

MAXIMIZING SPACE IN A SMALL GARDEN

Brought to you by Lori Adams – Down To Earth U-pick Garden located at 2103 SMC Road

- Make beds wide and pathways narrow. A raised bed is effective as long as it is no wider than 48 inches. Many people don't like beds this wide because they can't straddle them, but the effort it takes to walk around the row is worth it if you get more vegetables. My pathways are wider than I'd like because I need room for groups of people but for most gardens the pathways only need to be wide enough for a small wheelbarrow.
- Go vertical. Build trellises and chose varieties that take advantage of vertical space. For instance- indeterminate tomatoes can be grown in cages, zucchini and cucumber plants can be trained to grow up trellises, plants like strawberries can be grown in hanging pots and tall varieties of peas and beans will easily climb up fencing. Hill up potato plants for more spuds and leeks for longer blanched stalks.
- Choose varieties that give you the most bang for your buck. Many broccoli varieties continue to produce sprouts long after you have harvested the central head. I have harvested fresh broccoli from the garden for Thanksgiving dinner! Grow leaf lettuce instead of head lettuce for multiple harvests and edible podded peas (snap and snow peas) rather than shelling peas for more poundage. Choose hard neck rather than soft neck garlic so you can harvest the scapes for summer garlic flavor in stirfrys in addition to the bulbs you harvest in the fall. There are beet and radish varieties that are cylindrical rather than round and if you have deep sifted soil you can choose extra long carrot varieties. Also, choose both early and late varieties of each crop to assure a continuous supply.
- Use harvest methods that encourage more growth. Leaf lettuce will tolerate up to 3 harvests if you cut it 2-3 inches from the ground instead of harvesting the entire plant. Peas, cucumbers, beans, radish pods, berries and tomatoes all benefit from frequent pickings. Most will stop producing if you don't keep up with them. I have seen pea pods mature overnight! Pea pods must be picked EVERY DAY! If possible, celery, swiss chard and rhubarb should be harvested a few stalks at a time rather than all at once. The plants recover faster if they still have 2/3 of their foliage. Harvest only outer stalks and use a pulling, twisting motion rather than cutting the stalks. When cutting fennel bulbs leave a generous amount of root and it will sprout with multiple baby fennel plants. Rather than pulling up green onions, cut them off 2-3 inches above the soil line and they will continue to grow more greens all season. I believe you could do the same thing with leeks but I have never tried it. Harvest root crops from crowded areas first to encourage surrounding plants to bulk up.
- Pruning is important. Herbs plants that are shooting up and trying to go to seed should be pinched back to encourage branching out. The same holds true with spinach. Pruning off dead leaves and rotten vegetables or fruit keeps all plant healthier and producing longer. Pea plants can be topped once they have reached the desired height and they will branch out resulting in more peas. Don't forget that many pea tops are edible! Prune excess broccoli and cauliflower leaves because they take a lot of energy. Target leaves that are diseased, touching the ground, touching other plants or shading surrounding vegetables. Just don't remove more than 1/3 of the leaves on any one plant. Don't forget that broccoli and cauliflower leaves are edible! Raspberries can be successfully topped to prevent them from falling over or breaking. They will also branch out and you can end up with more berries. Each raspberry clump should have all dead stalks removed and have no more than 3-5 live stalks remaining. As brussels sprouts reach the size of marbles start breaking off leaves starting from the bottom to send more energy into the sprouts. Toward the end of the season pinch out the top of the plant for really large sprouts. Don't forget that brussels sprout tops and leaves are edible! Remove strawberry runners so more energy goes into the berries.
- Use floating row cover. Using a row cover such as "remay" or "agribond" can extend your season by as much as 3-4 months. It keeps the soil and crops about 10 degrees warmer than the outside temperature. Ideally you should keep your vegetables covered all year, but at the very least you should keep all brassica crops covered until July 15th to protect them from root maggot flies. Supports are not necessary but beneficial.
- Plant seeds at the recommended spacing. More does not always mean more. If plants are too crowded they will not produce as well as they should. Broccoli, cauliflower and cabbages that are planted too closely together produce small heads. Consider placing seeds rather than sprinkling them or purchase a seeder. The extra time that it takes to carefully place your seeds ensures that every square inch of a small garden is utilized.
- Plant in blocks rather than rows. A row of broccoli can leaf out over a row of beets next to it and shade it out. A block of broccoli planted on the north side of a block of beets will have no negative affects.
- Practice successive plantings. About 3-6 weeks (depending on the crop), after you plant crops like spinach, fennel, cilantro, kohlrabi, napa cabbage, lettuce or cauliflower you can start some more of them indoors. The second set will be ready to plant out about the time you harvest the 1st set. With some crops you can do this several times during the season. Don't forget to amend the soil between each successive planting.
- Consider pulling up some of your flowers. This last idea is not a very popular one! It is pleasant to have ornamentals in your yard, but consider scaling back, mixing vegetables in amongst your flowers or even replacing ornamentals with edibles that are pretty such as sunflowers, nasturtiums, flowering kale, chives, cabbage, herbs or rainbow swiss chard.