆ **Cons:** are expensive to replace, can encourage foliar diseases, may lead to overwatering and weed growth, may require zoning or installation of a larger pump for high-pressure systems.

#### *Additional Infrastructure and Systems*

Once the crop has been chosen, the addition of a heating system, supplemental lighting, shade cloth, or a greenhouse control system should be considered. These decisions will be based on the needs of the crop, the season(s) of production, the level of control required, and the available capital. See Section II (“Steps to Convert the Structure to a Greenhouse”) above for an explanation of these options.

#### **Pros and Cons of Crop Production in Raised Beds**

Pros:

- Relatively inexpensive to construct and will last for many years.
- Requires less frequent monitoring and adjusting than hydroponic systems.

Cons

- Materials used to construct the beds may need to be replaced periodically.
- The soil will require regular amendments.
- More manual labor and bending over are required compared with hydroponic systems.
- Equipment may be limited depending on the load-bearing capacity of the floor.

Important Considerations:

- Labor needs.
- Amendments to the beds before, after, and between crop rotations.

## **IV. Crop Production in Containers**

### **Introduction**

Similar to raised beds, this option involves growing in containers directly on the concrete floor. The containers could be placed on benches or tables to improve ergonomics. The metal stall panels that were removed from the houses could be repurposed as bench tops to save money. Containers could be plastic pots or flats/trays of small propagules.

Crops commonly grown in pots are ornamental trees, shrubs, and herbaceous plants. Cut flowers and even many vegetable crops can also be grown in containers.

Crops that are grown in flats are typically transplants of a variety of plants, such as vegetables and flowers. This farm has a significant advantage in the production of vegetable transplants. Vegetable transplants are commonly grown in low-tech, dirt-floor greenhouses close to vegetable farmers. A major concern in such settings is the potential for disease development. This farm would have much lower potential for disease, since the houses have concrete floors. Furthermore, the farm could produce higher-quality vegetable transplants than those commonly produced in lower-tech greenhouses. The farm is also conveniently located near vegetable farms that could be potential customers.

This method is relatively inexpensive, since it does not require infrastructure such as raised beds or hydroponic systems.

### **Steps Involved**

#### *Flooring*

The concrete floor will be sufficient for this type of production and will not require any modifications.

#### *Pots or Trays*

Various options exist for trays and pots, but the choice largely depends on the crop chosen:

- Vegetable transplant trays<sup>21</sup> will vary in size and material depending on the specific crop and its size.
- Pots for ornamental plants or shrubs<sup>22</sup> will vary in size and material depending on the specific crop and its size.



## Growing Media

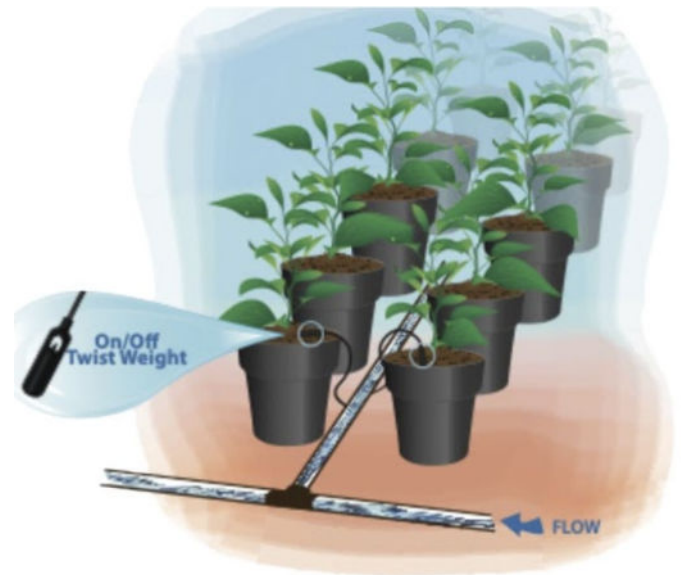
The pots or trays are typically filled with a mix of soilless media, such as peat moss, wood fiber, compost, coconut coir, vermiculite, perlite, or rice hulls.<sup>23</sup>

The specific mixture of these components will vary depending on the crop and its needs as well as the size of the container. An advantage to using composted or soilless mixes is a reduced need for weed control. Organic Materials Review Institute has published a list of USDA-approved potting soil for organic production.<sup>24</sup>

## Irrigation System

Once the crop, layout, and growing method are established, the choice of irrigation system should be made.

