



NO GARDEN? NO PROBLEM!

New to gardening, and want to try to grow something? But don't have space for a garden? Here are some tips for growing local food in small spaces.

If you've never gardened before, start with planning a small harvest of a few vegetables. Although a few crops can be ready in just a few weeks, such as radishes and salad leaves, most take months to reach maturity.

All vegetables have basic needs: water and nutrients for the roots, and light, air and warmth for the leaves. Beyond that, every vegetable has its own ideal growing conditions. Some – such as tomatoes, squash, and others take most of the summer to mature. Others, such as lettuce, mature more quickly and can be sown in small amounts throughout the growing season. You can consult our Greater Sudbury growing chart for when to start seeds either indoors or outdoors.

SEEDS


Seeds do have an expiry date. If you have bought seeds packets, even a few years ago, you may still be able to use them. The older the seed packet, there's more of a chance that many of the seeds will not germinate (sprout). Check the back of seed packets, and you'll see the date that the seeds were gathered. For example, A8=2018 and A9=2019. You can still plant those seeds, but be prepared to see that not all of the seeds will germinate. For older seeds, you may want to plant more than one in a pot or a space in your yard, and then remove the second one if both germinate.

If you don't have seed packets, you can even try sowing seeds from the pulp of tomatoes or the inside of peppers. The results may be less predictable than those from a packet, but you may get some good results.

SOIL

You'll need good soil to nurture your seeds. To quickly create a garden bed, you can lay cardboard or newspaper down right on the existing grass, put some good garden soil and/or compost on top, and plant there. This is sometimes called a "lasagna garden". The cardboard or newspaper will stop the grass from growing through, and the cardboard, newspaper and grass will eventually decompose and provide added nutrients to your bed. Most vegetables other than root vegetables like carrots and potatoes only need a few inches of medium to grow.

Many vegetables and herbs can be grown in pots. If you're planting in pots, try to plant in sterile vegetable planting medium that will not contain slugs or other pests. You can reuse the soil in pots



you've planted in before as long as you add a bit of compost or add extra nutrients through a liquid or granular feed like a slow-release fertilizer.

HAVE VERY LITTLE SPACE FOR A GARDEN?

If you live in a house with a small yard or in an apartment, you can still grow some vegetables or herbs.

You can plant in existing flower beds or create a lasagna small beds in your front lawn. Existing flower beds are perfect for perennial herbs, such as rosemary, chives, sage and thyme.

You can create a container garden by planting in pots on your patio. South-facing sunny spots are ideal for growing most things, particularly tomatoes, beans, peas, and herbs, while shady north-facing patches offer more limited options, including salad leaves, swiss chard, and some herbs. See some ideas here: <https://verticalveg.org.uk/ten-great-crops-to-grow-in-containers/>

You can also plant in window boxes. See ideas here: <https://verticalveg.org.uk/window-kitchen-garden/>. Window boxes are great for sprouting seeds and microgreens: you can sprout dried lentils, chickpeas and many other pulses and seeds by soaking them overnight then placing in a glass jar with a piece of fine muslin secured across the opening so that you can regularly rinse them with water as they grow. You can also invest in a tray sprouter that will allow you to up production. Microgreens take sprouting one step further, allowing seeds such as mustard, coriander and fenugreek to grow to 3-5cm tall before they are snipped.

Any vertical can be covered with trellis or wires to act as climbing frames for beans, peas, climbing squash or nasturtiums (the leaves and flowers are edible). So a small space at the base of one of your house walls can be used for vegetables.

If you don't have plant pots, fashion containers out of whatever you have to hand: an old bin or bucket makes a great container for potatoes or a single tomato or chilli plant. You'll need to add drainage holes to the bottom of any container, so that excess water can run out – without that, plants' roots will rot. Remember that plants in containers will need regular feeding and daily watering in hot weather.

On a smaller scale, plastic food trays for fruit and meat – and yoghurt pots of all sizes – are perfect for growing microgreens and starting off vegetable seeds.

GROWING VEGETABLES IN CONTAINERS

For those of you who don't have a lot of space with which to work, consider planting your veggies in containers. This method also keeps time and cost to a minimum.

Tips for Growing Veggies in Containers

- Avoid small containers, as they often can't store enough water to get through hot days. Larger pots hold moisture better . . . plus, the bigger your container, the more plants you can grow.
- Clay pots are usually more attractive than plastic ones, but plastic retains moisture better than unglazed terra-cotta. To get the best of both, slip a plastic pot into a slightly larger clay pot.
- You can also use barrels, buckets, baskets, boxes, tubs, and troughs—anything that holds soil. Just be sure that it has drainage holes in the bottom.
- Hanging baskets make good use of space, and plants grown at eye level can be easily tended and harvested.
- Place containers where they will receive maximum sunlight and good air circulation.
- Vegetables that can be easily transplanted, such as peppers and cherry tomatoes are best suited for containers. Transplants can be purchased from local nurseries or started from seed at home.
- Before planting, add about 1 inch of coarse gravel in the bottom of the container to improve drainage.
- To keep plants adequately cool and moist during hot summer days, double-pot them: Place a small pot inside a larger one and fill the space between them with sphagnum moss or crumpled newspaper. When watering the plant, also soak the filler between the pots.
- Feed container plants at least twice a month with liquid fertilizer, following the instructions on the label. (An occasional application of fish emulsion or compost will add trace elements to container soil.)
- Watch for and control insect pests.

References:

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2020/apr/13/no-soil-seeds-or-space-no-problem-a-beginners-guide-to-growing-vegetables#maincontent>

<https://verticalveg.org.uk/>

<https://www.almanac.com/>