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vegetables for mini gardens



University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
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CIRCULAR 1036

For More Detailed Information . . .

The following publications are available from your local extension adviser or from the listed source.

OFFICE OF AGRICULTURAL PUBLICATIONS, 123 MUMFORD HALL, URBANA, ILLINOIS 61801:

- Illinois Vegetable Garden Guide, Circular 882
- Growing Vegetable Transplants, Circular 884
- Insect Control for the Homeowner, Circular 900
- Growing Tomatoes at Home, Circular 981
- Gardening in Containers — Flowers, Shrubs, Small Trees, Circular 997

OFFICE OF INFORMATION, EXTENSION SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, WASHINGTON, D.C. 20250:

Minigardens for Vegetables, HG Bulletin 163

MIDWEST PLAN SERVICE, AGRICULTURAL ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT, IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY, AMES, IOWA 50010, OR EXTENSION AGRICULTURAL ENGINEER, COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE, UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, URBANA, ILLINOIS 61801:

Outdoor Living — Planning and Construction Guide, MWPS-12. (Contains information on construction materials and construction of modular containers. \$1.00.)

This circular was prepared by H. J. Hopen, J. W. Courter, J. S. Vandemark, and W. R. Nelson, Jr., extension horticulturists, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.



There are many good reasons for planting a vegetable minigarden. A minigarden requires only a small amount of space, and can be easily incorporated into the total landscape. Homegrown vegetables are often fresher and of better quality than those from the grocery store, are readily available, and contribute to a balanced diet.

This circular deals with the vegetables and techniques best adapted to minigardens. If you have adequate space, a conventional backyard garden is more convenient and practical. Circular 882 contains detailed suggestions for the backyard garden. Good cultural practices (as outlined in Circulars 882 and 981) should be followed.

To be of top quality, vegetables must be harvested at the proper stage of maturity. Choose a location with full or nearly full sunlight for your minigarden. You can correct soil conditions such as poor drainage, fertility, and water-holding capacity by adding high-quality soil or organic materials and fertilizer. Lightweight growing materials are also available. These contain fertilizer and offer excellent water-holding capacity.

Planting Suggestions

Buy transplants whenever possible to reduce the time from planting to harvest. Be sure to get good-quality transplants. You can grow your own plants if you have adequate facilities, but specialized techniques are necessary (see Circular 884). Avoid overcrowding, particularly with seeded items, and thin when necessary to avoid failure in production.

Train or arrange plants vertically to take advantage of restricted areas. Stakes, trellises, and fences can be used to support crops such as tomatoes or cucumbers (see Circulars 882 and 981).

Use tubs, raised beds, shallow boxes, and other containers to permit gardening in areas where conventional soil beds are impossible.

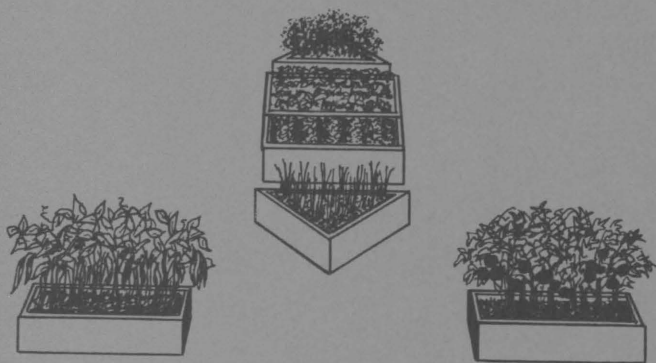
Plant vegetables with attractive leaves as border plants in the vegetable or flower garden. Lettuce, parsley, and herbs are particularly suitable for the foreground, and chard, asparagus, and kale are attractive background plants.

Consider locations other than the conventional backyard garden. Investigate the possibilities of raised beds or containers on decks and patios, and in fence corners.

Display individual characteristics of vegetables by planting as single specimens or in random groupings rather than in straight rows.

Modular Containers

Modular arrangements of plant boxes can add effectively to the landscape decor in outdoor living areas. Containers with a 6-inch soil depth are sufficient for green onions, radishes, most leaf lettuce varieties, Swiss chard, and parsley or chives. An 8- to 10-inch depth should be used for larger vegetables.



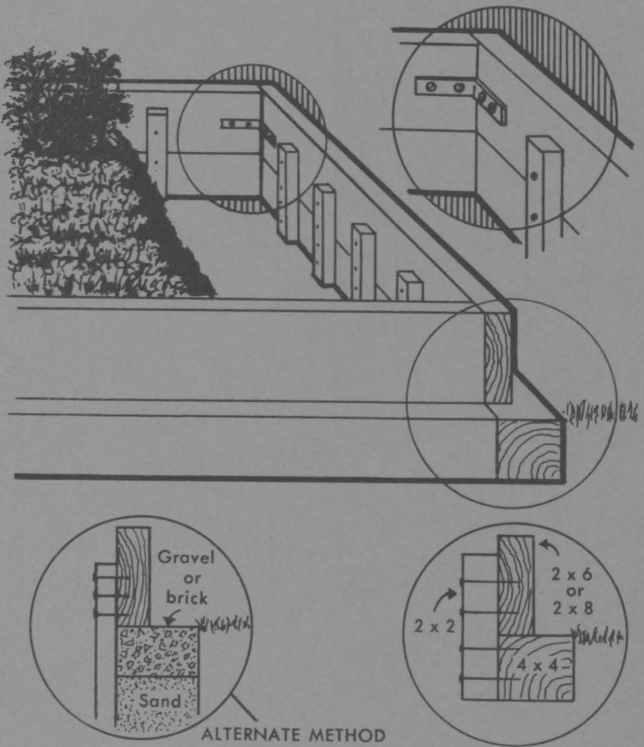
A typical modular arrangement. See MWPS-12, "Outdoor Living," for construction details of modular containers.