- **Overhead Sprinklers:** Ideal for trays of small plants and transplants, overhead sprinklers supply water to the media surface and plant foliage. These systems can be as simple as fixed sprinkler heads spaced evenly, hanging from a pipe running the length of the structure, running along the ground and mounted on risers, or automated using an overhead boom<sup>25</sup> with many sprinkler heads that run on a track or rail above the crops. We recommend that you consult an irrigation company once the crop and layout are chosen so the company can specify the best system type and layout.
  - ◆ **Pros:** can be automated, may last longer than other systems.
  - ◆ **Cons:** are expensive to replace, can encourage foliar diseases, may lead to overwatering, may require zoning or installation of a larger pump for high-pressure systems.
- **Drip Irrigation:**<sup>26</sup> Ideal for larger containers of shrubs or ornamental plants, this method involves delivering water directly to the surface of each container, which minimizes foliar disease pressure and maximizes water use efficiency.
  - ◆ **Pros:** is relatively inexpensive, allows for precise watering of individual plants, helps prevent foliar diseases, uses water efficiently (reduces waste).
  - ◆ **Cons:** emitters may clog easily, system may need to be replaced more often than others, low volumes of water applied can lead to nutrient buildup and pH rise.



Source: "Nursery and Greenhouse Irrigation Guide," Drip Depot.



Figure 4. Irrigation system for container crop production.

## Pros and Cons of Crop Production in Containers

### Pros:

- Least expensive method for crop production.
- Can easily be transitioned to the production of other crops or growing systems.
- Concrete floors reduce disease risk, offering an advantage in the production of vegetable transplants.

### Cons:

- Can be labor intensive to move large numbers of trays or pots.

- Containers restrict the types of crops that can be grown.

Important Considerations:

- Labor needs.
- Container choice, as not all container sizes are suitable for all crops.

## V. Crop Production in Hydroponic Float Systems

### Introduction

The raft system or deep-water culture is a method of hydroponic production where the crops are suspended on rafts in troughs filled with a nutrient solution.

The nutrient solution is aerated and circulated with pumps, and the roots of the plants grow from a soilless medium, such as rockwool or coconut coir, directly into the nutrient solution.

The crops take up nutrients directly from the solution, which is closely monitored and adjusted according to pH and electrical conductivity.

Since this system relies on the plants to float on the surface of the water, the crop chosen must be relatively lightweight and lack an extensive and vigorous root system. Leafy greens, such as lettuce and herbs, are the best crops to grow in this system, since they are lightweight, have a short growth period, have a more compact growth habit, and are easily harvested.



**Figure 5.** Lettuce growing on a hydroponic float raft.



### Steps Involved

#### *Flooring*

The concrete floor will be sufficient for this type of production and will not require any modifications.

#### *Installing the Systems*

Float systems can be constructed<sup>27</sup> using a wood frame and thick poly liner, or they can be purchased<sup>28</sup> to fit specific dimensions. The basic elements for the system are as follows:

- The frame, which can be constructed from wood or purchased in different forms, such as square steel pipes, and lined with poly liner. These frames/ troughs can be set directly on the ground, or they can be elevated on benches, depending on the specific system, the overall weight, and ergonomics.
- The float or raft, which is commonly made from Styrofoam,<sup>29</sup> rigid foam-board insulation,<sup>30</sup> or plastic.<sup>31</sup> The rafts support the plants and insulate the nutrient solution from temperature swings. The rafts are often white to aid in reflection of the incoming light to maintain a more consistent temperature within the nutrient solution. Plastic rafts are more easily cleaned and disinfected and may



last longer than Styrofoam. An advantage to rigid foam-board insulation is that it can be custom-cut to fit nearly any size system.

### Substrate

The substrate is important to the growth and structure of the crop. It should drain well, allow for aeration, retain some nutrients, and aid in crop structure. The ideal growing substrate may be dependent on the type of raft chosen or constructed, since it needs to fit precisely into the holes of the raft. The most common substrates are rockwool<sup>32</sup> and Oasis,<sup>33</sup> but they have limitations in organic growing operations. Substrates like rockwool and Oasis allow for easy seeding and harvesting.

