



Garden Scene Changes

Say the word “garden” and what scene springs to mind? Is it long, straight rows of well-tended vegetables on smooth, level land? Out with the old movie! This new release begins with the picture of a half-whiskey barrel holding two tomato plants, and a mixture of lettuce, radishes, marigolds and larkspur. Nearby is another barrel with chili peppers, cilantro, and nasturtiums. To place this picture in your landscape, find the barrels and install them under a tree with light shade. Mesquite and Acacia are good choices. Fill the barrels with a good potting soil, such as *Black Gold* or *Sunshine*, and place a comfortable bench between them. Now plant the favorite vegetables. Hang potted rose scented geraniums in the tree limbs. Under another tree nearby, situate a small birdbath. to attract insect eaters. How quickly a new picture is created! What a great place to relax, too.

PLANNING

Thinking of this kind of scenery change, walk around your yard space. Imagine pots filled with greens, boxes overflowing with color, large barrels bursting with vegetables, and small irregular plots of earth that produces crops. When buying seeds, check the packet for the words, short season, bush, dwarf, and miniature. These are crops that will grow quickly in small spaces. If flowers can grow in confined spaces such as containers, so can vegetables. Of course, some vegetables have longer roots than most annual flowers. But get a few facts before planting anything. For information about plants that grow and fruit in your area, join a gardening group, visit the Cooperative Extension office for free information, stroll around a garden center, or take a trip to the library for books on plants in your geographic location. Do remember that each neighborhood has a microclimate of it's own. So take a walk around and make a note of what kinds of plantings are thriving in other yards.

WHAT TO PLANT

For a close-up of the new movie, imagine vines such as cucumbers, beans and peas growing on a trellis especially constructed for the vines; or use an existing fence for winter vegetables; or install a 4' x 8' piece of decorative landscaping lattice between patio posts. Visualize marigolds, lettuce and parsley growing under the vines. A window box set on a wall will show off lacy leafed garbonzo beans growing above nasturtiums, and English peas that trail downward. A beautiful winter addition to the garden, as well as being useful. A 14-inch pot will successfully hold one determinate tomato, or one sweet pepper plant, or two chili plants, with a light sprinkling of lettuce, marigolds and alyssum. Borage planted in a pot and set beside the tomatoes will encourage bees and repel the hornworm. Separate the corn patch from the tomatoes, as the tomato worm and corn earworm are similar pests.

SHELTER TOMATOES

Tomatoes will fruit when temperatures are over 55 and less than 95 degrees. They will need shade after noon on hot summer days. In early spring in a sheltered area, place transplants in barrels or boxes. To protect the seedlings from frost, fill plastic jugs with water, which will draw heat during the day and release it at night. Set the jugs in and around the seedlings. As nighttime temperature rise, remove the jugs. Install stakes around the outside edge of the structure where tomatoes live. Attach vinyl-covered wire to the stakes to support the vines in summer. As stems die, trim them and add to the compost. Prune the plant in the fall and wrap 4-mil plastic around the wire. Leave a space where the wire can be folded back to pick fruit. As the nights grow colder, place chicken wire over the top to protect the vines, and then cover the wire with blankets. Top with a sheet of plastic. If the days get warm, above 55 degrees, remove the plastic. Pick ripe tomatoes to be the star of the holiday season!

OTHER VEGETABLES

If there is room on the property, plant 4 or 6 rows of corn in front of a row of sunflowers. With the corn, plant

squash and beans to climb the stalks. Viola! A practical hedge. A child's wading pool with solid sides is an excellent container for corn. Add seeds of baby pumpkins and bush beans to compliment the corn. Another idea is to construct, or buy, a long narrow box twenty inches high. Place the box on cement blocks and fill it with planting soil. Except for root crops, most vegetables will grow in 12-18 inches of soil.

Eggplant, okra and peppers like the summer heat. Plant the okra in the back, then eggplant transplants, add the peppers, making use of the okra shade. Use either sweet or hot peppers, but keep the two separated by at least 25 feet, or the sweet peppers will be hot! Another set of vegetables in the box would be cucumbers on a trellis, determinate, or bushy, tomatoes in front. Place marigolds and sweet alyssum around the edge to attract pollinators. Slip in a few bulbs of garlic, here and there.

Winter crops of beets, carrots, turnips, parsnips, and potatoes need the depth of tall containers for roots to form. Read the seed packet to determine how deep the box, or bed, must be to accommodate the root system. Be sure to use 1 foot or more of compost on top of 2 inches of manure to encourage the roots to grow.

Several feet from a south wall, arrange large stones, or cement blocks, to form a winter garden bed. The bed should be only as wide as the arm can reach. Plant cauliflower and/or broccoli seedlings, and seeds of chard, fava beans, and lettuce. Petunias provide nectar for predator insects. Nasturtiums cascading over the stones will encourage friendly birds and insects.

COMPANION PLANTS

Control some insect pests with the strong scents of herbs and flowers. Companion planting books can be found in the library. For instance, in the rose bed, plant onions, garlic, or chives, and larkspur to add texture as well help repel aphids. Drop a few lettuce seeds in the hole where a green onion has been pulled.

Coriander, small scented geraniums, and parsley are good insect deterrents. Harvest the herbs for winter use or use fresh in summer salads. Fennel will grow in corners and out of the way places where weeds collect. Keep fennel away from tomatoes and peppers. Rabbits dislike the smell of fennel.

Mints love to have damp roots in a shady spot, so plant them in a cool corner by the water outlet. Sow flax seed with carrot seeds. Not only is this a pretty picture but a deterrent to the Colorado potato beetle. Basil of any kind planted in pots sitting by the door will deter flies, plus making it easy to snip off pieces.

ESSENTIALS

Consider three essential factors: water, sun, and compost. Correctly watering small plots and containers is necessary for crops to mature. Hand watering wastes time and water, and encourages shallow roots.

When roots do not grow deep into the soil, heat dries the roots and the plant dies. Well-timed deep watering will insure a healthy harvest. Be sure to check the plants frequently as small plots dry out quickly in hot, dry, windy weather conditions. Sun in the Southwest can be a problem. There is not enough, or too much. Provide afternoon shade. During the hot summer, morning sun up to 11:00 a.m. is beneficial for crops. Keep a yearly chart of the movements of the sun to determine what crop to plant where and when. Light walls reflect sun and burn the plants in summer. Reflected sun keeps plants warm in winter.

USING COMPOST

Compost keeps the soil soft to hold moisture. It adds nutrients and allows natural ingredients in the native soil to be used effectively by the plants. Use half native soil and half compost for vegetable beds. Earthworms will be attracted to make tunnels for deep watering and taking nutrients to the roots. Using compost in the beds allows the plants to be placed closer together, which discourages weeds and keeps the soil moist. The heavy leaf canopy prevents sunscald of the fruit. Interplanting is using different kinds of plants in the same plot, those that require similar moisture and amendments.

END OF STORY

Now say the word "garden" and watch the new movie. It has a different script, one where you are the director. You can add, delete or change whatever pleases you. Experimenting with various kinds and flavors of vegetables, herbs, and flowers will be an ordinary and usual event. Fresh produce all year ensures a smash hit with your family and friends. You might even deserve an Oscar!

*References: Desert Harvest, Jane Nyhuis; How to Grow More Vegetables, John Jeavors; Patio Gardening, Jack Kramer; 600 Garden Answers, editors of Organic Gardening magazine
Lois H Lockhart. Mav 95. revised Julv 2000*