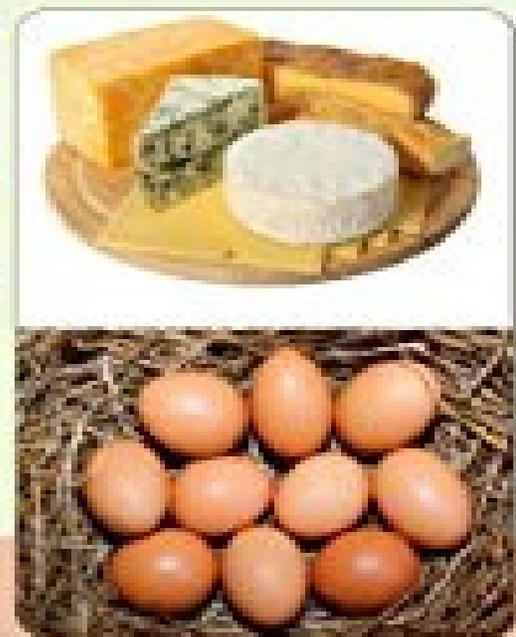




# URBAN HOMESTEADING

A Beginner's Guide to Self-Sufficiency  
& Sustainable Living in Urban Homes

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# Urban Homesteading:

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*A beginner's guide to self-sufficiency & sustainable living in urban homes*

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## Disclaimer

This eBook, '**Urban Homesteading: A beginner's guide to self-sufficiency & sustainable living in urban homes,**' is written with an intention of helping you understand and appreciate the concepts of Homesteading. The information provided in this book is meant to be taken as a broad guideline to Homesteading. While the author has taken utmost care to make sure that the information provided in this book are accurate, readers are advised to take precautions before following the information provided herein.

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# Introduction to Homesteading

## ***Understanding Homesteading***

Have you ever secretly wanted to slow down your life's pace and take things a little easy? In this fast-paced technology driven world, the idea of living life at a slow and relaxing pace has started to gain popularity and acceptance. Rising inflation, overdependence on technology, shortage of resources, pesticides ridden fruits and vegetables, and not-a-moment-to-catch-my-breath lifestyle have pushed a number of people into looking at homesteading as a viable lifestyle. Although homesteading is certainly not a new concept, the ideas and concepts of urban homesteading has started to gain traction with both the young and the urban population.

Homesteading way of life was very common in the past and people have been consistently growing fruits and vegetables in their backyard from times immemorial. Moreover, the concept of raising chicken in the backyard pen is not uncommon either. While the idea of homesteading and self-sufficiency might not be new, the ways in which homesteading is practiced has certainly undergone a drastic change. In the past, homesteaders spent years undertaking backbreaking tasks of plowing, tilling and harvesting farms carved out of complete wilderness. They stayed away from modern day amenities and tools. Although, present day homesteaders too undertake physically exhaustive tasks, they are, nevertheless, not as grueling as the olden-day tasks. But, let this not fool you as homesteading – present or past – is taxing if you do not have the right aptitude to live your life without a number of so-called 'basic' amenities that we take for granted.

A large number of people are attracted towards homesteading because it helps keep unhealthy and harmful chemicals out of the food chain. Turning to gardening is the only way to ensure that each and every one of us has access to wholesome and less-contaminated food. Moreover, people have gone further and have ensured that chemicals do not find their way into their personal lives as well. With every action they take, homesteaders make sure that they do not harm themselves, their co-beings, the Earth and the future generations. Call it what you may – green movement, eco conscious or going green – the basic idea that defines homesteading is self-sufficiency and environmental responsibility. Homesteading, as difficult and backbreaking it might seem initially, is the first step towards a happier, healthier and satisfying lifestyle.

Urban homesteading is not a new concept or an idea; in fact, homesteading is as old as the mountains. Before people started buying bread and eggs from stores, everyone raised poultry in their backyards and baked bread at their homes. Homesteading is an ancient concept; however, urban homesteading has revived the old techniques of self-sufficiency and adapted them to suit the urban dwellers' needs. Urban homesteading is not a single concept; it is a collection of various techniques and practices. It includes growing vegetables and fruits, raising animals, preserving food, making bread, cheese and yogurt at home, spinning and knitting, making cleaning products, using solar and wind energy, conserving water and making fertilizers and compost. The one concept that holds urban and rural homesteading is the idea of providing for self, resisting the temptation to binge consumption, consuming products

made at home, creating products rather than purchasing mass-produced products from stores.

- Grow your own fruits and vegetables.
- Raise farm animals for food
- Use alternative sources of energy – renewable energy
- Rethink transportation by using bicycles or walking to work
- Make efforts to reduce waste and also repurpose waste
- Rainwater harvesting
- Do your housework yourself
- Learn to knit, mend, do repairs and learn using basic tools and techniques
- Make food at home such as cheese, bread and yogurt
- Live in a simple and self-sufficient manner.

## ***Why Homesteading is a good decision***

So, you think you have it all figured out. The slow pace of life as a homesteader beckons you and you want to leave behind your posh high-paying job to become a homesteader – a slow paced life (no internet and Smartphone's, remember), environmental friendly (growing your own food) and a chance to live an alternate lifestyle. These points are all true when you talk about homesteading. Homesteading might not require you to give up all your talents and skills; however, you will have to give up on a few things that you have – so far – held so dearly. Depending on where you plan to homestead, you might have to give up on your internet, cell phones and TV. When you compare what you would get in return, these simple compromises might not seem very important. However, initially, you will face a lot of problems and you also might take more than expected time to adjust. Patience and passion are the only two things that can see you through.

Everyone who is a part of the back-to-land self-sufficiency movement will appreciate the very many benefits of homesteading. Some of the benefits of homesteading are:

- **Quality of food and life:** Regardless of the reasons homesteaders provide for living a life of self-sufficiency, at the end of the day, quality of food and quality of life is the main reasons why they chose this way of life. There might be a number of reasons why people choose the self-sufficiency way of life, but food quality is one of the main reasons for it.

