



Planning Your Hop Yard

So, you want to grow your own hops.

Homebrewing quickly becomes an obsession and can spread in directions you don't expect when you start. Shortly after making my first beer, I learned I could grow my own hops to use in the beer I brewed.

As someone with little interest in gardening, I was surprised by how much this possibility excited me. I loved the idea of making beer with hops grown I had grown.

When you're ready to embark on this adventure, here are a few tips to keep in mind when planning your hop yard.



Configurations

This is where you really get to think about setting up your hop yard. There are more configurations than what I have outlined below. Your setup is limited only by your inspiration, creativity and space!

Raise (to) the Roof!

If you have a small yard, that doesn't mean you can't grow your own hops. This configuration allows you to simply run your twine from the ground up to the edge of the roof, a deck or anything above the ground.

- This design can be modified to use large pots rather than garden beds.
- If you use pots, they can be moved to the optimal location for maximum sun exposure.
- For apartments or rentals, you can move the plants with you when you move on.
- Can be used below a deck or sunroom.
- Since this requires a structure, you will probably have access to water nearby.



S.J. Porr's welcoming hop archway.

Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/sjporr>

Pole and Wire



This configuration is probably what most closely resembles the layout commercial hop growers use.

Secure poles in the ground that reach to a height of 10-18 feet and tension wire or cable between their tops.

Hop strings are tied at regular intervals from the wire and secured to the ground to allow the hop plants to grow up the strings.

When designing your initial garden, you could set up one row with your first variety. If you find you love growing your own hops, you could add another set of poles and wires 10 feet away with your next variety.

Tipi

Long poles are tied together near one end and the legs are spread out. The strings are run up to where the poles meet.

- Can be assembled quickly using scrap poles and rope.
- Structures can be moved easily.
- Can be used with pots for a completely movable hop yard.



Josh Secaur's hop yard. Check out his [Youtube Channel](#)

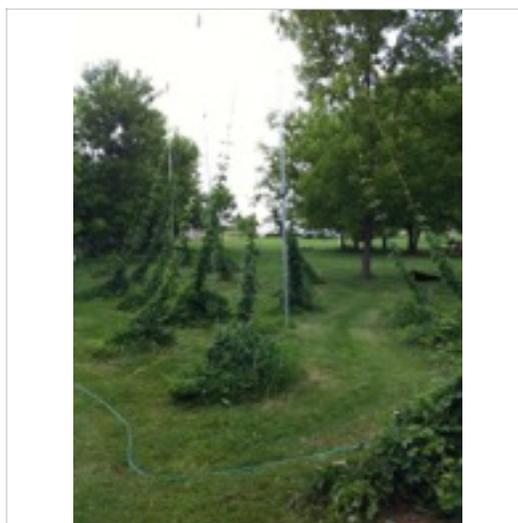
Central Pole



My backyard hop yard. Two poles, two varieties.

Bury one large pole and plant the hops around its base. Use a flagpole system to raise and lower the strings. Adding a flag-raising mechanism can allow you to easily raise the strings to the top of the pole. Then, at harvest time, you can lower the strings for easy harvesting.

I personally harvested a tall, skinny maple tree that produced two poles about 14-feet long. I buried them 3 feet in the ground, leaving about 10 feet in height for the bines to climb.



Using a flagpole worked great for this layout.

Another shot of [Mike Fredricksen's](#) hop yard.

Using a Fence or Rigid Frame



My hop plants growing in my mother-in-law's garden.

Hops are beautiful and can be a great addition to your yard by allowing them to grow along a fence, or onto a hard trellis. This can allow you to block a view, or potentially even serve as a moderate privacy/noise fence.

The drawback with this arrangement is that the hop bine will be intertwined in the frame, which makes the harvest more challenging. I have spent hours standing at this frame and only harvested 25% of the ripe cones.

Use the Pot

If you are living somewhere you do not plan to stay long term, you have different needs. You may not be able to plant a garden, or you don't want to leave the hop plant behind when you leave.

An alternative to planting the hops in the ground is to use a large pot. This allows you the flexibility to bring the hops with you when you move to a new location. By using a pot, you can combine it with any of the above configurations for a hop trellis.

