

Gardening in Small Spaces

You don't need a big area to have a beautiful garden. All you need is a small, sunny space in your yard, on your patio, balcony, deck or windowsill. With the correct containers, proper soil, enough water and the right plants, you can create a veritable oasis of flowers, vegetables or both almost anywhere.

The most important ingredient in creating your garden is sun. Vegetables and flowering annuals generally need at least 6-8 hours of sun per day. Leafy greens, root vegetables and non-flowering plants tend to require less sun. To help you choose the best plants for your location, read the tags on the garden center plants and the information on the backs of seed packets. Look for bush, dwarf, patio or compact varieties.

Raised beds are perfect for small garden spaces, providing order and beauty. They shouldn't be wider than 4 ft to ensure that everything can be reached without stepping on the soil; otherwise, they can be any size. Interspersing flowers provides color and attracts pollinators. Penn State recommends using a soil mix of 70% topsoil and 30% compost. Vertical gardening techniques incorporate trellises, cages, netting or poles to help to maximize the available space. Trellises can be used to reinforce taller plants and to support vining vegetables such as cucumbers and pole beans. Vegetables grown on trellises are also easy to harvest. Monitor vertical gardens carefully. They can dry out quickly due to sun and wind exposure.

Patio, deck and balcony gardens are created by using containers, pots, planters, etc. Containers must have drainage holes so that plant roots do not sit in water. Varying container sizes and shapes give visual interest and allow for different-sized plants. Eggplant and pepper plants, as well as determinate tomatoes, grow well in a container garden. Herbs, greens, lettuces and bush beans are also productive. Plant flowers such as salvia and marigolds for color and to attract essential pollinators. Use a soilless potting mix for container plantings. Plants in containers do tend to need more frequent watering so check them often.

A sunny windowsill can be an ideal place to grow basil, parsley, chives and other herbs. Microgreens, which are nutritional champions and rapid growers, will thrive in shallow containers with 6-8 hours of sun.

Explore using raised beds, trellises and containers to provide an attractive and practical garden in the space you have. Let your imagination lead you.

Checklist for February

Flower and Vegetable Garden

- ✓ Get separate soil tests, as soon as the ground thaws, for both your flower beds and vegetable garden to determine the need for soil amendments.
- ✓ Check germination of old seeds by putting seeds in a moist paper towel inside a plastic bag for 5-7 days.
- ✓ Start chives, leeks, broccoli, cauliflower, onions, and shallots from seed indoors 6-9 weeks before planting outdoors in mid-March. ["Planning a Vegetable Garden" FS129](#)

Indoor Plants

- ✓ Start to fertilize houseplants regularly with a water-soluble fertilizer. Use a half-strength solution.
- ✓ Monitor houseplants for signs of stress (dried or yellowing leaves) due to less daylight, overwatering, overheated indoor air and little humidity. Stress is a factor for disease and insect problems.

Trees and Shrubs

- ✓ Continue to check for damaged trees and shrubs. Prune damaged branches but wait until next month to do more extensive pruning.
- ✓ Inspect trees for spotted lanternfly egg masses. Remove masses and dispose of them. ["Spotted Lanternfly in NJ"](#)
- ✓ Sterilize gardening tools with alcohol or a household cleaner such as Lysol.
- ✓ Check Ocean County Hazardous Waste Schedule at (732) 506-5047 or online at www.co.ocean.nj.us/OC/SolidWaste.