

SPRING LAWN & GARDEN SPECIALS

Upside down gardening saves space and foils pests



Upside-down gardening, primarily of leggy crops like tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers, is more common partly because of the various types of upside down planters on the market.

The advantages of upside-down gardening are many: it saves space; there's no need for stakes or cages; it foils pests and fungus; there are fewer, if any, weeds; there is efficient delivery of water and nutrients thanks to gravity; and it allows for greater air circulation and sunlight exposure.

While there are skeptics, proponents say the proof is in the produce.

Tomato and jalapeño seedlings sprout from upside-down planters fashioned out of milk jugs and soda bottles that hang from fences.

While horticulturists, agronomists and plant scientists agree that pests

and blight are less likely to damage crops suspended in the air, they are unsure whether growing them upside down rather than right-side up will yield better results.

Judging from gardening blogs and Web sites, those fooling around with upside-down gardening are generally enthusiastic, particularly if they have planted smaller varieties of tomatoes.

Tomato varieties are labelled as either indeterminate or determinate, and horticulture experts recommend choosing indeterminate ones for upside-down gardens. Determinate tomato plants are stubbier, with somewhat rigid stalks that issue all their fruit at once, which could weigh down and break the stems if hanging upside down. Indeterminate types, by con-

trast, have more flexible, sprawling stems that produce fruit throughout the season and are less likely to be harmed by gravity.

In addition to plastic soda bottles, milk jugs and five-gallon buckets, upside-down planters can be made out of thick heavy-duty plastic trash bags, plastic reusable shopping totes, kitty litter containers, laundry hampers and even used tires. Web sites like instructables.com and Upside-DownTomatoPlant.com show how it can be done. Variations include building a water reservoir either at the top or bottom of planters for irrigation, cutting several openings in the bottom and sides for planting several seedlings and lining the interior with landscape fabric or coconut fibre to help retain moisture.

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