



Miniature Kitchen Garden in Pots **Melissa King 10/02/10**

These days there are lots of compact growing fruit trees, vegetables and herbs that are tailor-made for pots and containers. So no matter how big or small your garden is, it's easy to grow and harvest your own food.

I think people are turning to growing their own food again because they want to recapture old-fashioned flavour. People are also questioning how store-bought produce has been grown, stored and transported. Harvesting your own garden-grown produce is a great way to gain control back over the food you are eating because you know what journey that plant has gone on from seed right through to plate.

Leafy Greens and Rainbow Silverbeet

Leafy-greens like lettuce and silver beet are some of the easiest crops to start with. They are fast growing and can easily be grown in pots and containers. Look for decorative varieties like gourmet loose leaf lettuces or silver beet with rainbow coloured stems, which are as attractive as any flower. You can easily nip out into the garden and harvest them leaf by leaf as you need them for fresh salads and stir fries and the plant just keeps on growing.

Silverbeet Tricolour has brilliantly coloured stalks in shades of pink, red, gold, white and Orange. There are other colourful Silverbeet varieties called 'Rainbow' and 'Five Colour'.

Lettuce 'Profusion' is a mix of red and green loose leaf lettuces

Herbs

Grow potted herbs in a sunny spot close to the house so you can make the most of freshly picked garden herbs in your home cooking. It sounds obvious, but try to grow herbs that you actually use. For example, if you cook a lot of Mediterranean style food then fill your pots with Oregano, Italian Parsley and Marjoram. Combine plants in pots that enjoy similar growing conditions e.g. sun lovers with sun lovers.

Mediterranean Herbs

Rosemary

Rosemary enjoys a sunny, well drained position. It clips easily and can be used to create a hedge around the herb or flower garden. It is also excellent in pots. In ancient Greece and Rome it had a reputation for strengthening memory. Sprigs of rosemary are worn in Australia on Remembrance Day. Try drinking Rosemary tea to ease a headache or migraine.

Thyme

Thyme enjoys a warm sunny spot in well drained soil. Harvest regularly to promote a compact, bushy growth habit. The oil in thyme leaves is strongly antiseptic. Drink thyme tea or chew fresh leaves to ease a sore throat.

Sweet Basil

Sweet Basil is an annual herb. It can be harvested 6-8 weeks from planting. Tip: prune young plants to promote strong bushy growth. Great partner in the kitchen to tomatoes. It is a key ingredient in pesto and a great addition to pasta dishes.

Marjoram

Marjoram isn't as commonly grown but its great on pizzas or in tomato dishes. For best results grow it in full sun with good drainage. Try growing Golden Marjoram to bring a bit of colour to your herb displays.

Oregano

Oregano enjoys full sun and well drained soils. The ancient Greeks plant Oregano and Marjoram on their loved ones graves to help them rest in peace.

Italian parsley

Italian Parsley has a stronger flavour than curly leaved parsley. It has flat dark green leaves and looks a little like coriander. It prefers a sunny or partly shaded position and can be grown year round. Simply harvest the outer leaves as you need them. It makes a lovely border to the herb or vegetable garden or grow it in containers.

Asian Herbs

Lemon Grass

Lemon grass is a tropical plant, so in cooler climates grow it in a warm sheltered position. Its normally the tender white part of the stems that are used in cooking, particularly Thai dishes. It hates wet feet and is damaged by frost in cooler areas.

Vietnamese Mint

The leaves have a hot, minty flavour so you only need to use it sparingly in Asian style salads or stir fries. It prefers a bit of shade and can be water thirsty, so its best planted in a pot on its own.

Coriander

Coriander is an annual herb. It has a tendency to bolt to seed quickly, so in hot areas its best planted where it gets some shade. You can use the leaves, stems and roots for flavouring salads, soups and hot dishes. Keeping the soil moisture fairly consistent will also help to reduce the chance of early bolting.

Chives

Chives have onion flavoured leaves that can be used to flavour salads, soups and hot dishes. Garlic chives are also frequently used in Asian cooking. Simply shear off the leaves as required. Plant seedlings in full sun and they will be ready to harvest in just 6 or so weeks.

Hot Tip: Why not add some Chillies to your Asian herb bowl

Chillies are packed with Vitamins A and C. They can help to improve circulation, as well as aid digestion. Some research suggests that Chillies can even speed up your metabolism! We planted Thai Chillies. In most situations you will be picking ripe chillies in 9 weeks. The fruit changes colour throughout the season, so it's a wonderfully decorative plant, but wait until the fruit is red before picking for the best flavour. Thai Chilli plants grow 30 cm tall and wide and prefer to be grown in full sun or part shade.

Care

Pots

I will be using Cottaseal pots which have the timeless look of terracotta, but they have been treated with a sealant to reduce water loss.

Soil

Choose a good quality potting mix. You will see the difference in growth and performance. Some bags have added goodies like fertiliser and water storing crystals. If your potting mix doesn't contain water storing crystals, then add some to the mix yourself.

Food

In pots feeding is really important, so give plants regular doses of fast acting liquid food. Apply a seaweed based plant tonic at planting time to reduce transplant shock and promote root growth.

Compact Fruiting Trees

Ballerina Apples

Tall and narrow, ideal screening plant or for large pots. Fruits around Feb-March. Can grow up to 3.5 metres tall but only 60 cm wide, pretty spring flowers.

Nectarzee

1.5 metres tall, displays full sized yellow fleshed nectarines, pretty spring blossom. Ideal for containers.

Pipsqueak

A miniature pear tree! Bears large, green skinned, full size fruit. Tree grows to approximately 1.5 x 1.5 metres.