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URBAN FARMER'S STARTER GUIDE

Nothing compares to the joy of growing your own produce.

This book talks about urban gardening - the process of growing your own produce in limited space, ensuring a mind body connect and a sustainable and healthy living.

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Image Source: The NIE

Gardening

Creating something always brings joy and a sense of accomplishment. It can be a piece of art, a tasty dish or even a garden. A fruit/ vegetable garden, to be specific. To be free from ever-fluctuating vegetables and fruit prices to pesticide-ridden vegetables and herbs for small cooking requirements, there is only one solution, your own kitchen garden.

Contrary to popular belief, an exclusive urban garden to grow organic fruits/ vegetables that provides sufficiently for a family does not require a huge space, a lot of additional burden or a “green thumb”. All it takes to make a successful urban garden is some enthusiasm, some planning and a whole lot of you!

Find the right spots and resources

Any urban garden should have access to the following:

1. A good amount of sunlight. Fruiting plants like tomatoes require direct sunlight. Thus they can be placed on the western and southern sides. On the other hand, leafy greens like Spinach and herbs need indirect sunlight or shade. Hence, locate and plant accordingly.
2. Ample natural ventilation.



Image Source: Benedikt Geyser (Unsplash)

3. A good mix of soil, including, gravel, peat moss and coco peat, preferably in grow bags, for providing a nutritious environment and prevention from pests. Soil should be light and capable of holding moisture. Put organic kitchen waste – scraps of fruits and vegetable, eggshells, leaves and other natural products, to make compost and enhance the quality of your fertilizer.

4. A nearby water source like a sink. This will help water and maintain the plants easily and regularly.

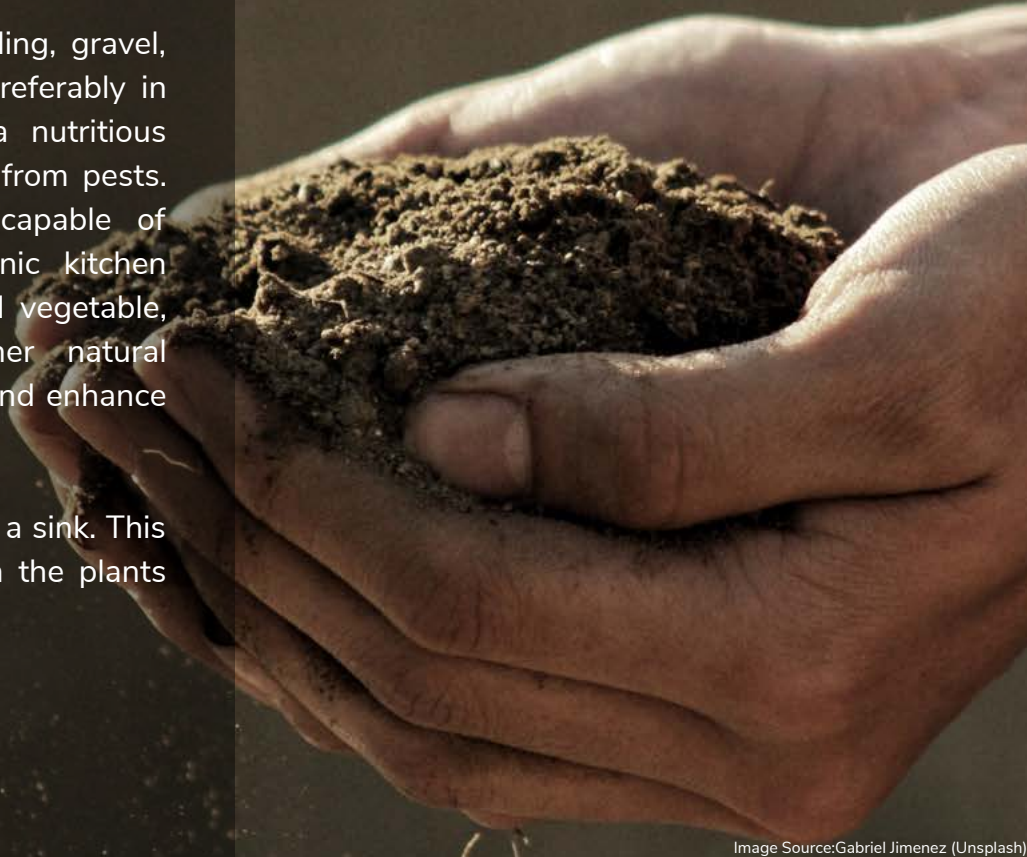


Image Source:Gabriel Jimenez (Unsplash)

Decide on what plants you want to grow

The first step in planning a vegetable garden is to decide what to plant in your garden. It is always best to start small and work your way up as you gain knowledge. Taking a look at what vegetables your family consumes is a good starting point. Essential herbs and short term vegetables (Take 1-1.5 months to harvest) like Mint, Coriander (Dhaniya), Fenugreek (Methi), Spinach and Radish are a good starting point from where you can gradually move to long term vegetables (Take 2-3 months to harvest), like Tomatoes, Eggplants, Capsicum, Chillies, Cabbages, Cauliflowers etc.



