

MARCH 2008

# In The Field™

Marion/Levy's AGRICULTURE Magazine



Family Farming in Levy County

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Is Our Southern Lady and Ag  
Literacy Day Draws Near





business  
upfront

by Erin Freel Best

**W**ith emphasis on efficiency and automation, today's u-pick operators and even serious gardeners are finding new options with vertical growing systems like those created and designed by Tim Carpenter of Verti-Gro in Summerfield, Florida.

Carpenter started in the hydroponic growing business in 1972, and has years of experience helping individuals find the right system. He explains that new users are surprised by the different types of fruits and vegetables individuals can grow in one of his systems. While most people automatically think of strawberries and tomatoes, other popular items include lettuce, herbs and even corn and melons. "The corn just grows straight up. The pots are very strong and the melons can be planted in the bottom pot and run along the ground," says Tim.

Carpenter estimates that Florida growers and hobbyists who utilize the vertical growing system use ten times less water because of the sandy soil. Additionally, there are minimal weeds and the plants are grown in an organic-certified medium. The Verti-gro stackable pots are insulated to protect the plants from extreme temperatures. Fans of hydroponics say the stacking pots in vertical towers allow for high-density production in a much smaller area.

According to Carpenter, "One of the biggest advantages of the Verti-Gro system is that you are saving space." Verti-Gro now has customers nationwide. While they cater to smaller growers and avid gardeners, the popularity of their systems also allows them to maintain accounts like EPCOT. For the past 12 years, EPCOT has employed a growing system that features lettuce, herbs, strawberries and peppers.

The most popular growing system is the 4-stack unit (VGK-16A). This four-tower unit is priced at \$249.00, can hold 64 plants, and is completely automated. Each unit comes with a nutrient tank, submersible pump, automatic timer, plant nutrients, soil-less growing media, and a pre-assembled automatic plumbing system. It also includes growing and set-up instructions.

Carpenter adds, "People are more into automation these days. If they are gone for a three-day weekend, they want to know their garden is going to get watered. Our units come complete with automatic water timers."

Verti-Gro is located in Summerfield, Florida just off of Hwy 441. For photos of growing systems and various fruits and vegetables, visit [www.vertigro.com](http://www.vertigro.com). Hours of operation are Tuesday - Friday 10 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. and Saturday 9 a.m. - 1 p.m.

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