

Small Space Gardening



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What Can you Grow in a Small Space?

Want to garden but not sure you have enough space to grow the fruits, vegetables, and herbs that you're interested in? There's a growing trend toward what's called "small space gardening." This is a type of gardening that maximizes both gardening technologies and design to generate the most produce in the least amount of space.

It incorporates everything from a small windowsill herb garden to a raised garden bed on your back porch. You can grow amazing fruits and vegetables in containers on an apartment patio or build a vertical garden and grow a variety of herbs and vegetables. You'll be quite surprised at what you can grow in a small space.

On the Vine

Any vegetable or fruit that grows on a vine like tomatoes, beans, and even grapes can be grown in a vertical garden. Squash and zucchini along with watermelon and cucumbers all enjoy climbing up a structure.

You can plant them in a small raised garden bed that you build, or you can plant them in containers. The key to success here is to give them something to climb so they don't grow horizontally and take up space.

In Small Containers

Any herb can grow in a small container. The plant will tend to grow to the size of the pot, which means you can keep them in tiny containers on your windowsill, in a flower box outside, or in larger planters.

Other fruits and vegetables that grow well in containers include peppers, tomatoes, strawberries, and even blueberries and raspberries. Tomatoes can be grown in containers as long as they're provided with a cage or a means to grow vertically and have their branches supported.



In a Raised Garden Bed

The ideal size for a raised garden bed is four feet across and four to six feet long. The narrow width means that you can kneel on one side and reach the plants on the other side. It's also appropriate for small yards and patios.

The good news is that you can grow just about anything in a raised garden bed. From carrots and garlic to asparagus, Brussels sprouts and celery - you're only limited by your personal preferences. Keep in mind that to maximize space you'll want to provide a vertical growing structure for any plants that tend to vine or need a lot of space.



If you're using a raised garden bed, consider embracing the practice of square foot gardening where you can pack as much produce as possible into your small space. We'll take a look at square foot gardening next.

Square Foot Gardening

Square foot gardening, also called SFG in many gardening communities, was developed in the 1970s by Mel Bartholomew. Prior to his career as an author and a television presenter, he was an engineer. When he retired, he began gardening and quickly realized that the traditional method felt wasteful.

He spent hours weeding the gaps between the rows of plants and decided that getting rid of the rows was a better idea. A gardening concept was born. Through his television programs and his book, the concept of SFG took off. In fact, many manufacturers embraced it and created what they marketed as "ready to assemble" gardens.

What Exactly Does It Look Like?

Another essential element of a successful square foot garden is the use of a specific type of soil mix. This mix is designed to prevent weeds from growing and to retain water and nutrients. The mix is a combination of compost, peat moss and vermiculite. Each element comprises one third of the combination.

With a square foot garden you'll have a small raised garden bed. The standard size is 4 feet x 4 feet. You'll create a grid on the top of the bed that sections off your bed into foot squares. The key to success with a square-foot garden is to create a deep bed. They're usually 6 to 8 inches deep. This gives the plants plenty of room to find nutrients in the soil.



Why the Squares?

The squares or the grid that you create with string are important. It allows you to maximize the number of plants in the box and it helps with crop rotation. There's a specific pattern to follow.

Each square has either 1, 4, 9 or 16 plants in it depending on the size of the plant. You can use your fingers to mark the spots in the soil before you add the plants so you can see what will fit and how it all comes together. If you have larger plants they might take up two side-by-side squares and you can plant climbing plants like beans into mini-rows with 4 per square.

Tending to Your Garden

When you're taking care of your SFG, you don't have to walk on the bed. You can reach right across it. It's also recommended that you harvest your herbs, fruits, and veggies with scissors rather than plucking them as this can harm the roots.

Square foot gardening works well for many situations and you can expand on it if you have a larger garden and want to maximize your space. It does require a little more planning in the beginning. However, it's a great way to garden efficiently.

Row Gardening

When most people think about gardening, they envision a space that is organized neatly into rows. The corn stands tall in the back, the tomatoes rise in front of the corn, the beans follow and so on. This certainly makes a garden easier to plan and harvest; however, it's not always the best option.

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Row gardening is one of the earliest forms of gardening. In fact, if you visit any farm you'll likely see the plants lined up in nice, even rows. You can till the dirt and add some organic material into the soil. Tilling it breaks up the hard dirt and mixes the organic material into the soil. Try to till about 8 to 12 inches deep.



The Benefits of Row Gardening

Row gardening makes it very easy to grow a large volume of plants in an organized way. You can also rotate the plants annually so that you're not depleting the soil. For example, your corn row may become your tomato row and your tomato row may become your lettuce row. It also makes it easy to harvest your vegetables and fruits. You simply walk between the rows to gather what you need.