There is no way that you can compare the taste of a tomato or a carrot plucked fresh from the tree to picking up a carrot from the nearby supermarket that had to travel hundreds of miles to reach there. The carrot in the supermarket might look bright and shiny; however, it would have been plucked from the tree a couple of days ago, chemical-sprayed to artificially ripen it and shipped hundreds of miles to the supermarket. Homemade yogurt and eggs have a taste that leaves your mouth salivating for more. Homemade bread is so soft and fresh that the store-bought fresh seems tasteless in comparison. Good quality food helps you and your family live a good quality life.

- **Happy and Healthy Life:** There is a number of health benefits associated with homesteading. The food you produce, undoubtedly, has a number of health benefits than mass-produced foods. Eggs, bread, meat and other homemade foods have their nutrients intact while mass-produced food items tend to lose out on essential nutrients as they sit in the box waiting for you in the supermarket. Moreover, your backyard chicks and goats tend to feast on a variety of healthy foods that helps them produce nutrient-rich food.

In addition to being nutrient rich, home grown fruits and vegetables do not have harmful pesticides and chemicals in them. Since home grown food are not genetically modified or artificially ripened, they retain their natural color, taste and nutrients. A number of diseases that result from factory farming such as E.coli, salmonella and other viruses are eliminated in homegrown foods.

The health benefits of homesteading are not limited to food; in fact, the amount of exercise you get also helps you lead a healthy life. The amount of work involved in homesteading is exceptionally beneficial to your body. Even if you are into urban homesteading, you get a lot of physical exercise which is great for your health and general well-being.

- **Economically Beneficial:** Baking your own bread is way cheaper than buying a loaf of bread from the nearby supermarket. Some people might tell you that homesteading involves investing in a lot of fancy gadgets and tools; however, this is completely not true. Making your own soap, bread, eggs, meat and bread goes a long way in helping you save a lot of money. In fact, homesteading also involves various ways of preserving food items in an environmentally friendly manner.

Remember, homesteading is costly if you make it costly. If you are looking for ways to cut down your costs and still undertake a particular task, the first thing you have to do is look for various ways of doing that particular task. Don't zero in on one way of doing it until you know it is the easiest and cheapest ways. You have to look for cheaper, easier and less-expensive ways of doing things – if you want to grow a garden don't let space constraints stop you or make you invest in land. You can easily grow a container garden using spare containers at home or also look for square foot gardening techniques.

- **Environmental Friendly:** Our technology-enriched lifestyle has been consistently taxing our planet's resources so much that we are on the verge of exhausting a number of non-renewable resources. The time has come to take a little respite from this onslaught of burden we put on the delicate environment of the planet. We have to start taking responsibility for our actions and try to amend and mend a few of them so that the future of this planet is not hanging in the balance. Take for instance the consumption of oil. Most of us assume that if we shift from travelling in cars to travelling in public transport or going in for carpooling, you are saving the planet. It is true that carpooling and travelling in public transportation helps save gallons of oil, we should also understand that it is not enough to help save the planet. Transporting fruits, vegetables and other food products from the farm to our home consumes hundreds of gallons of oil. Homesteading and gardening can help save the planet in a number of other ways too. Factory farming and mass-manufacturing of products is consuming a lot of resources. In fact, the toxins from these farms and factories are choking our natural water and soil resources. They are harming the earth's repair and restoration efforts. However, this does not mean that you have to throw up your hands in utter exasperation and give up hope for a better future. You don't even have to run off into a cave or give up your fancy home in the city. Urban homesteading helps you retain your home in the city and continue to enrich your life and save the environment as well.
- **Creating a Sense of Togetherness:** The idea of self-sufficiency and togetherness seem poles apart and contradictory. However, there are more related to each other than we assume. When you take up urban homesteading, you are indirectly encouraging others in your community to join hands in making the world a much better place to live. You will be

surprised to learn that a number of people would be more than willing to help you in your endeavors. Self-sufficiency is not about providing only for self or isolating from others. In fact, urban homesteading is being taken up as a community effort in a number of places.

- **Personally Gratifying:** There is nothing more gratifying than seeing a beautiful bunch of carrots or baking a large loaf of bread – all by yourself. The sense of satisfaction and pride you get by growing your own food, raising goats and chickens and making your own soaps and other utilities cannot be compared with buying them from the supermarket. You achieve a deep sense of satisfaction, achievement, and also develop a positive and healthy attitude towards life.

## ***Urban Homesteading Vs Rural Homesteading***

Both urban and rural homesteading offers a great sense of satisfaction of doing things by ourselves. Growing fruits and vegetables in a backyard garden, cooking them, building furniture and tools for our homes, and also learning new techniques of self-sufficiency and re-learning old and forgotten skills is homesteading these days. Homesteading provides a lot of independence and choices. It protects us from debt crisis, offers more choices for pursuing hobbies and interests, offers greater security in the times of economic slowdown and recession, and protects us from environmental hazards.

While homesteading throws up a picture of living in the countryside with vast (read acres) areas of land waiting to be tilled and plowed, it is nothing more than just a daytime fantasy. In fact, rural homesteading is possible only for people who have the luxury of land and time. If you are living in the city, homesteading might seem like a distant impossible dream. Giving up on amenities like cell phone, internet, home delivery, garbage pickup, electricity, gas, near-by neighbors and easy transportation might seem like a heavy toll to pay. Living in the countryside might be peaceful, calm and more laid-back; however, this is not for everyone.

It is understood that rural homesteading offers you peace and quiet that urban dwellings do not know of. The countryside is not completely dead; it is, on the other hand, more alive than you know. The noises of the city are replaced with the noises of the countryside – the birds, the animals and the wind actually has a say in the countryside. You can be sure of sleeping well in the nights, but you have to deal with the loud chainsaws and grinding machines that compensate for the traffic noises. However, the sheer madness of traffic, the cacophony of noisy neighbors and the absolute mayhem of 24/7 traffic is something you will miss in the countryside. There is reduced cost of living if you take up rural homesteading, and you are always surrounded by the warmth of nature.

Most manuals on homesteading will tell you that you have to give up the luxuries of the city, pack your bags and settle down on a farm to take up homesteading. In fact, many homesteading experts also talk about gardening and raising farm animals on acres of land. The abundance and availability of land will soon become a burden when you don't know what to do with it. Just because you don't have an acre of land to call your own, don't give up on homesteading. You can continue to stay self-sufficient with urban homesteading. Even with a single square foot of land in the city or a balcony to call your own, you can grow your favorite fruits and vegetables and live a healthy life. If you have the luxury of land somewhere in the countryside, and are willing to give up the pleasures of the city, you are welcome to try rural homesteading. However, if space is a constraint and you don't want to lose your city life, you can try urban homesteading and enjoy the same benefits of rural living.

