

DIG THIS By Peg Tillery (for 6-18-03 What's Up and 6-21-03 Bremerton Patriot) ,
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Gardeners sometimes seem to run out of available space for more plant additions. (Or so their partner tells them.) That's when it's time to start filling up some containers. Summer is the perfect time to put together and grow great gardens in relatively small spaces. Local nurseries and garden supply stores have abundant offerings in both container and plant choices.

The cool thing about containers is they're portable and if you don't like the plantings this year, you can empty the contents into your compost pile and start over with new selections next year. Your yard might only have a small patch of sunny space but with a container you can pot up a batch of sun-loving beauty to satisfy your heart's desire for some heat seeking plants.

In selecting a container you're only limited by your imagination. Start haunting local garage sales too for vessels. If you can punch or drill a hole in it the container can hold plants. Try baskets too. They're great filled with soil and planted up. If the containers you find don't have holes, try planting up a small water garden or plants that like swampy conditions. Roadhouse Nursery, Savage Plants, Valley Nursery and Clear Creek Nursery are just a few of the local sources for water gardening plants and supplies.

If you've always wanted to start a vegetable garden but aren't sure where you'd put it containers work wonderfully for many vegetables. One woman I know plants vegetables in a wheelbarrow each year and rolls it around her yard to take full advantage of the sunlight.

When choosing a container decide whether you'll want to move it around. Also make sure it has drainage holes. Lift the container to feel its weight. This will determine whether it will be stationery or mobile. At the same time purchase potting soil. (Compost and regular soil from your garden is too heavy for planting in containers.) You might also want to pick up some polymer beads to mix in with the soil. These beads become saturated with water and help keep the soil and plants from drying up too quickly.

You might even find an extra tall or large container. Fill the bottom of the container (about half way up with either plastic water, milk or pop bottles; or with Styrofoam packing peanuts); then fill the remaining portion with potting soil. This saves you from having to use too much potting soil and also helps make the container easier to move around.

Vegetables grow great in containers. Try beans, cucumber, eggplant, peppers, squash, spinach, tomatoes, tomatillo, swiss chard, lettuce and other salad greens, onions, shallots, small carrots, radish, and any vegetable you can think of that could live happily in a pot. Herbs grow very well in a pot. Basil is great in a container. Some of the more tender lavenders are perfect in a large pot later moved to shelter during the colder winter

months. Usually invasive mint and horseradish become well-behaved in containers. There are several small rosemaries for container growing.

Bulbs you might want to try now are: Acidanthera, Crocosmia, Alstroemeria (Peruvian lily), Canna, Clivia, Caladium, Schizostylis coccinea and many lilies. Don't forget to plant up some hostas in containers. Grasses come in every shape, hue and size adding texture and interest. One single clumping grass filling up and spilling over the edges of a container makes a striking statement.

Remember, too, it's perfectly fine to take your container with you to the garden store (just make sure you have proof you purchased it before going to the store). You can then find cool plants and place them in the container together to get an idea how they'll look at home planted up. Think of how you'll place the pot. Try placing a square or rectangular container on an angle. Make sure you have tall, medium sized and low-growing plants combined together. Experiment with several colors in a grouping. Try chartreuse, crimson and dark green foliage. Look for ranges of texture. Give yourself permission to stroke and fondle the plants when making your selections. Smelling the plants is encouraged too.

You might want to surf the Internet a bit for inspiration making sure the information applies to our Pacific Northwest. Our zone is 7 or 8 depending on who developed the zone map. Our local libraries have a plethora of gardening books with ideas for container gardening.

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