The Downside of Row Gardening

The biggest downside is that row gardening takes up a lot of space. It's great for large plants but not so efficient for smaller ones. And for plants that climb like tomatoes and beans, you'll still want to provide structure. Tomatoes need cages and beans need a pole or a trellis.

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You can row garden in a small space. There's no rule that says a row garden needs to be a huge structure. However, if you are dealing with a small space you'll want to make sure your row garden is well planned and that you choose mostly small plants. Herbs, carrots, lettuces and other root vegetables are ideal for a small space row garden.

If you like the idea of row gardening but don't think you have the room, consider vertical gardening as an option. We'll take a look at what it is and how to do it next.

Vertical Gardening

If you have a small space or a wall or fence that you want to beautify, a vertical garden may be just what you've been looking for. Vertical gardens allow you to grow anything from flowers and herbs to larger vegetable plants. It just takes a little imagination and planning.



A vertical garden is pretty much what it sounds like. Rather than growing horizontally on the ground or in a raised garden bed, you grow up a wall or structure. How you create your vertical garden depends on your space and your needs.

For example, you can hang several planters vertically and plant herbs and vegetables in the space. You can also position beans and vine-like vegetables and fruits against a wall and coax them to grow up the wall instead of out into the yard.

The main difference with vertical gardens is the medium that the plants grow in. Hydroponics for example, can be a type of vertical garden. Hydroponics are plants that grow in water.

Aquaponics is another type of vertical gardening and it mixes raising fish with your plants. That's a bit more complicated than we're going to get here but it's certainly something to investigate if you love fish and gardening. Soil-based gardens are the other option.

The Benefits of a Vertical Garden

There is an abundance of benefits of vertical gardening. In addition to allowing you to use your imagination in terms of how you plant your vegetables and herbs and what you plant them in, you can have a lot of fun. Many people try to find ways to make their vertical garden artistic.

For example, you might hang white pots on a glossy black fence in a star-shaped pattern. You could also find unique items to hold your plants like old rain gutters, or you might make a vertical garden from a closet hanging shoe holder.

The other benefits include the fact that your plants are off of the ground so they're not vulnerable to pests. They also don't need weeding which certainly saves time and energy. You can also bring your vertical garden indoors during the colder months which may give you a longer season.

The Downside of a Vertical Garden

Downsides might include the fact that you can be limited with the size of the plants. You don't see too many people hanging tomato or pumpkin plants on the side of a wall or a fence. Also, because the plants are hanging and they're more exposed to the air, you may need to water them more often.

Small Space Gardening

Take a look around your space and consider what you might want to grow. If you're interested in smaller plant and you have a wall or fence that fits the bill, consider trying a vertical garden.

If a vertical garden isn't quite what you're looking for, maybe a greenhouse is in order. You can make small table top greenhouses and grow all season long. We'll explore the ins and outs of small space greenhouses next.

Small Space Greenhouses

When you think about greenhouses, you probably imagine a large conservatory or farm greenhouse. These buildings can be amazing structures but they're not right for the average gardener. The truth is that most people don't consider a greenhouse because they think they're too big. However, there's a growing trend of mini-greenhouses and small space greenhouses. In fact, they're so popular you can buy a mini-greenhouse at your local home store and they're even at Walmart.



DIY or Buy?

As mentioned, you can buy a premade mini greenhouse. They come in all shapes and sizes and can be purchased to fit your space. For example, if you have a wall or fence area that gets good sun, you can purchase a greenhouse that's taller to fit the space. There are also ground level or tabletop greenhouses you can buy.

The other option is to build your own greenhouse. This is a good idea if you have a space that has a unique shape and size. You really don't need much to build your own greenhouse. A frame can be made from PVC or wood. You then attach a thin clear plastic sheet to the frame. Leave it open on one end or create a Velcro opening and you have an instant greenhouse.

Why Use a Greenhouse?

Greenhouses are ideal for cooler climates. If you live in an area where you get enough sun but the temperatures tend to run cooler, a greenhouse can help you grow more plant varieties. It also extends the season. Your tomato plants for example, won't die from the first hard frost. You can protect them with a greenhouse and get more fruit from the plant.

One excellent use of a greenhouse is to build one that you can position on top of your raised bed. This extends your growing season and produces more food.

Additionally, depending on the size of the greenhouse, you can take the structure into your home during the winter and continue growing your vegetables with a grow light. If you choose a vertical structure, you can tier or stack your plants on shelves and grow more plants in less space.

You can grow anything in a greenhouse. The only consideration is that the temperature does need to be controlled. It can get too hot in a greenhouse and that can cause your plants to wilt. It can be too cool as well. If your temp is too hot, the simple solution is to open the greenhouse to provide the warm air an escape. If it's too cold, add heat lamps or move the greenhouse into the direct sun.

Why Garden in Raised Beds?



