No Place for a Bed

Make one in a container or use hanging baskets and planting pouches which take up no ground space at all. Containers can be almost anything that will hold soil. ALL MUST HAVE DRAINAGE HOLES!

Purchased new, they can match your architecture and style. More economical, sustainable and just as productive are reused containers like nursery pots, food service buckets and drums cut in half. An old yard waste tub or kiddie pool that has sprung a leak is perfect.

Or dispense with the pot and grow right in a bag of potting soil. These “grow bags” can be used anywhere there is enough light for the plants – on patios, sidewalks, driveways or directly on the ground. Poke drainage holes in the bottom and cut slits or a square on the top to grow tomatoes, peppers, broccoli, beans, beets, lettuce, spinach and radishes. Put one in a leaky old kid’s wagon and you have “meals on wheels.”

Soil from the garden or bagged topsoil alone will not work in containers. Purchase a potting mix made of compost or peat moss with either perlite or vermiculite for drainage. You can mix your own using compost or topsoil and vermiculite or perlite. One “recipe” includes 2/3’s compost and 1/3 vermiculite or perlite. Another has 1/3 each of compost, topsoil and either vermiculite or perlite. Some mixes contain slow release fertilizer and/or moisture holding granules. These are certainly convenient but they definitely add to the cost.

Make the Most of Small Beds

Use intensive planting methods. Succession planting calls for an early, fast-growing, cool-season crop such as radishes or lettuce replaced later with a slower-growing crop like beans or cucumbers.

Interplanting uses the space around slow growing crops like tomatoes and broccoli for spinach or green onions which will be harvested by the time the main crop needs the space.

Wide rows of 18 – 24” instead of single rows save the space between the rows. Late plantings of many cool-season vegetables such as lettuce, spinach, green onions, carrots, beets, and radishes can be started in mid- to late summer for harvest in the fall when temperatures are cool again.

Square foot gardening is the ultimate in space saving planting. In each square foot of the garden, crops are spaced so that they fill-in and cover the soil keeping it cooler, moister and helping to choke out weeds. Plant 16 radishes or carrots per sq. ft. or 9 bush beans or spinach or 4 lettuce or chard. Tomatoes, peppers, and broccoli require a sq. foot each while squashes need 3’ by 3’.

Grow up!

Plants trained to supports make room for other crops on the ground.

- Sticks, poles, and reused lumber can make trellises and arbors, towers or teepees.
- Three sticks held at the top using an up-side down flowerpot painted to be pretty and practical for growing peas early then pole beans or cucumbers later.
- Create a framework of string, chicken wire or netting for better coverage of the structure.

Fertilizing and watering are required more frequently for containers than for in-ground beds.

- Water should always run through when watering.
- Don’t let pots stand in water to be soaked back up.
- Fertilize at quarter strength once a week to replace the nitrogen that is carried away with each watering.
Growing your own is economical

Save on groceries while still having fresh, healthy produce. With proper pest management methods using few if any pesticides your veggies will also be organic. Studies show that people who grow at least some of their own produce are 3 – 4 times more likely to have 5 servings of vegetables a day.

Reused containers are often free as are the sticks and poles and scrap lumber used for vertical supports. Reused pots should be washed thoroughly before each use.

Starting your own seeds indoors 4 – 6 weeks early can be cheaper, too, plus you get a bigger selection of varieties to choose from.

Use yogurt containers and fast food or deli trays for seedlings. Grow more than you need so you can share it with others or sell it for a little extra cash.

For More Information

UW Extension Publications:
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Container Gardening - A3382
Growing Strawberries in Wisconsin - A1597
Growing Vegetables at Home - A2801
Handbook for WI Gardeners - A3585
Specialized Gardening Techniques - A3384
Intensive Planting Methods - A3384

Other Resources:
Square Foot Gardening by Mel Bartholomew
UW-Extension Horticulture Team - wihort.uwex.edu
InfoSource - infosource.uwex.edu
Horticulture Help Lines
Milwaukee 414-256-4664
Waukesha 262-548-7779

Become a Master Gardener Volunteer

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