## ***Homesteading and Permaculture***

Homesteading and permaculture are related to one another; they propagate the concepts of self-sufficiency, care for the planet, people and returning natural resources to the planet. It is the concept of sustainable method of agriculture. Permaculture philosophy is working with nature and not working against its principles. It is the idea of looking at the landscape of a place, understand the functions of species and bring various pieces together to create one better product. Permaculture helps reduce waste, minimize labor and input of energy into making products. It is about bringing all the pieces of a concept together so that maximum benefits are availed from it. Permaculture is an extended branch of ecological and environmental design.

## ***Homesteading - A social, economic and lifestyle choice***

To completely understand the concepts of homesteading, you should first understand its roots and reasons for its popularity. Back in 1862, the U.S. government offered nearly 160 acres of free land to people who promised to live on it successfully for years. Many families staked their claim to this land and started growing crops, raising animals, cultivating land, and took care of the household using homemade things.

The Homestead Act of 1862 was seen as an effort by the government of U.S. to populate previously undesired parts of land. Nations that were engaged in nation building, started enticing people to populate and cultivate on these pieces of land and develop self-sustenance methods. More Homestead acts were initiated in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to drive nation building and populating specific areas of the nation. A renewed interest in homesteading started to be seen in the 1930's and 1940's.

Homesteading, in addition to being a social process of creating self-sufficiency, is an economic choice to ensure independence and self-reliance. Homesteading not only allows you to produce food on your own, it also helps you sell your produce – food and other products – to others to help improve your financial status.

Homesteading is a lifestyle choice for many, and a number of people who are homesteading have expressed a deep sense of satisfaction and contentment with their lifestyle and standard of living. They feel that their way of life is far more healthy, satisfying and rewarding than the normal urban ways of life. Urban Homesteading is not a watered-down version of rural homesteading; in fact, it is a full-fledged concept that has a number of benefits.

## **Starting your Own Garden**

## ***Gardening for Self Sufficiency***

Growing your own food is the first step in ensuring self-sufficiency. Urban homesteading makes it easier for you to grow your own fruits, vegetables and herbs right in your home. Homestead gardening has started gaining popularity because of a number of reasons. Some grow vegetable gardens because it is economical, healthy and enjoyable. The fresh and organic food that you get from your vegetable garden is certainly healthy than buying off the counter in stores.

Growing food need not be complicated; in fact there are a number of ways in which you can grow a garden in the city even with space constraints. If you have shortage of space, urban homesteading allows you to grow your favorite fruits, vegetables and herbs in pots, containers and kitchen gardens.

Gardeners have grown vegetables, fruits, flowers and herbs from ancient times without having modern science and tools to help them. It is understood that not everyone is born with a green thumb; however, urban homesteading is all about growing fruits and vegetables that your family consumes.

Garden is a wonderful place where you can plant all your favorite fruits and vegetables and also grow your own livestock. Urban homesteading doesn't require large spaces or acres of land at your disposal; you can grow your garden in your balcony or in a series of small pots. A small yard in the front or a kitchen garden in the back is all you need for a fully-sustaining garden.

When you are designing your own urban homestead garden, you should make sure that you remember that gardening is not about the physical layout only. There are other requirements that need to be considered, such as time, water availability, availability of sunlight, participation of friends and family. These points will start affecting the yield of your garden.

Listing out your priorities will help you design your garden better. Ask yourself if you want to provide for your family's vegetable and fruits needs. Are you looking to reduce your dependence on supermarkets or do you want to reduce your overall expenditure? If you are looking to add nutrition and flavor to your food, then urban homestead garden is the right choice for you.

Also remember that growing one batch of vegetables successfully doesn't mean you can give up caring and planning the garden anymore.

## ***Selecting the location***

Selecting the right location for your urban homesteading garden is not a tough task as long as you have your priorities set right. When you are selecting the location for your garden, you should first decide whether you are going to have a normal backyard garden or a vertical garden, a container garden or a square foot garden. Each and every type of garden has specific needs and requirements. While selecting the location, you should take into consideration:

- The climatic conditions
- The size of your garden
- The type of garden you are planning to have
- The type of fruits, vegetables and herbs you are looking to grow
- The amount of fruits and vegetables you need
- Availability of water and sunlight
- Surrounding structures and shade
- Pest control and harvesting

Some plants need more sunlight than others while some plants tolerate shade better than others. You should remember how each plant grows, its water needs and the time it takes to grow.

In order to select the right spot for your home garden, you should be ready to spend some quality time to understanding the amount of sunlight that spot receives, the condition of soil and the type of plants that you are going to grow there.

- First pick a spot in your backyard where you want the garden to be. If it is going to be square foot garden or a container garden, you can mark this place for the containers to be placed.
- Once you have picked out the place, this is the time to wait and watch the spot for at least a couple of days before working on the spot.
- Place a piece of wood or cards demarcating the spot so that you know where and how big that piece of land is.
- You should then watch this spot throughout the day to note the amount and duration of sunlight it receives. Some plants need full sun, which is at least 8 hours of direct sunlight for them to grow well. Whereas some plants tolerate a good amount of shade. The spot where you are planning to grow your garden should get at least 6 hours of direct sunlight per day.
- While choosing the location, you should also remember that sun changes its position and intensity of light varies from season to season. You should make sure your plant selection takes into consideration these changing realities.
- Choose a location that doesn't have tall trees or imposing structures around it. Tall trees not only cast longer shadows during the day, they also tend to absorb healthy nutrients from the earth, reducing the availability of nutrients for your garden. Moreover, these tall trees tend to have longer roots which tend to interfere with your garden.

