



Container gardens can be noncommittal, easy

By Amanda Treher
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Building a garden seems like an intimidating project and a long-term commitment of nourishing and nurturing the soil. Being a college student, hopping from apartment to apartment, I assumed my plans for a bountiful and rewarding garden were in the distant future. I was wrong.

While living in Philadelphia, I noticed beautiful gardens tucked away on rooftops and tiny porch steps. Container gardens. These small bursts of color drastically boosted the aesthetic appeal of the corners they adorned. After moving to Dover, I tested out my luck with the less intimidating size and shorter-term commitment of the container garden.

It was an overwhelming success with more peppers, eggplant, and basil than I could give away or use myself. I learned a lot in my first summer as a gardener. With the growing season fast approaching, there couldn't be a better time to pass on my newfound knowledge.

First and foremost, you must have a full sun spot for most vegetables. Also, consider your access to water. Containers dry out much faster than in-ground gardens. Setting up a rainwater collection system nearby will alleviate some of the hassle of watering, if a hose is not accessible. But beware; precautions should be taken to control mosquitoes.

I followed some basic guidelines that I

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found online from various sources. Growing vegetables in pots presents one major problem, providing enough room for the roots. It is best to use pots that are 12 inches or more in diameter.

Depending on the vegetables you choose and the size of the pot, multiple plants can be grown in one container. Some dwarf varieties of vegetables are specially bred for pots. I grew a variety of hot peppers and smaller Italian sweet peppers, eggplant, herbs and even some traditional flowers all intermixed in my pots.

Before putting soil in the pots, gather large stones, seashells, broken pots, etc., to layer on the bottom for drainage. Place one layer of newspaper on top of this to keep the soil from falling out of the drainage holes in the bottom of the pot. Any type of potting soil can be used.

I added compost (donated by my parents) and mulch (available at some local farms or gardening centers) to increase moisture holding capacity of the soil and provide extra nutrients. Nutrients can be quickly leached out of pots with frequent watering, so I recommend slow release fertilizers. A major advantage with pots is that the soil and soil amendments can be controlled for specific plants.

Vegetable plants can be started indoors from seed or purchased locally at a green-



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Containers filled with a variety of peppers, eggplants, herbs and garden flowers were placed under full sun and beneath rain gutters to catch extra runoff from storms.

house. The annual Scholarship Plant Sale held by the Kent County Master Gardeners at Delaware State University April 25 from 8 a.m. to noon offers a variety of vegetables and other plants that are excellent for container gardening.

With the benefits of growing your own fresh picked vegetables, like control over chemical treatments, container gardens are an excellent place to begin your gardening experience. I am not sure where I will take container gardening in the future, but I know I will learn many lessons from my

noncommittal garden. So, there is no better way to "green" your life than by growing your own local vegetables.

Editor's note: On the campus of Delaware State University, the Claude E. Phillips Herbarium is Delaware's center for research, education, and outreach about plant identifications, locations and uses. Call (302) 857-6452 (Dr. Susan Yost) to arrange a tour of the herbarium, and e-mail amanda.treher@gmail.com (Amanda Treher, M.S. graduate student) for more information about this article.