There's a growing trend to garden in raised beds. These beds are usually anywhere from eight to twelve inches deep and can be any shape or size. They are easy to build and can fit any size yard or patio. And with a greenhouse built to position on top, you can extend the growing season.

The benefits of gardening in a raised bed include:

1. Soil control – When you build a raised garden bed, you have a few choices. You can position it onto the ground or you can build a bottom with holes for drainage. Either way, you're adding soil to the bed.

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You have complete control over the type of soil and can choose the mix that best fits your garden's needs. Additionally, year after year, you can simply add more quality soil to the box. You don't have to worry about depleting the existing soil.

2. Easier weeding – Actually, if you use a ground cover like mulch or a weed barrier then you won't have any weeding to contend with. Weeding in a traditional garden can take hours each week. With a raised bed you simply water and harvest. It's a lot less work.



3. Works for any size space – Generally, raised beds are 4 feet by 4 feet. This is a great size because it fits nicely into a corner and because you can reach across it from any direction. However, if you have a unique sized space that you need to fit a garden into, you can make your raised bed fit your needs. You can, for example, build a long, narrow 2 by 8 foot bed.

4. Easy to build – All you really need are a couple of nails, a hammer, and some wood. You can have the wood measured and precut at the lumber yard or hardware store. Metal brackets can ensure that you have perfect corners too.

5. Longer growing season – The growing season is extended with a raised garden bed because you can start earlier in the season. The soil you add to the bed warms more quickly than the dirt in the ground. Additionally, you can add a greenhouse top to the bed to take your vegetables into the cooler months.

6. No problems with pests – With a raised garden bed you won't have to worry as much about rabbits and rodents eating your plants. Additionally, you can prevent many bugs from becoming problems.

7. They're attractive – Raised garden beds can fit any design personality. You can make them out of wood, metal, and even plastic or synthetic wood. You can paint them or adorn them however you like. A raised garden bed becomes part of your outdoor living area.

Raised garden beds fit a variety of needs. They're lovely, easy to care for, and can extend your growing season. Measure your space and start designing your garden today.

If a raised bed isn't an option and space is really tight, you might want to consider container gardening.

Container Gardening

Container gardening is a fun way to grow flowers, fruits, herbs and vegetables in a creative and simple way. The fact is, you can grow things in just about any type of container.

Getting Creative and Eco Friendly



One of the reasons container gardening has become so popular is that it's a fun way to decorate a patio, porch or yard. You can use any type of container from an old bathtub to a wooden crate. You can reuse items or head to the home goods store to find planters that fit your design tastes and needs.

Small Plants

Have an old teapot, fish bowl or aquarium? You can grow vegetables in it. Do you have a mug that you never use? It might be great for herbs like chives.

Small plants like herbs and lettuce, and even root vegetables like carrots and radishes, grow well when they're in smaller planters.

You can pack them tightly together for an ornate appearance and to maximize space. You can also add these vegetables to flower pots. For example, you might have a planter that has petunias, daisies and lettuce.



Medium Size Plants

You can find lovely plants for medium-size planters too. For example, peppers - both sweet and hot - are beautiful plants. You can use the containers as a decorative element on your porch or patio and enjoy the harvest in later summer.

Tomatoes are somewhere between medium and large. If you plant them in a planter, make sure to place a tomatoes cage over them so they have the support they need to grow up. Look for smaller varieties like cherry tomatoes.

Large Containers for Larger Plants

Larger containers work too. You can grow tomatoes, cucumbers, beans, zucchini and squash in larger containers. Position a trellis in the container so the plant can grow vertically. These types of containers and plants make a great background on a porch. You can place smaller containers in front of them and create a tiered container garden.



Tips for Container Gardening

Container gardening is easy but there are a few tips and rules of thumb that make it even simpler.

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- **Holes** – If your container doesn't have holes, then you will want to drill them. Your container needs some drainage so your plant doesn't become waterlogged.
- **Soil** – A good potting soil can make all the difference in your success. You can make your own or buy a bagged soil from your nursery.
- **Check regularly** – While you don't have to worry about too many pests eating your plants and you certainly don't have to worry about weeds, it's a good idea to create a habit to check, and water, your container garden on a regular basis.

Container gardening is fun and it's an easy way to start gardening. Identify a few types of plants you'd like to grow, find the appropriate container, and get started.

Small Space Gardening Ideas

There are so many fun ways to garden and you don't need a large space to grow a lot of produce. In fact, sometimes the smallest spaces produce the most interesting and creative gardens. Here are a few ideas that people have used to make the most of their small space.

Driveway Garden – If you're short on space, why not turn to the driveway? Generally there's a little boundary on either side of the driveway. You can position vertical gardens along the length of the driveway and against the house or fence. You can also line the driveway with beautiful containers filled with your favorite vegetables.

On the Front Porch – People like to make their front porch a welcoming space. Why not build an elevated planter box or use containers or even a vertical garden to maximize the space?