- The lay of the land and water availability are equally important. Most gardens are flat; however, in case you have a slightly steep land, you have to either straighten it or try using raised beds for the garden. The reason for this is steep lands tend to let the water flow quickly; this makes it harder for the plants to absorb essential water and nutrients.
- The next step in selecting the right location is to understand the soil structure. If you already have a wonderfully sandy loam soil, then you can start off your gardening with a bang. However, if you are unsure of the soil type and structure, you should start the process of improving the soil quality. Regardless of the type of garden you are going to have, the soil should be well drained, aerated, and should retain good amount of moisture for longer periods of time. In case you are using garden soil, you need to modify it by adding peat or coarse builder sand or perlite to improve the effectiveness of the soil.

## ***Optimum Amount of Sunlight***

Sunlight is one of the most important requirements for the growth of fruits and vegetables. Although there are a number of plants that require less sunlight and can also grow indoors, most vegetables require certain amount of sunlight every day.

You should first decide the amount of sunlight your location receives before choosing the plants you want to grow. The availability of sunlight will determine the plants you grow and the yield you are going to get. Plants that need Full Sun (more than 6 hours of direct sunlight every day) are tomatoes, peppers, eggplants and more should be grown during the summer when you are sure of receiving full sun. Plants that receive less than 6 hours of direct sunlight and still survive the shade are cauliflowers, spinach, beans and radishes. The optimum amount of sunlight your patch of land receives will determine the plants you can grow.

If you want to start growing plants that enjoy sunlight, you should choose fruits and vegetables that are native to that area. These plants are accustomed to the climatic and soil conditions of that particular location. All plants need sunlight; some plants need more sunlight while some need less. However, most vegetables require good amount of sunlight every day. If you live in an arid area, you should make sure that your garden patch receives good amount of shade in addition to the sun. Too much sunlight has the potential to kill your plants; you should make sure that your plants get enough shade too. So, too much or too little sunlight is harmful to your plants – try to hit the magic mark and you are ready for some great harvest.

## ***Collecting rainwater for Watering plants***

Collecting rainwater for watering plants and using it for household purposes is one of the integral parts of urban homesteading. Rain water is free; you don't have to pay thousands of dollars in getting a few hundred gallons of water. It is yours and yours for free. Regardless of whether you live in a draught-stricken part of the world, or you are blessed with enough rain water for generations, you have to take the right steps to harvest this important element. If you are looking at self-sufficiency as one of the primary goals of urban homesteading, then you have to accept rainwater harvesting as one of the prime and most useful, simple, and cheap ways of maintaining your garden, judiciously use our shared resource, and reduce your dependence on artificial methods of water procurement. Water reservoirs and catchment areas are fast disappearing in the concrete wilderness of cities. But, rainwater is freely available, easy to capture and store in large quantities for a prolonged period of time.

The main idea behind rainwater harvesting is to capture the runoff water from roof tops, downspouts, and gutter and collect them in storage containers. You should make sure that you collect rainwater in large chemically-untreated containers so that your plants will not absorbing toxins from the containers, if you use the water stored in these containers to water your plants. However, even 5 gallon containers tend to fill up very quickly, making it necessary that you look for other sustainable methods of water harvesting. You can try building a pit of gravel, sand and pebbles that collects the rain water and diverts it into your well. This way, you can maintain groundwater levels throughout the year. The sand, pebbles and gravel help in filtering water off harmful bacteria. Rainwater is free of chemicals, free from pesticides if you collect them from rooftops and balconies, are somewhat clean and pH neutral. They are not treated with chlorine and other chemicals that could affect the growth of your garden.

Making use of stored rainwater to water your plants is a good way to ensure you get a good yield every time. Always make use of spot watering or hand watering. You can try watering the plants, either in the morning or after sunset. Never water your plants too late into the nights; some of the roots and leaves of certain plants need to be dry before the night. Some plants require constant watering; this is helpful when you are looking at a plant that is accustomed to rainy and moisture-laden climates. Too much watering is as dangerous as too little water to your plants. Remember to always use just enough water for your plants.

## ***Making your own Backyard Compost***

Homesteading is all about providing for yourself; making your own backyard compost is also one of the major parts of urban homesteading. It is easy to make your own compost using easily available garden clippings, kitchen vegetable left-over's, shredded paper, leaves, and a bit of soil. There are two types of composting –cold composting and hot composting. Cold composting simply means that you collect organic materials in a bin, and allow them to turn into compost over a period of one year or so. Hot composting is for the serious gardener in you.

- Dig a hole in your backyard, at least 5 feet deep.
- To this, keep adding organic materials – layer by layer – such as fresh leaves, kitchen waste, dried leaves, paper, straw, coffee grounds, fruits and vegetable scraps, and egg shells. This should fill your pit to 3 feet.
- To this mixture, sprinkle water to keep it moist. You have to keep adding water regularly to maintain the moisture. Make sure you don't make the mixture soggy; too much water will make your pile rot rather than compost.
- Keep monitoring the temperature of this pile every now and then.
- Make sure you keep turning the pile using garden fork so that oxygen is worked into the mixture. You have to stir thoroughly making sure that all the layers are mixed, and the compost cooks faster.
- Your compost is done when you are sure that it is no longer giving off heat, and that it looks dry, brown and is crumbly.

Good Compost materials are fruit and vegetable scraps, dried leaves, green grass and plant clippings, egg shells, coffee grounds, chopped wood and bark chips, paper shreds, and straw. There are certain materials you should not use to make compost; they are products that contain meat, grease, oil, fat, diseased plants, treated wood chips, feces of dogs and cats, dairy products and weeds.

## ***Mulching in your Garden***

A large number of newbie gardeners would not know the difference between mulch and compost. Mulch could be any type of organic material that you spread across the surface of the soil to help the soil retain moisture, keep the soil cool, resist weed growth and improve the overall appearance of the soil. Moreover, organic materials help in keeping the soil healthy as they decompose into a good layer of fertilizer.

Organic mulch materials are bark, shredded to paper, wood and bark, compost, grass clippings, leaves, straw and more. Since organic materials decompose quickly, you need to keep replacing them very often. However, organic materials tend to increase the fertility of the soil and also improve its organic content. Make sure you know the contents of your mulch as you wouldn't want to spread weeds into the soil.