Image Source: Chandan Chaurasi(Unsplash))



Image Source: Vlad Kutepov(Unsplash)

Plan out your garden

Planning out your garden is an essential first step in the gardening process. If you've gardened before and kept track of how much you grow versus how much you eat, then planning out a garden is easy! But when it comes to planning out a garden, all of the determining factors are highly variable. That is the size of the garden or back yard, growing conditions, location of the garden and the choice of plants to grow. These factors differ from person to person.

Understand the size of your garden and decide on what and how much you can grow. If you only have a small back yard/ balcony, put up chain-link fences and use them as a trellis to grow creeper and climber plants like green peas and beans along with other root or stem vegetables like potatoes, beets etc. which require a good amount of floor space.



Image Source: Canva



Image Source: Chennai First

What and how much to grow?

The kind of vegetables you can grow depends on the region you reside in. For, Indian conditions, specifically for southern regions like Bangalore and Hyderabad, one can grow a variety of summer (Tomatoes, eggplants, spinach) and winter (Carrots, peas, radish, cabbage, beetroot and potatoes) plants, alternating throughout the year. There are various perennial plants as well, which grow throughout the year.

The number of vegetables that you grow also makes a big difference. One should plan based on their family's requirements (Likes, dislikes, consumption and storage) and amount of space available to avoid overcrowding your garden, leading to unnecessary or inadequate harvest.

Here is a list of vegetables and herbs that you can grow along with the number, planting space and requirement per person, to ease your planning process.

Name	Type	Season	Life span (days)	Harvest in (days)	Yield	Spacing	Depth (inches)	Plant per person
Mint	Herb	Perennial	180	40	50g/ 2 sq. m.	Stems 2' apart	1-2"	50gms
Fenugreek (Methi)	Herb	Feb-May	25	20	50g/ 0.5 sq. m.	4" apart in 8-18" rows	0.25	50gms
Coriander (Dhaniya)	Herb	Mar-Sept	40	30	500g/ sq. m.	8" apart in 8" rows	0.25	100gms
Tomato	Potted	Jun- Sept Nov- Dec	95	67	10-100 nos./ plant	40" apart in 30" rows	0.25	2-3
Eggplant (Baingan)	Potted	Jan, Feb Aug- Dec	125	67	10-15 nos. /plant	25" apart in 3' rows	0.25	2-3
Spinach (Palak)	Leafy green	Jan-Apr Jul- Oct	80	40	1-2 plants /10' row	6" apart in 1' rows	0.5	30-50
Capsicum and chilli	Potted	Oct- Dec	120	80	2-8 kg/10' row	1' apart in 2' rows	0.25	3-5
Carrot (Gajar)	Root	Oct- Dec	110	90	25-35 nos./ 10' row	1-2" apart in 12" rows	0.25	30-40
Radish (Shalgam)	Root	Oct- Dec	45	40	5-10 nos./ 10' row	1" apart in 6" rows	0.5	20
Beetroot	Root	Oct- Nov	90	70	6-8 nos./ 10' row	3" apart	1	15- 20
French Beans	Climber	Jul- Oct	90	60	2-3 kg/ 10' row	3-6" apart in 25" rows	1-1.5	10-15
Peas (Matar)	Climber	Nov- Feb	1 yr.	75	10-15 pods per plant	2-4" apart in 2' rows	1	20-30
Potatoes	Stem	Oct- Nov	180	75	5-10 nos. /plant	10-14" apart in 2' trenches	4	10
Cabbage (Pattagobi)	Leafy green	Sept- Dec	120	65	4-5 heads/ 10' row	24-30" apart	0.25	4-6
Cauliflower (Phoolgobi)	Leafy green	Sept- Dec	120	65	4-5 heads/ 10' row	20" apart in 3' rows	0.5	2-3
Ladyfinger (Bhindi)	Potted	Mar-July	100	50	6-7 pods per plant	2-3' apart in 2' rows	0.5	6

Reference: Agriculturist- Lakshmi Battula

Maintaining your garden

Once you are done setting up your garden, the process doesn't end there. You need to give your plants as much love as you can and maintain them regularly, and you will see them grow and give back the love to you. There are various methods in which you can keep your garden happy and thriving.

Thinning is a way of ensuring the survival of the fittest for the plant, preventing dense growth and maximising the growth/yield. Particularly in the case of plants like carrots, the vegetable would not have space to grow and would become unhealthy. While thinning you need to take care to water the plant first to soften and loosen the soil around it. Then choose the healthiest plants that you want to transplant.

