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Garden Graces Vegetables for the small garden

by Grace C. Lockwood

Some of us are lucky enough to live in the country or on a large property where we can have a large vegetable garden and grow enough for the whole year. However, most of us, like me, live in towns and cities and have a small garden plot or are restricted to patios and balconies. That does not mean that you cannot grow at least a few vegetables for summer use. Intensive gardening techniques and new dwarf vegetable varieties allow the gardener with the smallest space to grow their favorites, whether it be tomatoes, carrots or a small melon.

New dwarf vegetable varieties take up a fraction of the space of their normal sized counterparts, taste great, and can even be grown in containers to yield a summer's worth of produce. For the small garden plot, dwarf vegetables plus intensive gardening practices can increase the yield substantially.

One of the most familiar small fruit is the cherry tomato. They are prolific producers throughout the season for fresh eating and the freezer. Old standbys are "Sweet 100" and "Sweet Million". "Sweet Million" is more disease resistant than "Sweet 100". Both plants need to be staked as they form long vine-like branches. Two new cherry tomatoes are "Husky Cherry Red" and "Tigrette". "Husky" is a sweet tasting cherry tomato but has a fairly thick skin while "Tigrette" is a thin skinned red and orange/yellow striped tomato on a dwarf bushy plant. Stokes has a series of cherry tomatoes especially for container planting and Dominion Seed House has a series called "Patio Hybrids".

Carrots need deep, rich soil to form their long roots but baby carrots can grow in heavier soils as they are only a few inches long. "Orbit" and "Thumbelina" are round, sweet tasting baby carrots, picked when they are about golf ball size and can be grown in containers as well. "Spacemaster" bush cucumber has 7" - 8" slender cukes on a compact plant with very short vines. There is a new "Bush Spaghetti Squash" plant and even a melon plant can be grown in a large container.

Small spaces mean deciding on what vegetables you really want to grow and having to leave some out. Large space grabbing plants like broccoli, cabbage and potatoes should be avoided unless you have an absolute passion for them. Corn is a very heavy feeder and can deplete the soil rapidly. You will also have to watch out that the raccoons do not "pick" the corn before you do!

Intensive gardening techniques include raised bed gardening where soil is raised about 6" - 8" between paths. The beds are normally 4' wide and can be any length. They can be loose or confined by pressure treated wooden boards and low stone or brick walls. A favorite has been old railway ties but remember that they have been soaked in creosote which is highly toxic. They are best reserved for flower beds. The loose soil in the beds allows for closer spacing between plants and greater yields. Vertical gardening on trellises also allows you to grow more in a confined space. Climbing peas, beans, cucumbers, melons and squash will produce more in the same space

than the bush types. Shade tolerant vegetables like lettuce, spinach and celery can be planted underneath or on the north side of climbers.

Vegetables with deep roots and shallow roots can be interplanted to share the same space with minimal nutrient competition. Carrots can be planted with radishes, lettuce, onions or beans. Onions can be planted with spinach; tomatoes with radishes, peppers or basil; and peppers with radishes or lettuce.

Relay planting can increase the variety of harvests over the growing season. Peas, carrots, lettuce, spinach, Chinese leaf vegetables and onions can replace the peas, and tomatoes, peppers, melons, squash and cucumbers can be planted after the early lettuce and spinach has been pulled up. Planting crops like lettuce, radishes and spinach every two weeks will yield smaller manageable harvests over a longer period of time. Lettuce and spinach can be planted in early fall as well for they grow best in cool weather. So even a small garden will supply you with a bounty of fresh vegetables with some to spare.

Grace Lockwood is a Georgetown resident who has been an avid gardener for as long as she can remember. She has both vegetable and flower gardens but has a soft spot for roses - especially modern hybrid tea roses and antique roses. Grace is a hydrogeologist by training and is currently taking correspondence courses for landscape design from the University of Guelph.

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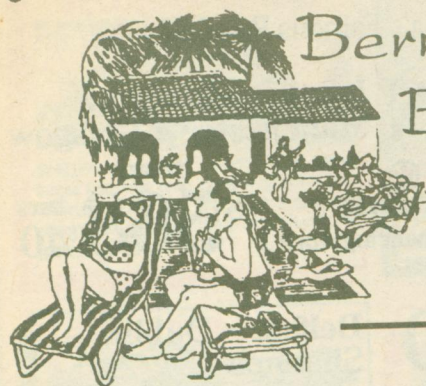
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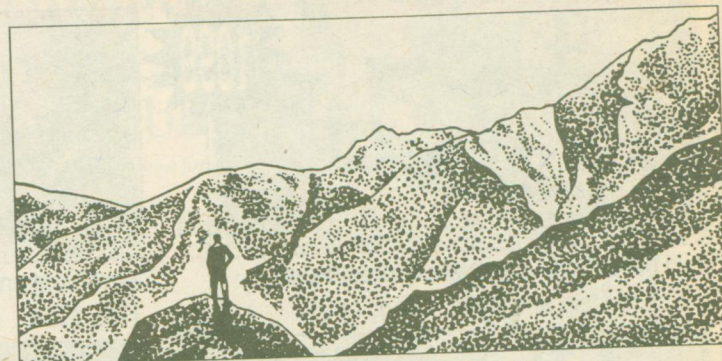


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