Knowing when to mulch is very important as it will enhance the growth of your plants. The best times to mulch are late-winter and early spring. When you mulch in winter, the soil traps the moisture from the wet weather and uses the same to sustain during drier weather. This way, your plants don't end up drying very quickly. Now, you have to water the soil before you start mulching as it would be difficult to water the soil after you have covered it with mulch. Make sure you pick out the weeds from the spot so that they don't end up enjoying the benefits of the mulch. Spread the mulch over the soil or around the soil evenly – about 2 inches in thick. Leave a little gap in the spread for the stem; and level off the mulch to an even finish.

## **Types of Homestead Gardening**

## ***Rooftop Gardening***

Land is becoming scarcer, especially for gardening purposes. Urban homesteaders are finding it difficult to grow a garden because of the lack of suitable land for gardening purposes. Rooftop gardening is one of the best alternatives for urban gardeners who want to enjoy the innumerable benefits of a garden even when there is no sufficient land available for them. Rooftop gardening is especially helpful in urban environments and cities where ground space for garden is hard to come by.

Rooftop garden is a man-made garden space, mostly on the top-most level of a building. This piece of green land can be used to produce fruits and vegetables or simply as a play area – or even for decorative purposes. Although not every roof top can be converted into a full-fledged garden, you can make use of the empty space to grow a number of fruits and vegetables. You can make use of the entire rooftop to make a garden or plant a number of fruits, vegetables, herbs and flowers in containers and pots to be placed on the roofs or balconies.

The rooftop should be able to withstand the combined weight of the soil, the plants, water, and also deal with precipitation. Some rooftop gardens do not require excessive maintenance or upkeep. These rooftops work as a simple roofing material, and are not intended for heavy foot falls. However, there are rooftop gardens that need heavy upkeep, landscaping, and reinforcement to withstand the weight of the garden.

- Before you start planting the roof, first inspect the roof and make sure government and environmental regulations allow constructing a rooftop garden.
- Find out if the roof can withstand the weight of the garden; if it can't, then provide proper reinforcements to strengthen it.
- If you are unsure of it, consult a structural engineer to help you out.
- Choose a design that takes into consideration sunlight, watering needs, the plants and maintenance.
- Remember you can't grow every plant on your roof; so choose the plants wisely after clearly understanding its nature and growth capabilities.
- You can also use a number of pots, containers and planters to help you build a good garden on the roof.
- Consider windbreakers to make your garden less susceptible to getting blown away because of the wind.
- Also consider watering methods you are going to use.
- The plants you can grow on your rooftop are 'Blue Star' juniper, lavender, daylilies, maiden grass, carrots, greens, lemon-pickling cucumbers, pole beans, lettuce, beats, chives, radishes, and snap peas.

## ***Backyard Gardening***

Everyone dreams of a backyard garden – the perfect place to grow fruits, vegetables, flowers and whatnot! Gardening is fast becoming one of America’s favorite pastimes, a time for the whole family to come together and get dirty! Moreover, growing your own fruits and vegetables has such a charm that it is converting not-the-gardening types into –green-thumbs very quickly. There is no age limit to take up gardening; and you are sure to get enough sun and exercise with gardening. One of the basic steps of backyard gardening is choosing the right spot to plant your garden. Some of the key points to note while planting your urban homesteading garden are:

- Decide the garden size before deciding on what you want to plant. Urban homesteading is all about doing your planting and harvesting by yourself, and organically. You should make sure that you have the necessary tools and time to take care of your garden. So, if you are a starter, start small and slowly increase the size of the garden.
- Choose what plants you want to grow depending on what you want to consume.
- Make sure you don’t have too many large trees growing near your garden spot, and also envision future trees
- Remember the amount of sunlight this spot will receive, the wind and watering needs of the soil
- Plant seasonal vegetables and fruits so that you can sustain the whole year through. Do not plant too much of one single plant type; always make interval plantings of any one vegetable at least every 10 days or so. Plants that have short peak periods tend to grow faster, and these can be replaced immediately.
- Do not plant too many of the same type; rotation planting will help you cut growth of weeds
- It is also good to group plants that have similar planting conditions and harvest dates.
- Interplant plants that have a fast growing time with plants that grow slowly.

## ***Square Foot Gardening***

[Square foot Gardening](#) offers an easy way to harvest a lot of produce in a small and confined garden space. Square foot gardening is most beneficial for those who have space constraints and restrictions. You will be able to grow a number of fruits and vegetables in confined spaces. You can easily plant as many fruits and vegetables your square foot garden can hold at once.

To be able to successfully grow a square foot garden in your house, all you need is few feet of land, some good soil mixture, seeds and a lot of patience. Equally divide the square yard into small pieces in such a manner that they can accommodate your favorite plants. The success of square foot gardening also depends on the sunlight, wind, watering, soil mixture, fertilizers and the square foot gardening boxes used.

Before you start making these boxes, you should first determine the size and location of your garden. You can purchase built boxes but since we are into urban homesteading, building square foot gardening boxes is very important. It is easy to build the boxes using basic tools. Make sure you build a large square shaped open bottomed box; with partitions dividing the whole box into a number of smaller squares. Now, fill in this box with soil mixture and start planting.

The advantage of square foot gardening is that you can have a piece of garden even when you are dealing with space restrictions. You can build a garden on the rooftop or on your front yard.

## ***Container Gardening***

[Container gardening](#) is another example of good urban homestead garden. The very term 'garden' manages to invoke images of lush green ground garden in most of us. However, for those dealing with urban space constraints, having a piece of land for gardening is very difficult. However, this should not put you out of the running for growing a garden. Container gardening is one of the easiest and cheapest ways to have a garden. You can grow a container garden indoors, on your rooftops, on your front porch, on balconies, windowsills and on your steps.

Container gardening gives you the freedom of picking up any container that you can find in your backyard and convert it into a feasible and viable part of your container garden. Moreover, container garden gives you the freedom to move the containers to different locations in your house depending on the needs of the plants. If you think your plants are going to drown in the pouring rain, all you have to do is move that particular container indoors or to a better location.

Container gardening is also very effective way to deal with bad soil structure, seasons, and weeds. The container materials you choose will determine plant growth, water needs, and sunlight. If you are using terracotta or earthen containers, you have to make sure that you keep the plants moist as these container materials tend to absorb moisture very quickly.