### Nutrient Solution

Choice of specific nutrient solution should be based on the crop produced. Blends are available, such as a blend for leafy greens.<sup>34</sup> The availability of nutrients in the solution depends on the solution's pH and electrical conductivity. The solution should be checked daily using a pH and EC meter<sup>35</sup> and adjusted as required.<sup>36</sup>

## Pros and Cons of Crop Production in Hydroponic Float Systems

### Pros:

- Faster production and lower water use than soil-based systems.
- Least expensive hydroponic system to install.
- Systems and rafts can easily be reused.
- Plant growth is consistent and stable, since roots have constant contact with the nutrient solution.
- Does not require much electricity except for the pumps.
- Can withstand short power outages, since the plants float on the nutrient solution.
- Nutrient solution does not require recirculating but could be sanitized and reused if needed.

### Cons:

- Requires daily monitoring and adjustment of the nutrient solution.
- Can be difficult to adjust and calibrate nutrient levels if they get outside an acceptable range.
- Systems built on the ground require bending over.

- Longer power outages would require a back-up generator to prevent crop harm or failure.

## VI. Crop Production in Hydroponic NFT Systems

### Introduction

Nutrient film technique (NFT) is a method of hydroponics primarily used in growing leafy greens with low mass and short growth cycles, such as lettuce, spinach, and herbs.

Fruiting vegetables or other crops that take longer to grow, are heavier, or have larger root systems are not suitable for NFT systems.

In this hydroponic system, a thin stream (film) of nutrient solution flows through a channel 3"–10" wide and containing the plant's roots. The plants are inserted through a cover in the channel, and the roots grow directly into the stream of nutrients.

Channels are sloped slightly to allow the nutrient film to flow easily.

The nutrient solution is contained in a reservoir where it can be adjusted and aerated before it is pumped through a small-diameter line to the top of the channels.<sup>37</sup>



Source: "Controlled Environment Agriculture Innovation Center," The Institute for Advanced Learning and Research.

**Figure 6.** Hydroponic NFT system for growing lettuce.

## Steps Involved

### *Flooring*

The concrete floor will be sufficient for this type of production and will not require any modifications.

### *Installing the Systems*

NFT systems can be purchased in various sizes and styles to meet the needs of the layout and the crop.<sup>38</sup> Some companies will custom-build NFT systems to fit the specific needs of the greenhouse structure.<sup>39</sup> These systems are usually glued and bolted together. The systems must have a slight slope from the top to the bottom of the channels so that the nutrient film will flow properly.

### *Substrate*

The growing substrate should drain well, allow for aeration, retain some nutrients, and aid in crop structure. The ideal substrate may be dependent on the specific NFT system chosen, since the substrate needs to fit precisely into the holes in the channel. The most common substrates are rockwool<sup>40</sup> and Oasis,<sup>41</sup> but they have limitations in organic growing operations. Substrates such as rockwool and Oasis allow for easy seeding and harvesting.

### *Nutrient Solution*

Choice of specific nutrient solution should be based on the crop produced. Blends are available, such as a blend for leafy greens.<sup>42</sup> The availability of nutrients in the solution depends on the solution's pH and electrical conductivity. The solution should be checked daily using a pH and EC meter<sup>43</sup> and adjusted as required.<sup>44</sup>

## Pros and Cons of Crop Production in Hydroponic NFT Systems

Pros:

- Faster production and lower water use than soil-based systems.
- Nutrient solution is recirculated and reused throughout the crop cycle.
- Channels and covers have a long life and are easily cleaned, disinfected, and reused.
- The systems are elevated, making for more comfortable, ergonomically sound working conditions than float systems.

Cons:

- More expensive to purchase initially and slightly costlier to maintain than float systems.
- More complex than float systems.
- Clogged supply lines or channels can lead to crop harm or failure.
- Can be difficult to adjust and calibrate nutrient levels if they get outside an acceptable range.
- Requires daily monitoring and adjustment of the nutrient solution.
- A back-up generator would be required in the event of a power outage (even a short outage), as the systems rely on pumps to supply the nutrient solution to the plants.