Find friends for the plants you are growing. Friends that help each other grow or companion plants. Growing such plant combinations also reduces and often eliminates the need for using chemicals for pest control. Companion planting also has a positive effect on the health and yield of your plants. For instance, carrot likes to grow with beans, radish, tomato and pea. While cauliflower doesn't always grow too well with peas and tomato.

Place various sized pots hanging from your roof for growing herbs. Be careful about placing root and stem plants on your roof as they might damage the roof. Use all the organic waste generated in your house, like peels and leftover food as organic compost.

Continuously examine your plants for weeds or moulds and pick them out. Use natural pesticides- a solution of 10 ml neem oil in 1 L water and 5 ml dish soap instead of chemical pesticides. Spray once a week on all sides to keep pests and worms away. You can also sprinkle turmeric or cinnamon on your plants or cover the soil with some loose red soil.



Image Source: Gardener's World

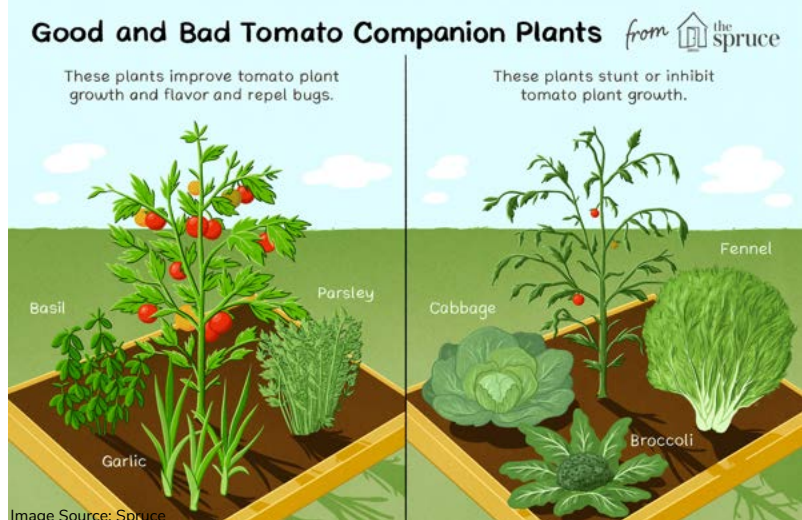



Image Source: Spruce



Image Source: Dr.Axe

Reference:

www.thebetterindia.com, www.livelovefruits.com, www.bengaluru.citizenmatters.in, www.allthatgrows.in, www.ugao.com, www.greenmylife.in, www.gardengatemagazine.com, www.harvesttotable.com, www.geekgardener.in

A close-up photograph of a person's hand reaching upwards, with fingers slightly spread, towards a dense canopy of green leaves. The lighting is bright and natural, creating a warm, golden-green hue. The hand is positioned on the right side of the frame, with the palm facing towards the viewer. The background is a soft-focus blur of green foliage, emphasizing the hand and the connection to nature.

The self-sustainable living

With organic living slowly becoming a chosen way of life for many a lot of people, home gardening and farming is becoming not just popular but also a preferred practise in many homes. These home farms don't just provide pesticide-free produce but also promote a zero waste life, wherein bio degradable waste produced at home, goes into making natural compost for these farms.

Small lifestyle changes like these are a big step towards living a life close to nature. Growing your own food is a continuous cycle of sustainable living where you grow, eat, use the waste as compost and the process continues. The above article will be a great starter for your quest into this gardening world, which will gradually lead you a step closer to self-sustainable living. And now that you are ready to grow your own food, gather your supplies, put on your gardening gloves, get your hands dirty, and create the perfect terrace garden for yourself. Happy gardening!



Venkatlakshmi is an architect, who graduated from NIT Trichy in the year 2020. She plans to pursue a career in the field of design. Loves travelling and exploring new horizons, is extremely curious and has an eye for detail. Being an avid reader and writer, she has been involved in various projects at school and college level. Watching her thoughts take form on paper and resonate with the readers gives her a sense of happiness. Participates actively in oration, singing and theatre.

Organo Et School

Organo Et School is the brainchild of team Organo. Organo was founded on the idea of environmentally conscious living and Organo Et School translates that idea into reality by educating and empowering schools, colleges, organizations and communities on the triple bottom line of sustainability. Organo et School aims at engaging individuals of today to stay connected with nature through workshops, live sessions and site visits.



Leading the change

We create an experiential learning environment for people to learn from.

Organo Et School educates people about the challenges of sustainable development and creates opportunities for them to use their creativity and knowledge to pioneer innovative solutions for themselves.

Learners develop a sense of place and belonging to their local community.

**NURTURING A LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FOR ALL
STAKEHOLDERS WHERE INCLUSIVE HOLISTIC ECO-LIVING IS
CELEBRATED**

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