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Raised Beds

The simplest kind of raised bed is rectangular in form, with 8- to 10-inch redwood or cypress sides reinforced at the corners. Length can be adjusted to the available space, and a 3-foot width is sufficient to accommodate two or three rows of the smaller vegetables such as lettuce, carrots, and beets.

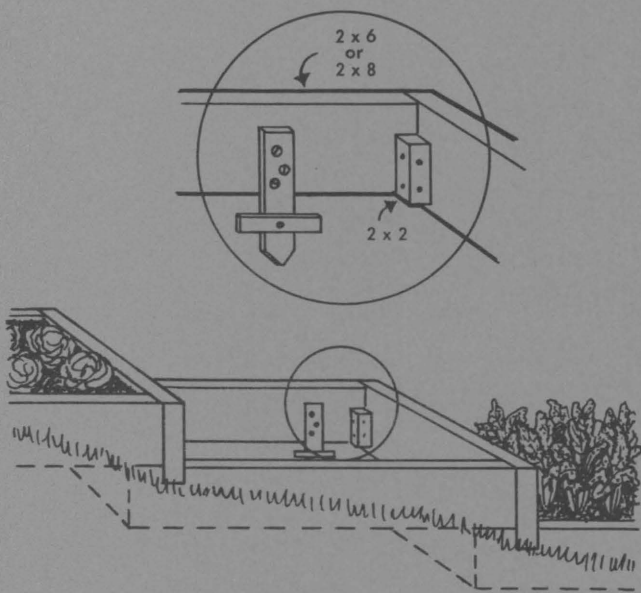
Water and fertilizer can be easily controlled in raised beds. Good soil can be used to fill the forms above the existing soil grade. This is a distinct advantage when the topsoil is poor.



A method of constructing raised beds. Use the illustrations in this circular as a general guide; adapt containers and modular arrangements to fit your landscape.

Tiered Raised Beds

Tiered beds make it possible to grow more vegetables than can be accommodated in a one-level bed of comparable size. This type of growing system is especially suitable for sloping sites. The extra soil depth (as in a raised bed) may provide advantageous growing conditions when the topsoil is poor.



Tiered raised beds should be constructed so that they comprise one unit. All beds should be anchored to prevent shifting. For an alternate method of corner construction, see illustration for raised bed.

Border or Background of Flower Bed

When space is limited, the border and background locations of existing flower gardens may be a good place to "tuck in" vegetables. The vegetable greens are well adapted to this kind of situation.

Containers on Patio or Backyard Doorstep

Vegetables with attractive foliage planted in containers add to the decor of the outdoor living area. Containers should be large enough to hold a mature plant without severely restricting the root system. Bottom drainage is essential. Frequent watering and fertilization are needed to sustain the restricted root system. Use an all-water soluble-type fertilizer for containers to avoid the buildup of excessive salts present in field-grade fertilizers.

Suggested Vegetables

Tomatoes can be grown in beds of all types and in most containers. Tomato plants produce large yields of fruit for the amount of growing space required. Dwarf-plant-type tomatoes in containers and standard staking varieties can be grown in mini-spaces. Varieties such as Small Fry, Tiny Tim, and Patio do well in containers. Cherry, Plum, and Gardener's Delight, as well as many standard varieties, are suitable for training on stakes or trellises. (See Circular 981 for methods of staking tomatoes and detailed varietal suggestions.)

Rhubarb can be grown in a tub or large container. If well watered and fertilized, rhubarb will grow for several years. Rhubarb can also be "forced" in mid-winter by moving the container to the basement (for heat) and harvesting the petioles as they appear. Rhubarb should be started from roots obtained from a reliable nursery.

Green leafy vegetables can be grown in partial shade or full sun. Plain or curled parsley and cut-leaf or crinkled lettuce such as Oak Leaf can be used for borders. Ruby lettuce can add color as a foliage or border plant. Swiss chard (green or red) can be grown as an edging plant, and will provide greens over an extended period. Kale can be used as a fern-type foliage that provides a splash of color as the temperatures turn cool in autumn. Flowering or Scotch Curled are kale varieties that may also serve this purpose. Asparagus may be used as a fern-type foliage in small-scale soil-bed areas. Chives or mint grow fairly well in partially shaded areas.

Cucumbers or summer squash can be planted near retaining walls and allowed to hang over them. The increased temperature generated by a concrete wall may increase the growth of these species.

Green or red Swiss chard, green or red leaf lettuce, green or red cabbage, peppers, green beans, purple fruited eggplant, chives, green (bunching) onions, and radish are all well suited for raised beds or containers.

Corn in a sunny spot will produce a background of foliage. In addition, fresh corn-on-the-cob or ornamental corn may be harvested.