Around the Patio – If you have a small deck, you can create seating and a garden by creating a combined bench and planter box. The back of the bench can contain the planter box. You can plant low-growing vegetables like lettuce and mix them alongside flowers and herbs.

On the Dog House – If you have a dog house in the yard, you can maximize the space by placing a planter box on top and growing vegetables and herbs.

On an Apartment or Condo Patio – If you are living in an urban environment then consider using containers to grow vegetables and fruits in attractive containers on your patio. You can even position a flower box full of herbs on the railing to maximize space.

The First Step to Small Space Gardening

The first step to take is to assess your space. What small spaces do you have and how can you best use them to grow vegetables, fruits, and herbs? You can even grow lovely plants like lavender and create your own sachets and lavender oil.

You're not limited to veggies. That's the second step - identifying what you want to grow and comparing that to your available space. Then allow yourself to get creative. There's no end to what you can create and grow.

How to Decide Which Type of Garden to Grow

When you're exploring options on small space gardening, it can feel overwhelming. Everywhere you look in and around your home you may see potential gardening locations. And when you think about what you can grow, the sky is the limit.

How do you decide what type of garden to grow and where to grow it?

The Reality of Time

How much time do you have to tend to your garden? How often are you home? All gardens need tending to. You'll need to check the soil. You'll want to make sure that your plants are bug free and not being devoured by pests. Plants need watering and they may need food depending on the soil you're using. And let's not forget about harvest time. If you aren't home very often then you may want to consider a small patio or windowsill garden as a starter garden.

What Will You Realistically Use?

Gardeners start out with good intentions. It's kind of like a New Year's resolution. They imagine growing bushels of tomatoes and spending a lovely weekend in the kitchen canning those tomatoes and making sauce.

But then it doesn't happen because the intention wasn't realistic. Think about how often you cook. Evaluate what your skills are in terms of canning, freezing, and drying. Also think about the likelihood about what you'll actually eat.

Space Matters

While it might be tempting to fill up every nook and cranny with plants, will you really enjoy all the greenery or will it be too much? Does the space that you have make sense for plants? Keep in mind that most vegetables need six to eight hours of sunlight. It doesn't have to be direct sunlight but they do need a lot of sunshine.

Take some time to honestly answer these questions. Then sit down and carefully plan your garden. It's the most important element for small space gardening success.

Small Space Gardening Tips for Success

Whether you're growing your garden on your windowsill or outside on your back porch, there are some success strategies that will make gardening just a little bit easier. Experienced gardeners and beginning gardeners alike can make use of small space gardening tips.

Plan ahead – Decide what you want to plant, where you're going to put it, and what your small space garden will look like before you buy anything. Draw your plan out - you don't have to be a designer. A simple chart can help you make sure your ideas are viable.

Buy everything before you get started – There's nothing more frustrating than having to run to the store in the middle of a project. This is why it's important to plan ahead. Make a list of all the supplies you need and buy them before you begin planting.

Plant on an overcast day – If you have the option, plant your fruits, vegetables, and herbs on an overcast day. The sun can be harsh on new plants that are trying to adapt to their environment. An overcast day gives them a little break while they settle in.

Keep pests at bay naturally – Container gardening, vertical gardening, and raised beds are all more effective at deterring pests. However, you may still have some to deal with. If you have rabbits, mice, or even deer getting to your plants, consider placing a wire frame around them.

Chicken wire is inexpensive and can be bent or stapled to most structures. When it comes to bugs, use a mild detergent mixed with water to prevent bugs from landing on your plant.

You don't have to start from seeds – Seeds need to be sown long before the growing season starts. It can take a bit of space and patience to grow a plant from a seed. You can instead head to your nurseryfarmer's market, or even your hardware store to buy good sized plants that are already growing well and will transition into a planter.



From window sills to raised beds, there are many small space options for growing fresh fruits, herbs and vegetables. Consider your wants, needs and space before you begin and you'll find gardening in small spaces a pleasant and rewarding activity.

Books for More Information

Square Foot Gardening with Kids by Mel Bartholomew
<https://amzn.to/33OcC2mAll>

New Square Foot Gardening by Mel Bartholomew
<https://amzn.to/2VTq3LY>

Square Foot Gardening: How To Grow Healthy Organic Vegetables The Easy Way by James Paris and Norman J Stone
<https://amzn.to/32vxGL9>

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We support school gardens, provide field trips to local farms, and help students harvest and deliver veggies to their school cafeteria for school meals – especially in schools serving low-income populations that are fighting childhood obesity.

Experiences in the garden connect to every area of students' classroom curriculum – reading, writing, problem solving, science and math. They get to see how their food choices connect to their health, their community, and their environment. At the heart of it all is one goal: To change the way kids see and enjoy healthy food!

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