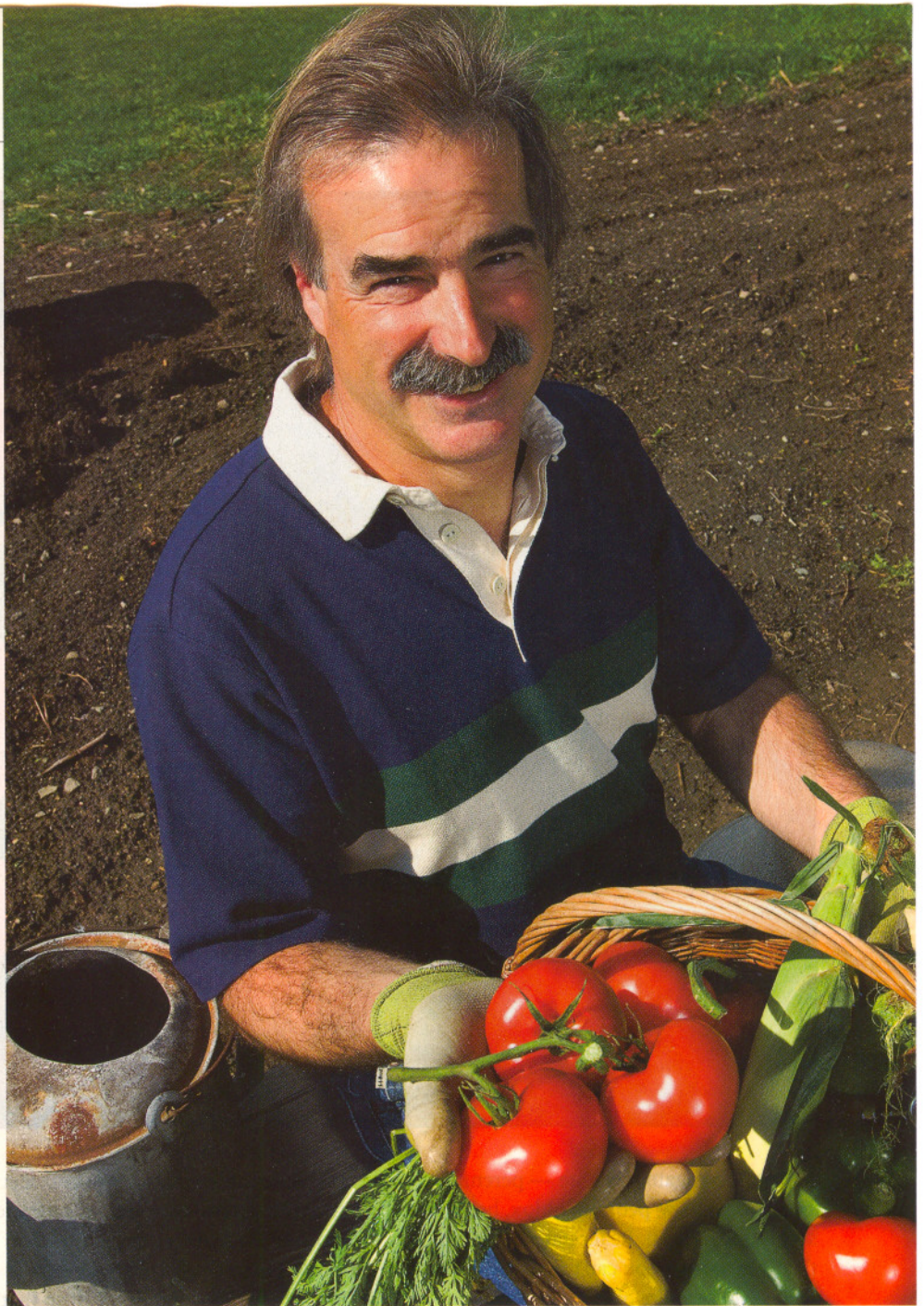


Grow a Vegetable Garden

You don't need to be a Maine master gardener to grow food for your family. But it helps to ask one for advice.

Interview by Aurelia C. Scott

Maine native Tony DiPietro lives on a small farm in Falmouth with his wife and daughter. Self-employed as a gardener and handyman, he is well known locally for the imaginative birdhouses he builds and sells, and for the quality of the pumpkins and flowers at his farm stand. A Cooperative Extension Service Master Gardener, he maintains a home vegetable garden that meets the needs of his family with, he says, "a little left over for friends and woodchucks."



How did you become a vegetable gardener?

I grew up on Munjoy Hill in Portland, where my grandparents had a huge vegetable garden. They emigrated from Italy and the garden was full of all the vegetables they loved the best — tomatoes, eggplants, peppers, beans. I didn't have chores in the garden, but I just must have soaked up their attitude. For them, the vegetable garden was holy ground.

Tell me about your own garden.

The entire garden probably measures

twenty-five by thirty-five feet. I want the garden to be a beautiful haven that you really enjoy being in, instead of something to hide. I don't grow vegetables in rows. I grow them in boxes [raised beds] in which I mix flowers. It brings in the butterflies and ties everything together. Nature plants it all together. We should, too.

There's a path that winds through the garden — I put peat moss down on the path to smother the weeds. And there are trellises, arbors, and lots of birdhouses with birds living in them. The garden

boxes are staggered throughout the garden so they don't look so formal. In the middle is a cutting garden of flowers. We also have a little 'punkin' patch in the corner.

What kind of flowers do you plant with the vegetables?

I sell cut flowers at the farm stand (165 Middle Rd, Falmouth; 207-781-2943), so I concentrate on what people want to buy, like cosmos, zinnias, and amaranth. Amaranth is an ancient plant with amazing, colorful seed heads. It's getting to be