## VII. Crop Production in Dutch Bucket Systems

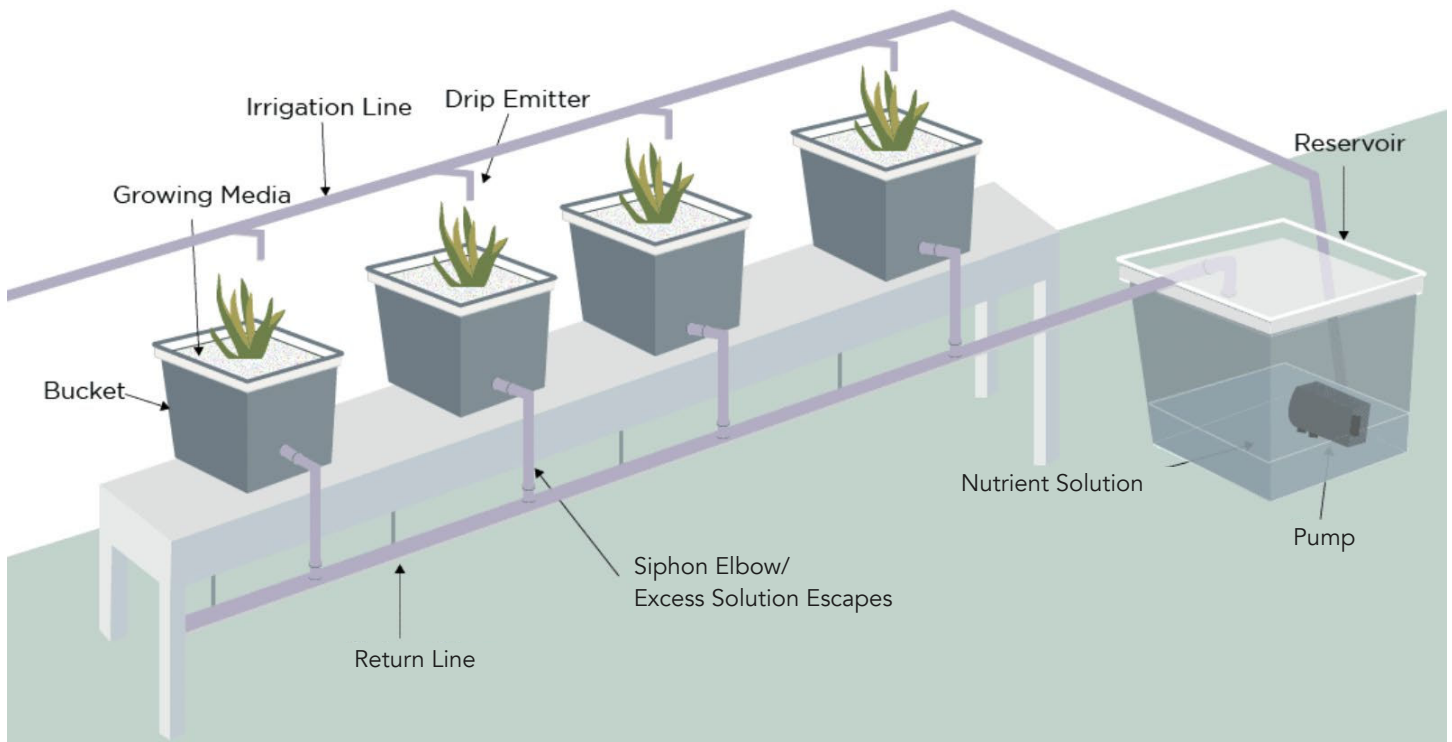
### Introduction

The Dutch bucket, also called "Bato bucket," system is somewhat of a hybrid between container production and hydroponic growing systems.

The individual buckets are connected via common irrigation and drainage lines that deliver the nutrient solution to the plants and collect unused solution and carry it back to the reservoir.

Fruiting crops, including vining crops, are typically grown in these systems. Commonly grown in Dutch buckets on commercial scales are tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, squash, beans, peas, and eggplants.<sup>45</sup> These are heavy nutrient feeders, meaning they require large quantities of nutrients to produce high yields. Another crop that grows well in Dutch buckets is strawberries.<sup>46</sup> Strawberries have a lower, bushier growth habit and different requirements than vining crops.





Source: "Dutch Bucket/Bato Bucket System," Trees.com.

**Figure 7.** Elements of a hydroponic Dutch bucket system.

## Steps Involved

### Flooring

The concrete floor will be sufficient for this type of production and will not require any modifications.