## **Companion Planting**

Every gardener worth his plants will know that planting a diverse mix of fruits and vegetables will not only make your garden look beautiful but also ensure healthy and faster growth of plants. Companion planting can be done on normal backyard gardens, rooftop gardens, container garden, and square foot gardens. All you have to know before companion planting is:

- Always combine fruits and vegetables that support and encourage each other plant's growth and not inhibit it.
- Choose plants depending upon similar needs and growing dates.
- Companion plants should have similar sunlight, water, soil and heat needs.
- Some of the best companion plants are: beets, cabbages, corn, cucumbers, potatoes, and strawberries. Broccoli, bush beans, cauliflower, onions, Brussels sprouts also make great companions. Cabbages, leeks, peas, radishes, sage and rosemary are one of the most used companion plants.
- While choosing companion plants, you should also know which plants do not make great companions. If you plant two incompatible plants together, you end up killing both the plants and spoiling the soil structure completely.

## ***Vertical Gardening***

Not every one of us has been blessed with space to grow a garden; some of us have to make do with just a wall to call our own. With **vertical gardening**, even a wall is more than enough. Whether you have a large wall or just a small hinge to hang a pot on your balcony, you can start growing upright crops easily. With a little bit of creativity and lots of patience, you can make a beautiful vertical garden in very little space.

There are various plant varieties such as pole beans and cucumbers that produce more than double their usual yield when you grow them on the right sized trellis. You have crops like tomatoes that grow well and bring a good yield only when you give them enough support to stand upright and off the damp ground. All you have to do is give your plants all the needed support, and you can enjoy a wonderful garden.

# Choosing Plants for Homesteading

## ***Deciding What to Plant***

Deciding what to plant one of the toughest decisions is you are going to take; it is not easy to resist the temptation of planting just about everything at once. Most garden varieties used by many green thumb gardeners are the annuals; these last one season and have to be replaced again next season. Unless you do not remove the complete yield and leave some to rot in the ground, you will find a few tomatoes popping up in strange places all over your garden. Spring is the best time to start planting.

What to plant depends on your requirements and family's vegetable needs? It is not easy to determine what your family is going to need for the rest of the year. Since every family's needs are different from others, you will have to start the journey with a trial and error method. Moreover, certain plants that grow in my neighborhood might not grow in yours – because of the sunlight availability, soil structure, and moisture levels in the soil. Certain plants like artichokes and asparagus take up a lot of time to grow and there are plants such as cucumbers and melons that like a lot of space to start growing.

There are certain plants that grow very quickly; some of the fast growing plants are lettuces and green beans. Plants like green onions tolerate sun and shade easily. Decide the plants depending on your family's needs, likes and dislikes, seasons, soil conditions, watering needs, sunlight requirements, and moisture content and overall appearances. You should consider,

- Your family needs for fresh, preserved and stored food supplies
- The climatic and water conditions
- Soil structure and soil mixture
- Disease resistance of chosen plants
- Their growth and maturity dates
- The size, shape, color and compactness of the plants

## ***Planning when to plant***

When to plant is an important question every gardener should answer. If you live a place that has warm temperature, you can plant trees anytime of the year as long as it is not too hot or it is not summer. Summer's heat can dry up saplings very quickly. Generally speaking, early spring and late winter are the best times of the year to plant. Autumn is not a bad choice either; however, summer should be avoided at all costs. In most cases, weather dictates your schedule and choices. While summer's intense heat can dry up saplings, it is also true that too little water will choke their roots easily. However, make sure that you don't go overboard with watering as too much water can drown your plants very quickly. Just because there is excessive snow in winter, do not assume that the plants are getting enough water. Remember that the moisture from snow is not enough to reach the roots of the plants. Until and unless the snow starts to quickly melt and the earth starts to thaw, your plants are going to die due to lack of moisture.

## ***Arranging Crops***

Arranging crops is essential part of maintenance. It is important that you maintain a proper arrangement so that you find it easier to water all the plants, reach out to each of the plants and maintain the area quite comfortably. Arranging plants in a linear direction rather than just planting them without any distinct reason or rhyme is certainly not good for your plants growth. Regardless of whether you are planting using seeds, or transplanting from other locations, container gardening or companion gardening, you have to ensure that a proper format and arrangement is followed.

Arranging crops properly improves the yield and also increases your convenience levels. While trying to decide the arrangement, you should consider:

- The topography of the land
- The slope of the terrain
- Existing vegetation
- Shade and sunlight
- Physical barriers
- Soil structure and water movement

There are a number of advantages of arranging crops in a distinct and specific order. You can improve light absorption, prevents buildup of excessive humidity, spread of water and nutrients is even, water logging is reduced, provides better access for cultivation, de-weeding, allows of better inspection of individual plants, enhances overall maintenance and enhances visibility of each plant.

## ***Dealing with weeds and pests***

Regardless of the type of garden you are going to grow, you are going to face weeds and pests. Whether you have a large backyard garden or a small container garden on your balcony, you will be invaded by weeds and pests, at any one point in time. You should be prepared to deal with these pesky enemies and save your plants. Before you start applying over-the-counter pesticides and insecticides, remember to try out homemade pest control products. Since urban homesteading is all about making your own organic food, you can save your plants from infection by using natural pest control products using items available in your kitchen.

Homemade insecticides will help save your garden; and it doesn't cause harmful side-effects as well.

- You can make this very simple pest control liquid at home. Mix together 90 grams of garlic cloves (finely chopped) with 2T liquid paraffin, and allow this mixture steep for nearly 48 hours. Completely dissolve 15 grams of grated soap flakes into warm water. Mix these two solutions together and strain it. One part of this mixture has to be used with 50 parts of water, and spray on plants.
- Best pest control for asparagus beetles, maggots and flea beetles are also available in your kitchen and garden. Simply soak two cups of chopped tomato leaves in enough water for at least 12 hours. Carefully strain this mixture and add one pint of water and ¼th teaspoon of liquid soap.

# Making your Own Food

## ***Make Your Own Cheese***

Making cheese at home is an integral part of self-sufficiency and frugal living. There are a million ways of making homemade cheese, and each method has its own advantages and difficulty levels. So, what do you need to make this delicious homemade cheese?

You would need, one quarter fresh cream, 1/8<sup>th</sup> teaspoon of mesophilic starter culture, a really fine cheesecloth and sea salt.

