

Great Gardens in Small Spaces

Washington County Master Gardener™ Association



Small Space Gardening

Even a small yard can become a garden. Planting the right plant with a creative design will make growing ornamentals and vegetables possible.

Right Plant – choose plants wisely to fit the space.

- Look for plants labeled
 - ◇ Dwarf varieties (that grow 1” to 6” per year)
 - ◇ Miniature varieties (that grow less than 1” per year)
 - ◇ Container-specific varieties
- Choose upright plants versus spreaders such as pole beans vs bush beans and bear’s breeches vs azalea.
- Plants labeled dwarf or semi-dwarf may still become large over many years.



Right Place – small gardens shine with thoughtful use of space.

- Vertical Planting- use structures to grow vertical in less space to create layers
 - ◇ Place a *trellis* in the back of a border to grow climbing plants such as clematis, Star Jasmine, or a variety of indeterminate tomatoes
 - ◇ Put a support such as *bamboo sticks* in a container to grow climbing annuals like Black-eyed Susan vine or Petunia or runner beans
 - ◇ Use a *fence* to support a climbing rose over or berry canes
 - ◇ Hang a *basket* of flowers or cherry tomatoes from a fence, pole, or plant a window box with herbs, flowers
 - ◇ Use an *old ladder or steps* to place containers of herbs, ornamentals or vegetables
 - ◇ Hook a *shoe organizer* to a fence or house wall and plant each pocket with an herb, lettuce, or cascading flowers
- Small area vegetable gardening – get more plants than in conventional gardening
 - ◇ Divide up a garden area into small square sections, typically 1-foot squares, and amend the soil if needed for intensive vegetable gardening.
 - ◇ Square Foot Gardening
 - * Put in a small raised bed, e.g., 2’x4’ or typically 4’x4’ and 6”-12” deep, divided into 1-foot squares
 - * Use potting mix or any soil mix that has good nutrient and water holding capacity
 - * Plant each square with a different type of vegetable such as lettuce, onion, and garlic
- Succession gardening increases the number of vegetables grown per foot.
 - ◇ Plant early crops like peas first and when they finish plant later season plants such as kale in the same square.



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- ◇ Plant short-lived plants in succession (lettuce, radishes, cilantro)

Style and Design Considerations - Ornamentals and Vegetable grown together can create beauty in a small space. A small garden is like a room. Fill it with plants that make you happy and feel serene.

- Tuck vegetables in an open area between ornamentals. The purple tinged leaves and fruit of eggplant can add a splash of color next to the green of shrubs.
- Color- limit color selection of ornamentals to 3 or 4 for a unified look
- Texture and Form-use interesting foliage such as variegated, lacy, small or large leaves and varied plant shapes like tall and thin and round and low for visual appeal
- Quantity - plant in groups of 3 and 5 and limit variety

Right Help – Even with the right place, the right plant, and the right care, gardening questions arise from time to time. The following resources provide reliable information:

- Master Gardeners™ <https://bit.ly/MetroMG>
- *Plant, Don't Plunk! – Landscape Design 101* <https://bit.ly/gardensdesign>
- Growing Edibles. Clackamas County Master Gardeners™ gardening handouts <https://bit.ly/CCMG10Minute>
- Square Foot Gardening <https://bit.ly/SquareFootGarden>
- “Raised Bed Gardening” OSU Extension Service <https://bit.ly/OSURaisedBed>