Monitor this closely. Pots can fluctuate much more quickly in both temperature and water saturation levels. Do not over-water, but make sure there is enough water for the plants to thrive.

Half whiskey barrels seem to work really well. If you need a resource, check these out on Amazon: <http://amzn.to/1mWjiWI>

Important concepts

Regardless of the final layout you select, these concepts will help you get better results:

1. String your hops - create a setup that allows you to suspend a string from high in the air for the vines to climb as they grow. The benefits of this are:
 - Maximize sunshine and airflow for each plant on the string
 - At harvest time, cut the strings down and pick the cones in a more comfortable position . . . preferably while seated and enjoying a tasty beer.
2. Locate your hop yard near a water source - hops need lots of water!
3. Plant your hops in full sun areas.
4. Start with one or two varieties, then expand.
5. Give them some space! Separate varieties so you can differentiate them at harvest time.

Closing Thoughts

For most of us, growing hops at home is a great addition to the hobby of homebrewing. It gives us another thing we can produce to influence the beer we produce. Give it a try and see if you enjoy it. If it gives you enjoyment, expand your hop yard as much as you feel comfortable with.

Starting with an easier setup like a tipi or single post can give you flexibility to expand to one of the other systems as you have more plants and varieties.

Once established, hop plants survive with little care from you. If you want thriving plants, though, you will want to give them the care they need.



Mike Fredricksen's Hop Yard
Check out [Pitchfork Brewing](#) where he is the head brewer.

About Jake

Jake is an avid homebrewer who started brewing in 2009. I started learning about homebrewing in 2001 when I joined a coworker at one of his brew days. Since then, the hobby has taken over most of my spare brain cycles.

My involvement with homegrown hops started when my mother-in-law offered to grow some hops in her garden in support of my beer production. After moving to a new house, I harvested some rhizomes from the thriving cascade plants at her house to establish a garden in my backyard.

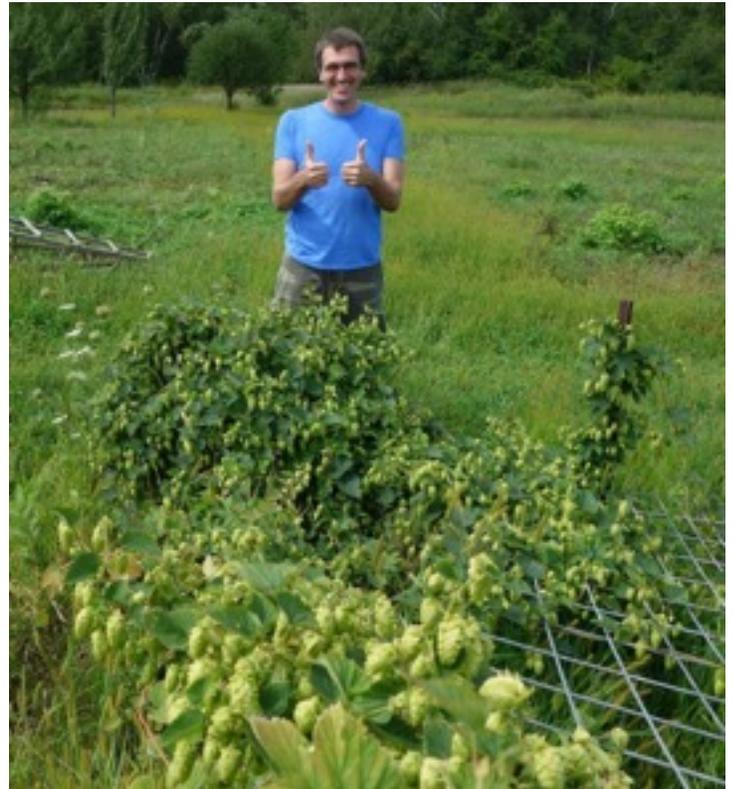
Please offer your thoughts, critiques, expanded details, or questions. I love learning from all of you.

Email: Jake@SuperBrewers.com

Youtube: <http://Youtube.com/superbrewers>

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Happy growing and hoppy brewing!



Some beautiful cascade hop cones waiting to take a bath in my boil kettle.