

## Gardening Techniques for Minimal Gardening Spaces (2025-04-12)

By Susie Morrison, Master Gardener

When the urge to garden, whether for flowers or edibles, strikes you, but you have minimal space to garden, there are several special gardening techniques you can incorporate into the space you have. So, if you live in an apartment or condo with only balcony space or have a small backyard space, read on to see which of these techniques might work for you. Remember to use a sunny space getting at least six hours of sunlight each day (for vegetables and fruits), quality soil, and adequate watering and fertilizer as needed.

### Raised Bed Gardening

If you have a small yard, perhaps raised bed gardens will work for you. These raised beds can be created from many different mediums. One common method is using boards and building boxes that will fit your space at least 12” deep and preferably 18” inches or more. It’s better not to build the boxes wider than you can reach, because you don’t want to have to step into your garden to tend to it. When using wood for building framed raised beds, be sure to use ground contact treated wood. These have been pressure treated with copper-containing compounds which significantly lengthen the time before the wood begins to rot. Before 2000 they were usually treated with arsenic which is definitely harmful to plants and humans. That is no longer done. If you check out the research done at the University of Oregon you will learn that treatment with copper is not a problem.

<https://extension.oregonstate.edu/gardening/soil-compost/pressure-treated-wood-raised-bed-construction-willamette-valley>

Another possibility is to use concrete cinder blocks to build a garden box. This an inexpensive and durable way to accomplish building raised garden beds. Garden boxes are sold as galvanized tubs with no bottom and can be found at any local garden supply. Kits to build garden boxes are also available at garden centers and online.

### Container Gardening or Bucket Gardening

You may have a smaller space like an enclosed space, balcony or porch. In this case container gardening in large pots or even 3–5-gallon buckets may be a good solution. Make sure the container is clean, free from chemicals and has drainage holes in the bottom. Choose a quality soil that will support your plants with good drainage and nutrients for your plants. If you want to grow vegetables, there are varieties of plants that are compact and need less space for rooting. You can ask at local nurseries for these varieties or shop online at different plant and seed catalogs.

### Vertical Gardening

There are a few plants that can grow well even in a smaller space with good soil, frequent watering and fertilizing. One such plant is strawberries that can be grown in multilayered pots or even in wall containers with pockets or mounts for small pots. A tiered planter box can provide space for a nice herb garden. Hanging baskets is another way to grow flowers or even strawberries. Another idea is to use a house gutter with hole drilled for drainage and closed at the ends. This gutter can be mounted on a fence or wall. Trellises can be utilized for plants that vine. The idea is to increase your space by gardening up.

## Square Foot Gardening

Square foot gardening is a technique that is designed to grow many vegetables in a small space. It is a good consideration for raised beds and large pots. This technique utilizes space by choosing plants that can grow together and even complement their growing process. A traditional example used originally by Native Americans is “three sisters” where corn, beans and squash are planted together. The corn provides a pole for the beans to climb, and the squash grows at a lower level and serves to shade the area and maintain soil moisture.

## Indoor Gardening

Even if you don’t have a balcony, patio or small yard space, you can garden indoors with sunny windows. Besides houseplants, herbs will grow well on a windowsill if given good soil, adequate watering, correct fertilization, and a little loving care. Fresh herbs from your window garden are a delightful addition to your home.

So, don’t let small spaces keep you from enjoying the gardening experience. No excuses!

## **Resources**

“Raised-bed Gardening,”

<https://extension.missouri.edu/publications/g6985>

“Growing Vegetables in Containers,”

<https://extension.illinois.edu/container-gardens/growing-vegetables-containers>

“Fabric Container Gardening: Growing Plants in a Pouch,”

<https://theplantbible.net/fabric-container-gardening/>

“Vertical Gardening Using Trellises, Stakes, and Cages,”

[https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/pubs\\_ext\\_vt\\_edu/en/HORT/HORT-189/HORT-189.html](https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/pubs_ext_vt_edu/en/HORT/HORT-189/HORT-189.html)

“Square Foot Gardening,”

<https://taylor.extension.wisc.edu/files/2010/05/SquareFootGardeningNew2009.pdf>

“Enjoy Delicious, Fresh Food All Year When You Grow Your Garden Indoors!” <https://ngb.org/indoor-garden-tips/>

For more information about gardening, visit UTHORT’s YouTube site for helpful videos:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjS3d1IkIH1OZ1Z2qPvhgfQ>

Or Washington County’s YouTube site: <https://www.youtube.com/@utextensionwashingtoncounty>

## **How do I ask a question?**

If you have a question for the Master Gardeners, submit them to us on our website at [www.netmga.net](http://www.netmga.net). Click the link at the top of the page, “ASK A MASTER GARDENER” to send in your question. Questions that are not answered in this column will receive a response from a Master Gardener to the contact information you provide.