

# SMALL SPACE GARDENING



You don't need acres of land to enjoy all the benefits of gardening. With a few smart strategies and easy techniques, you can grow a wide variety of food and flowers just about anywhere the sun shines. Here are a few ideas to help you get started gardening in any space you have available.

## VERTICAL GROWING

When you can't grow out, grow up. Crops such as beans and peas, cucumbers and other members of the squash family all naturally climb when provided with trellises and poles to wrap around. Tomato vines can be trained to grow upward on stakes or an overhead trellis with strings that drop down. Grape vines need only a little guidance to entwine themselves around almost any structure you provide them. Flowering vines that fit into vertical beds include morning glories, nasturtiums, scarlet runner and hyacinth beans, and trumpet vines.

## ESPALIER TREES

The traditional training technique used in many apple orchards, espalier involves guiding young limbs onto a wire trellis and regular pruning of new growth to keep it from spreading outward. Using this approach, you can grow fruit trees—including apples, pears, cherries, and plums—in narrow spaces and along walls. It works for many ornamental varieties, too.

## WALL BEDS

Imaginative gardeners come up with many ways to repurpose discarded items into growing spaces. Aluminum gutters (with a few drainage holes drilled in) can be hung on a wall or fence, filled with potting soil, and planted with salad greens, succulents, and more. The slots of wooden pallets leaning against a wall can be filled with potting mix for herbs and other shallow-rooted edible and ornamental plants.

## SUCCESSION PLANTING

If you have room for a small raised bed on the ground, get the most from it by planting fast-maturing varieties that you continually replace after they've peaked with new crops. Pass on slow-growing choices such as squash and melons and instead plant quick-producers including radishes, salad greens, and bush beans. Whenever possible, start with small transplants rather than waiting for seeds to germinate. With careful planning, you can enjoy three seasons of harvest—spring, summer, and fall—from any size plot.

## SEASON EXTENSION

Your small bed can be even more productive if you help keep it warm early in spring and late into fall and even winter. Cold frames are boxes topped with glass windows that allow light through while raising temperatures inside. Large glass jars or plastic jugs, known as cloches, and row covers (made from light fabric) can protect plants through the first and last frosts of the year.

## DOUBLE UP

You don't have to choose between a food garden or flower beds, even if you have limited room. Just plant attractive edible plants such as colorful peppers, red okra, purple cabbages and kale, and American groundnut, which has pinkish-plum-burgundy flowers and tubers that taste like nutty potatoes. Herbs such as dill, thyme, rosemary, and sage fit beautifully into ornamental spaces, too.





## INTENSIVE PLANTING

Planting small crops in between bigger ones makes your garden space work harder. The small, fast-growing crops will be ready before the big ones need the extra room. As the plants begin to crowd out their neighbors, harvest the early-maturing ones, leaving space for the others to develop. Plant lettuce and radishes, for instance, around longer-season vegetables such as broccoli, peppers, and tomatoes. In a traditional Native American "Three Sisters" plot, beans, corn, and squash are planted together for three harvests from the same area. The beans vines climb up the corn stalks, while the squash plants spread beneath them, shading out weeds and keeping the sun from baking the soil.

## CONTAINER CULTURE

Nearly everything you can plant in the ground also will grow in a pot. Hanging baskets and window boxes offer you another option for finding space for tomatoes, strawberries, and many herbs and flowers. Containers can be moved daily or as the season progresses to get them enough sunlight to produce fruit or flowers. When choosing varieties for containers, look for words such as "compact" and "patio" in the descriptions.

## LEARN MORE

[University of Maine Extension:  
Gardening in Small Spaces](#)

[Penn State Extension: Create A Square-Foot  
High Yield Vegetable Garden](#)

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