### Installing the Systems

Dutch bucket systems are most commonly purchased as a complete kit,<sup>47</sup> though they can also be made from scratch.<sup>48</sup> The basic elements of a Dutch bucket system are as follows:

- Buckets that hold the substrate and roots.
- Drainage line that connects to each bucket through a hole on the base and drains back to the reservoir.
- Irrigation line that distributes the nutrient solution from the reservoir to each bucket.
- Reservoir that contains the nutrient solution and a pump to deliver the solution to each bucket through the irrigation line.
- Buckets can be placed directly on the ground or, more commonly, elevated using a frame or table.
- The system requires a small degree of slope to allow the nutrient solution to drain out of the buckets and flow back to the reservoir by gravity.
- Vining plants<sup>49</sup> require a support system for the above-ground growth. Wire or cables can be attached to the ceiling and secured on the buckets to create the support system. The crops are attached to the wire with twine and hand-tying or small plastic rings that hold the stems on the main wire. This forces the plants to grow up and ensures the crops do not crowd one another while allowing for maximum growth and production.
- Strawberries<sup>50</sup> do not grow as tall as vining plants do. Thus, strawberries do not need a wire support system. But their bushy growth means a wider space is needed between plants. A smaller support system could be installed, but it is not critical.



Source: “**Hydroponic Bucket System**” (page 3), Hydroponic Answers.

**Figure 8.** Hydroponic Dutch bucket system.

### Substrate

Perlite is the most commonly used growing substrate. Other substrate options include clay pebbles, coconut coir, peat, and vermiculite.<sup>51</sup> The substrate must drain well to allow for root aeration while holding on to some of the nutrient solution so the roots can absorb necessary water and nutrients. The substrate may be reused for more than one crop cycle, but many growers replace the substrate with each cycle owing to plant disease concerns.

### Nutrient Solution

Choice of nutrient solution should be based on the crop produced. Blends are available, such as a blend for vining crops.<sup>52</sup> The availability of nutrients in the solution depends on the solution’s pH and electrical conductivity. The solution should be checked daily using a pH and EC meter<sup>53</sup> and adjusted as required.<sup>54</sup> As the solution circulates through the bucket system, the plants will absorb the nutrients, meaning these nutrients will need to be replenished in the reservoir over time.

## Pros and Cons of Crop Production in Dutch Bucket Systems

### Pros:

- Faster production and lower water use than soil-based systems.
- Can be used for fruiting and vining vegetables.
- Nutrient solution is recirculated and reused throughout the crop cycle.

- The buckets have a long life and are easily cleaned, disinfected, and reused.
- The systems can be elevated, making for more comfortable, ergonomic working conditions than float systems.
- Small quantities of nutrient solution contained at the bottom of each bucket may enable the plants to survive a short power outage.

### Cons:

- More expensive to purchase initially and slightly costlier to maintain than float systems.
- More complex than float systems.
- Vining crops require extra labor for tying and training and may be harder to reach as they grow taller.
- Clogged supply lines or drain lines can lead to crop harm or failure.
- Requires daily monitoring and adjustment of the nutrient solution.
- Growing substrate typically has to be replaced with each crop cycle.
- A back-up generator would be required in the event of most power outages, as the systems rely on pumps to supply the nutrient solution to the plants.

### Important Considerations for All Hydroponic Systems

The source water should be tested to determine the pH, EC, and presence of minerals or chemicals. Water treatment should be based on the results of this source water test. The water quality will also impact the choice of nutrient solution.

Nutrient solution may be reused from one crop cycle to another, but it should be tested to determine the quality and quantity of nutrients present and treated to prevent the spread of disease from one crop to the next.

Hydroponic systems need either level ground (float systems) or a slight slope (NFT and Dutch bucket systems). Therefore, care must be taken when setting up the systems to ensure optimal performance.

Power outages can be devastating for hydroponic production. A generator capable of powering the pumps is a good investment.



Supplemental lighting is beneficial for the production of fruiting crops, especially during the winter months.

Hydroponic systems require daily monitoring and adjustment to prevent losses due to leaks, clogs, or nutrient solution problems.

Plants should be transplanted, not directly seeded, into hydroponic systems.

See the following resources for further descriptions of hydroponic systems and production:

[A Recipe for Hydroponic Success](#)

[Hydroponic Lettuce Handbook](#)

[Hydroponic Leafy Greens](#)

[Hydroponic Systems Overview](#)

[Hydroponic Systems & What's Right for You](#)

## Endnotes

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