- Before you start making your own cheese, you should first make the mesophilic starter culture. You can use over the counter culture as well; however, it is better you make your own. In a clean and dry glass jar, add fresh and unpasteurized milk.
- Close the lid very loosely, making sure that you leave a slight crack open. Let this sit on the counter until the milk starts to thicken. If you are lucky, you might be able to get thick milk within 24 hours; however, sometimes, it might take more than 30 hours as well.
- Once the milk thickens, you should get it to look like yogurt. Once it comes to this consistency, you should stir it, and pour it into a fresh freezer cube tray.
- With each of these cubes, you get nearly one ounce of Mesophilic starter culture.
- Now take one quarter fresh cream in a clean bottle, and gently add the Mesophilic starter culture.
- Don't close the bottle tightly; just let the cover sit loosely on the bottle.
- Leave this bottle to rest for at least 8 to 12 hours for culture to start developing.
- You would know that it is ready when the mixture starts resembling thick yogurt.
- Gently dump this thickened cream on to cheesecloth; make sure that the whey continues to drip for at least 10 to 12 hours. Remember that the longer you let the cream drip, the thicker and firmer your cheese will be.
- Now, slowly scrap the cheesecloth and sprinkle salt (as required).
- Store this creamy cheese in an airtight container for future use.

## ***Homemade Bread***

Bread is all-time favorite food for many Americans, and homemade bread, perhaps, has no competitors. Made using only 5 ingredients, this delicious homemade bread will soon become a staple in your urban homestead kitchen.

- All you need for this French bread is 1 1/4<sup>th</sup> cup of warm water (not boiling!), a pinch of sugar (can use sucanat, if available), 3 1/2 cups wheat flour (can use half wheat, whole wheat or half white as well), 1 1/2 teaspoons dry yeast, and salt to taste.
- Take a large bowl, mix the yeast and sugar in warm water until the mixture dissolves completely.
- Now, add salt, and gently stir in flour into this mixture.
- Make sure there are no lumps and that the mixture is not chunky.
- The amount of flour required will depend on the water and your mixing technique. All you have to do is make the dough soft, pliable and non-sticky.
- Gently knead the dough, until the dough becomes soft and elastic.
- You can cover the dough with a wet kitchen towel for about an hour to make sure that the dough rises or doubles up in size.
- Divide the entire dough into two halves and roll each of these halves into rectangular shape.
- Slowly roll the rectangle by pinching the ends to seal the opening. Bring this into a nice 'log' shape.
- The seams have to stick and sit down; however, if they don't, simply moisten your fingers with water and reseal the seams carefully. Make sure it sits together firmly; otherwise, it will start to unravel during the baking process.
- Prepare an egg wash, by beating an egg and mixing it with one tablespoon of water. Egg wash will give your bread the much needed color and finish.
- In your 375 degrees pre-heated oven, plop the loaves carefully.
- Before putting the bread loaves into the oven, make sure you brush the bread evenly with egg wash and make four professional (and diagonal slashes across the bread loaves).
- Now, bake this for about 20 to 25 minutes. Cool down the homemade bread for some time before devouring it.

## ***Organic Eggs***

Local urban families are now looking at the art of raising chicken with renewed interest. One of the main reasons for the interest in organic eggs and farming is because people want to know how their food is being grown. They are interested in knowing what constitutes their food. They want to be in control of the food, and urban homesteading is the perfect choice for them.

Although raising chickens and goats in your backyard in the city is going to be very tough, the benefits of the same are innumerable. Some cities do not allow its residents to grow poultry at home, while some cities are more lenient. If you are unable to get permission from city council authorities and neighbor, you can approach local community homesteading groups to help you sort out this situation.

Most so-called 'organic eggs' that you buy off the counters are not exactly organic; a number of certified organic eggs are grown in inhumane and unhealthy conditions. Hundreds of hens are kept in steel cage like structures, and are not given the chance to even move about.

Pasture-raised hens' eggs are, by-far, the most healthy and happy eggs. These hens eat nutritious food that is free from harmful and genetically modified diet. These hens are free to roam about the area and are not given steroids or performance enhancement drugs to make them grow faster and fatter.

The flavor, color, and size of a pasture-raised egg are completely different from store-bought eggs. These eggs are rich in vitamins, zinc, calcium, riboflavin, beta carotene and have loads of omega 3 fatty acids. Organic eggs have the highest amounts of healthy protein, next only to mother's milk.

To grow organic eggs in your backyard, you should ensure that the hens are free to roam about, and are not kept in cages or enclosures. The poultry should be given organic matter; make sure that you use homemade organic matter instead of buying it from stores. Always make sure that you do not provide antibiotics of any kind to the poultry. Antibiotics should be used only when there is an outbreak of infection. Organic eggs do not induce the hen to molt; the birds tend to go into natural molt.

## ***Homemade Yogurt***

Making yogurt at home is very easy; however it can test your patience. Yogurt doesn't require a lot of work from you; in fact, it takes a lot of time for the yogurt to simply sit and culture. So, patience is the key here.

There are a number of ways to make yogurt and each method is different, but regardless of the method you use, yogurts are delicious and super-healthy foods. Yogurt can be made in large quantities and stored without worrying about spoiling it.

- You need a large stockpot, a thermometer, a cooler, and two-quart sized glass jar with lids. You need half gallon milk – preferably cow or goat's milk. If you are using goat's milk, you will end up with a very runny yogurt. Goat's milk make runny yogurt that has to be drunk.
- Now, fill the milk into the two quart sized jars, making sure that you leave at least 2 inches of room on top of the jar. Just don't fill it to the brim. Preferably use glass canning jars that come with lids. Never use plastic – you are going to boil the jars, remember!
- Gently, place these two jars in the large stockpot; fill it with water and set to boil. Make sure you fill enough water in the pot so that these bottles don't start toppling or rattling about.
- Bring the water to boil, and slowly reduce the flame and let the water start to simmer.
- This is the time to check the temperature of the milk inside the jars. It has to be around 180 degrees F.
- If you don't have a thermometer handy, just look out for a 'skin' to start developing on the milk. This will be your first indicator that the milk has boiled. In case, the temperature in the thermometer points more than 185 degrees, don't fret.
- Very carefully, remove the jars from the stockpot. The jars are going to be extremely hot, take necessary precautions.
- Let these hot jars cool down to about 100 degrees F. Resist the temptation of placing these hot jars under the sink tap to help them cool faster. You might end up breaking one or both the jars. Let these jars cool on their own.
- Open the lid – just a crack - and allow the milk to start cooling.
- Give the milk a stir once in a while to help any hot spots escape.
- Feel the sides of the jar – if it is too hot to touch, you have to allow it to cool further. If you are able to hold the jar, and if the milk is warm, then you are good to go. Remember you are going to put live culture into the milk, which is 'live bacteria.' This bacterium enjoys a good warm temperature but will die if you dunk it into scalding hot milk. If you are able to hold the jar in your hands, then the bacteria will probably survive the heat too.
- Now, take two tablespoons of yogurt (made from live culture) and stir into each of the milk jars.
- Tightly cap the jars and allow the incubation process to kick start.
- You should make arrangements to keep these jars warm. Warmth will improve the incubation process. Some people place these jars in their oven and leave the light on. You can try the homesteading way.

