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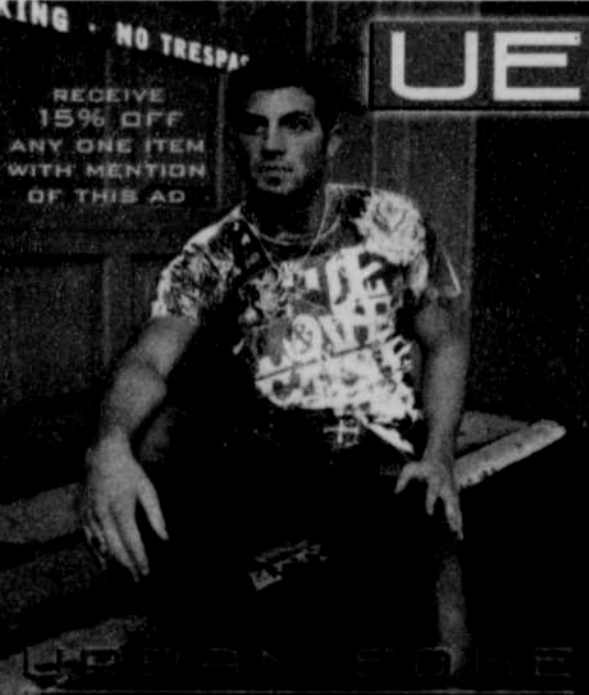


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Growing Your Dinner

Container gardening for fruits, vegetables and herbs

Don't be fooled into thinking you need a few acres to grow your own edibles. Fruit and vegetable gardening on decks, patios, terraces or balconies is possible, and some plants will even do better in these warmer environments. And with the whole "eat local" movement, when you grow your own edibles, you can measure your dinner's traveling distance in yards instead of miles. Growing edibles in containers means they are quicker to warm, and with roots sitting above ground, they will ripen earlier in the season. Why not make it fun and grow pots for a specific meal like tomatoes and basil for Caprese salad or peppers and tomatoes to make salsa? Or maybe a large pot full of lettuce and endive, ensuring you'll always have a fresh salad bowl more to your liking? Other veggies that grow well in containers are chard and eggplant. Ratatouille!

Tomatoes are a classic to grow in containers. You'll have the best success if you grow either the smaller varieties (often labeled patio tomatoes) or cherry tomatoes. A half whiskey barrel provides space they will need to stretch out and for a cage to support the branches as they become heavy with fruit.

And who says you have to grow tomatoes right side up? Local nurseries have been displaying hanging upside down tomato pots. It looks crazy, but the great thing is they don't require staking, and they benefit from good air circulation. In small spaces, this is a way to take advantage of every bit of growing space. A little Googling provides info on how to use buckets and step-by-step directions on how to make your own if you prefer to do it yourself.

Another plant for hanging baskets is the tasty strawberry. As the fruits develop they'll tempt you at eye level and brighten their shiny red berries, letting you know when they're ready to pick for your morning smoothie.

Columnar apples are excellent for small gardens or in pots. One of my favorite nurseries, One Green World in Molalla, offers columnar apples (along with many other wonderful trees like figs and pawpaws). Try Scarlet Sentinel, a compact apple variety that will produce 50 or more fruit after a few years of growth.

Herbs are a great way to grow something functional and beautiful. One large pot with fennel or dill, sage, thyme, lemon thyme, basil and flat leaf Italian parsley makes for a lovely combination of height, texture and scent. Mint is best grown in a pot because of



