

Container Gardening Offers Many Benefits

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



PHOTO BY Tom LeRoy

Container gardening is a simple and fun way to grow edible crops in just about any situation. It's growing in popularity because it's easy to get started and enables anyone to be successful— including those who think they have a "brown thumb." [The Galveston County AgriLife Office will sponsor a seminar on "The Patio Garden with Vegetables, Herbs & Fruit Trees" to be presented by Tom LeRoy on Saturday, August 22.]

Many people living in urban areas would like a garden but feel that the lack of space limits them. Regardless of where you live—even if it's an apartment with limited patio space—you can usually have an enjoyable and productive garden by using containers.

If you are curious about, or interested in, container gardening, I recommend attending an upcoming

educational seminar on "The Patio Garden with Vegetables, Herbs & Fruit Trees" to be presented by Tom LeRoy on Saturday, August 22, 2015, from 9:00 - 11:00 a.m. Tom is now retired but began his 35-year career with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service right out of college, after receiving a Bachelor's Degree in Horticulture in 1975 and a Mas-

ter's Degree in Plant Breeding in 1977, both from Texas A&M University.

Tom is an experienced home gardener and has co-authored three gardening books: "Growing Fruits and Nuts in the South," "Common Sense Vegetable Gardening in the South", and "The Southern Kitchen Garden."

Rather than acquiring your container gardening skills by trial and error, I highly recommend attending Tom's seminar. His program will be conducted at the Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office located in Carbide Park (4102-B Main St. in La Marque). Pre-registration is required (phone 281-534-3413, ext. 5065 or e-mail GALV3@wt.net) to ensure the availability of handouts.

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Container gardening can be an attractive part of the landscape of an urban home or apartment, whether on a windowsill, patio, rooftop, balcony, or doorstep. Container gardening is the city dweller's answer to the big backyard garden when America was more rural. You may not have a half acre to plant, but you can achieve a similar goal by growing plants in pots.

What can be grown in these small spaces? The possibilities for container gardening are endless. Apartment dwellers can grow vegetables in containers on balconies. Varieties have been developed specifically for container use. When given proper growing conditions and adequate care, many vegetables grown in a typical backyard garden will also grow well in containers.

A lot of us like to grow tropical plants, such as citrus trees or dwarf bananas, in containers. Citrus is very adaptable to container growing in 5 gallon or larger size containers. Provided you start out with potting soil with good drainage, you can likely keep a citrus tree in the same pot without root pruning and repotting for several years. Citrus grown in containers can be rolled around. This comes in handy over the winter season should a cold snap happen our way. You will not likely corner

the market on citrus fruit production, but a lot of people get a fair amount of production growing this way.

You don't need a large garden to grow herbs. Most herbs are perfect container garden plants and will thrive on your deck, patio, balcony, fire escape, or front steps, provided you offer them the right growing conditions.

The most important factors for successful container gardening are sufficient sunlight, proper moisture, adequate fertility and, perhaps most important, a little tender loving care.

While it's true that container gardening is ideal for limited spaces and that most vegetables will grow in containers, be aware that some vegetables are more suitable and easier to grow than others. Therefore, the gardener should plan to grow vegetables that will produce a large quantity of food for the amount of space and time required.

The size of the container will vary according to the crop selection and space available. Pots from 6 to 10 inches in size are satisfactory for many herbs and ornamental peppers. For most vegetable crops such as peppers, eggplant and tomatoes, you will find 5-gallon containers are the most suitable size. They are fairly easy to handle and provide adequate space for root growth.

Does container planting take

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more water? It takes less, overall, than a garden plot, but may require more frequent watering. The type of container helps determine water needs. The sides of the container will be exposed to hot sun, so choose one with thick walls that do not conduct heat readily. Metal and plastic containers are least desirable. Ceramic pots are better, but wooden tubs are best from the standpoint of low heat conduction.

Provided there is adequate sunlight, you place container-grown vegetables and fruits at entryways, on patios and decks, or anywhere you have a need to add a living component to enhance the appeal of an area.

Each planted container will have its own personality and you can even create container scenes.

They can range from dramatic to subtle and from grand to petite.



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