

VERTICAL GARDENING



Guiding plants upward can dramatically increase your garden's productivity and make it possible to grow food and flowers in narrow spaces. Plants that grow up supports are easier to care for and harvest from than those that sprawl across the ground. **Whatever you grow, vertical gardening can add a visual dimension to your landscape.** All you need to create a vertical garden are suitable plants and the structures that will hold them up.

What Grows Up

Vining, rambling, and sprawling plants are all easy to train to grow on supports. Some plants wrap around the structures as they climb, while others need to be secured to them. You can choose from a wide variety of edible and ornamental plants to create a vertical garden. Here are a few popular options.

Beans

Whether you want to grow fresh-eating green beans, lima beans, or kidney beans and other dried varieties, look for those labeled as "pole beans," rather than "bush" types. The vines of scarlet runner beans (*red*) and hyacinth beans (*purple*) can reach 8 to 10 feet tall, making a colorful curtain around a teepee or in front of a wall.

Cucumbers

The sprawling vines of cucumbers need a little guidance to grow up but getting them off the ground helps protect the plants from soil-borne diseases that can splash onto the leaves. 'County Fair Hybrid' and 'Saladin' are two reliable varieties with vigorous growth habits.

Grapes

Long, woody grapevines need support to stay healthy and productive. In vineyards, they're typically trained along horizontal wires, while in home gardens they are often directed to grow up and over an arbor or bower, allowing the clusters of ripening fruit to dangle down within reach.

More than 50 species of grapes are native to the mid-Atlantic region, though their fruit isn't as sweet as 'Concord' and 'Catawba', which also thrive in this climate.

Melons

Like cucumbers, melons stay healthier when the vines are lifted off the ground. Muskmelons and cantaloupes are the best choices for a vertical garden. Look for varieties that produce small to medium size fruit, such as 'Sugar Cube'. Grow them on A-frames or other sturdy and stable trellises. As melons are maturing to their full size and weight, give them extra support with slings made of used nylon hosiery or netting, so they don't break loose from the vine before ripening finishes.

Peas

All kinds of peas, including snow, sugar snap, and shelling types, will wrap tendrils around trellises as they climb. Some varieties can reach more than 8 feet tall. **Pass on "dwarf" or "bush" varieties, which peak at modest heights.** You can give each pea vine its own stake, but netting (*purchased or homemade with string*) stretched between poles is more efficient for you and allows the vines to produce more branches and pods.

Morning Glory (*Ipomoea tricolor*)

The blue or white flowers of morning glories open early in the day and close as the sun rises in the sky. They bloom on vines that entwine themselves around just about any support, reaching up to 10 feet tall.

Roses (*Rosa spp.*)

The roses sold as "climbers" don't have the tendrils or suckers that vines use to cling to trellises or walls. Climbing roses are just tall varieties with extra-long canes (*up to 10 feet*) that can be easily guided onto a trellis or arbor. The canes do need to be tied in spots to keep them secured on the structure.



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Sweet Peas (*Lathyrus odoratus*)

Like edible peas, ornamental sweet peas grow on vines that wrap around supports as they climb up to 8 feet tall. The fragrant flowers come in pink, red, blue, lavender, purple, white and bicolors.

Trumpet Vine (*Campsis radicans*)

Hummingbirds are attracted to the bright red, orange, and yellow, trumpet-shaped flowers of this ornamental vine.

The vines can reach 6 to 12 feet tall.

Ways To Elevate

Poles

The most basic of plant support structures work best with vines that climb naturally, such as beans and morning glories. **Poles made with bamboo or wood are sturdy and inexpensive**, while the types that are metal coated in plastic are durable, lasting through many seasons of use.

Trellises

There are lots of different trellis styles. For rows of peas, you can set up a simple free-standing structure with a series of poles and netting in between them. **Decorative trellises made from metal or wood** can be installed more permanently on walls to hold up ornamental vines and roses.

Teepees

Set up long, flexible poles in a circle, bend and tie their tops together, and you've created the frame of a teepee. Plant climbers such as beans—edible or ornamental—squash, or nasturtiums at each pole and as they grow up their foliage will fill in the spaces in between the poles.

A-Frames

Cucumbers, squash, and melons can grow up both sides of sturdy A-frames, allowing fresh air to circulate around them. You can buy the frames—**typically made of coated metal**—or make your own with wood or bamboo stakes.

Cordons

Grapes, espalier fruit trees, and many types of ornamental vines can be trained on wires stretched between support posts. **Cordons also work for rows of tomato plants.**

Arbors, Bowers, and Pergolas

A vertical garden becomes an architectural element in your landscape when the plants grow up these kinds of permanent structures. Clematis, wisteria, roses, and honeysuckle all thrive on arbors, bowers, and pergolas.

Repurposed

Discarded bed springs or headboards can become instant trellises for climbing vines. Secure old gutters to a wall, fill them with potting soil, and plant them up with lettuces, herbs, petunias, and other mounding edible and ornamental varieties. **Any wooden or metal ladder can turn into an A-frame trellis.** Use your imagination and you're sure to find other household items you can use to help your garden grow up.

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[PHS McLean Library Vertical Gardening Subject Guide](#)

[Old Farmer's Almanac: Vertical Gardening](#)

[University of Minnesota Extension: Trellises and Cages to Support Garden Vegetables](#)

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