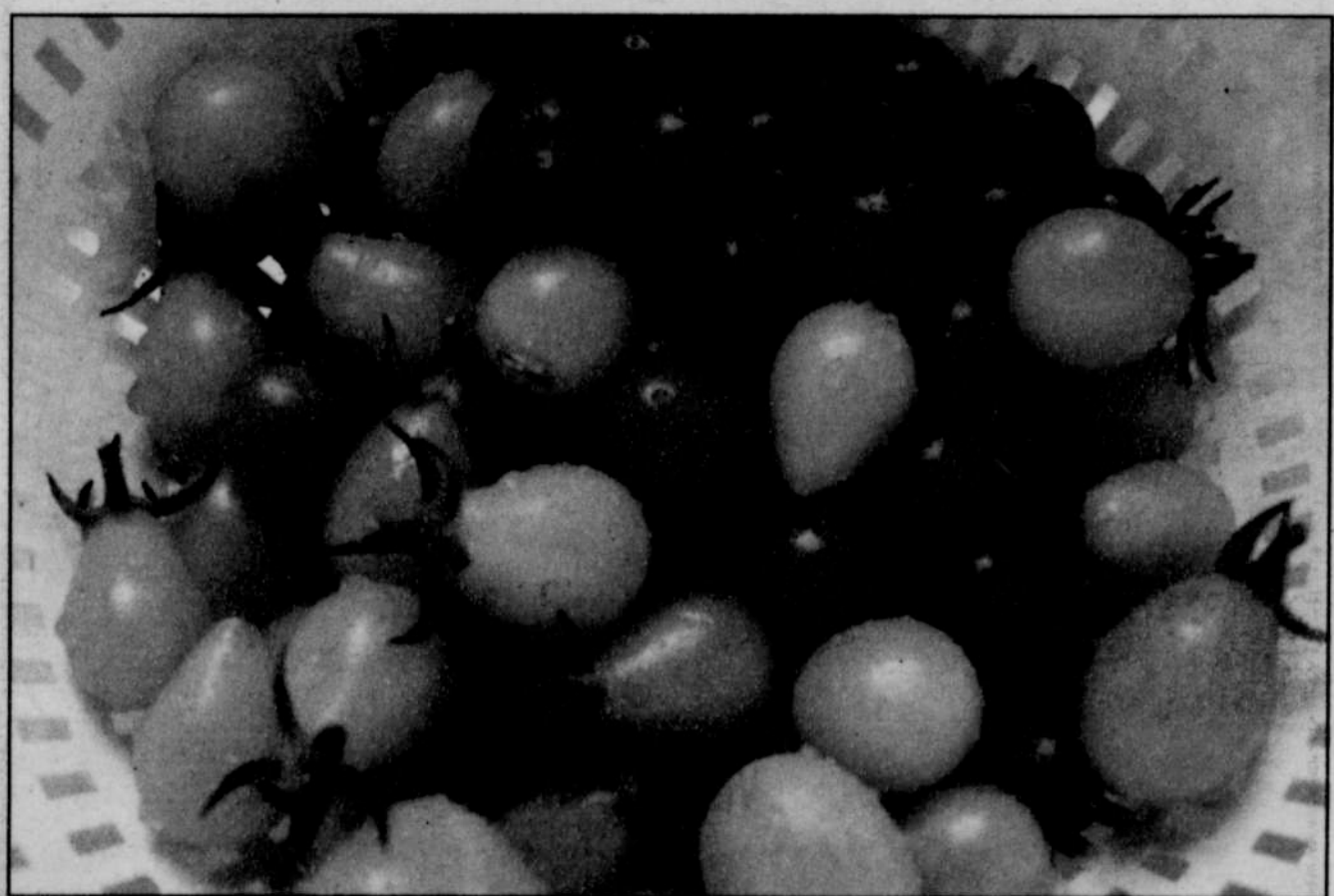
its aggressive root nature. I grew mint in a pot last summer and had an endless supply for fresh mojitos all summer long. Whatever you do, don't put that mint in the ground or you'll forever regret it. Trust me.

A few rules of thumb will ensure your edible containers are a success, and a visit to a local garden center will get you everything you need. Whitney Farms Uncle Malcolm's Life Link Potting Soil is a great combination of soil and natural fertilizer ingredients, including kelp meal and bat guano! It also has pumice and perlite to help ensure good drainage. When it comes to fertilizing your edibles, stay away from chemicals. Remember, you're going to eat this stuff! If you use the potting soil I mention above, you don't need to fertilize for the first month. After that, though, a diluted organic fertilizer should be applied every two to four weeks.

Things to watch out for: Don't let your containers dry out. Once soil in a pot dries up, it's less likely to retain moisture again. If you're growing lots of veggies in pots, it would be good to invest in a little drip irrigation to make sure they get regular water. If you're going on vacation periodically this summer, ask a neighbor to be in charge of keeping your containers watered, and offer to share some of your harvest.

Remember that flowers can be edible, too. Tuck in a few nasturtium seeds along the edges of a few of your pots, and you'll soon have peppery-tasting flowers to top your summer salads. 10

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Cherry tomatoes are a perfect fruit to grow in a container. There really isn't anything better than homegrown tomatoes!