- Take a large cooler and fill it with warm water and place these jars inside the cooler. The water should be maintained at 120 degrees, so you would have to replenish the cooler with hot water regularly.
- The complete process will take at least 10 hours.
- Once it is done, you have to allow the yogurt to cool down completely. As it starts to cool down, the yogurt will start to thicken.
- You have just made healthy and nutritious yogurt right at home. Eat it with fruits, honey, nuts and maple syrup.

**Preserving Food**

## ***Canning***

Canning is a food preserving technique that has been in use from time immemorial. It is very effective in keeping food safe, healthy and nutrient-rich. With canning, you have the ability to process and preserve just about anything you want, from meat to vegetables. Make sure that the jars you are going to use are neat, clean and sterilized. If you are unsure, boil the bottles for a good two minutes to keep those pesky bacteria out. Add the food you want to preserve, add seasonings, and some boiled water. Close the lid, with just enough space to let air escape. Now, place this bottle in water and boil it for few hours. Every food product has different boiling points, so make sure you know when yours is complete. Remove the bottle from the water, tighten the lid completely and allow it to cool. Make sure all the bottles are closed shut for the food to stay preserved.

## ***Freezing***

Freezing is a common food preserving technique. The winter season is your best friend when it comes to preserving food items. In the northern hemisphere, you will have a large outdoor freezer the whole winter season. Take advantage of it by finding a spot outdoors that can keep your food safe from decaying and from animals.

## ***Dehydrating and Drying***

Drying and dehydrating food is also an easy and time-tested method of preservation. This method of preserving food was used during the ancient times and still continues to be used in a number of countries. Using the sun to dry food items is easy and environmental friendly. You can dry pieces of fruits, vegetables, meat, and mushrooms. Make sure that you dry food items for longer hours in order to completely drain off the water and moisture content from them. Water has the potential to quicken the decomposing process. Dried food items stay fresh and edible longer; moreover, they retain most of the nutrients in the process.

## ***Salt Preservation***

Salt preservation is perhaps one of the oldest and most used forms of preserving food items used in the world. Meat and pickles, around the world, are preserved using salt. It is not enough to sprinkle salt on meat and expect it to stay fresh. You have to go overboard with salt content to preserve food. Salt, sugar, and oil are great preservatives.

**Bonus Chapter!**

## ***Companion Planting - Vegetables, Herbs and Flowers***

<b>Name</b>	<b>Best Companions</b>
Pole Beans	Potatoes, Marigolds, Corn, Radishes
Bush Beans	Corn, Cabbage, Carrot, Cauliflower, Beets, Marigolds, Potatoes, Cucumbers, Strawberries
Broccoli	Carrots, Marigolds, Beets, Calendula, Mint, Thyme, Sage, Onions, Beets
Cabbage	Spinach, Chard, Broccoli, Brussels Sprouts, Cauliflower, Tomatoes
Carrots	Cabbage, Radishes, Lettuce, Onion, Sage, Rosemary, Chives, Leeks
Beets	Cabbage, Broccoli, Cauliflower, Bush Beans, Onions, Brussels Sprouts
Cucumbers	Cabbage, Radishes, Potatoes, Beans, Corn
Garlic	Roses, Tomatoes, Fruiting Trees, Cabbage
Eggplant	Tomatoes, Peppers, Potatoes, Green Beans
Bay Leaves	Cayenne Pepper, Peppermint
Celery	Cabbage, Onions, Spinach, Leeks, Beans, Tomatoes
Cilantro	Potatoes, Dill, Anise, Caraway
Leeks	Celery, Onions, Carrots, Apple Trees
Lettuce	Broccoli, Carrots, Onions, radishes, Beans, Beets, Cucumbers, Strawberries
Okra	Peppers, Basil, Eggplant, Black Eyed Peas, Cucumber
Peas	Bush Beans, Corn, Eggplant, Carrots, Cucumber, Tomatoes, Spinach, Turnip, Potatoes
Bell Peppers	Tomatoes, Carrots, Basil, Petunia
Onions	Carrots, Beets, Strawberries, Leeks, Tomatoes, Lettuce
Potatoes	Peppers, Carrot, Peas, Marigold, Cabbage, Onion, Corn, Celery
Tomatoes	Basil, Beans, Onion, Peas, Garlic, Mint, Carrots, Peppers, Lettuce, Cucumber
Spinach	Onion, Cabbage, Eggplant, Cauliflower, Bean, Peas, Strawberries
Strawberries	Spinach, Lettuce, Bush Beans
Turnips	Peas
Basil	Tomatoes, Peppers, Petunia
Pumpkins	Melon, Squash, Corn
Corn	Cucumber, Beans, Potatoes, Soybeans, Melons, Peas, Pumpkin, Sunflower

## Conclusion

Homesteading requires complete dedication and work. Don't let this alternate lifestyle become a noose around your neck by stressing yourself to achieve everything in a week's time. You should be ready to accept that urban homesteading is not easy; it needs constant effort and lots of patience. Your urban homesteading brochures will not talk tell you anything about these. Most people start out on homesteading with a lot of hopes and aspirations but they manage to burn out within few months – purely out of disappointment and desperation. Even though many people set out to achieve their dreams of living a simple and self-sufficient lifestyle, they lose the passion within a couple of years' time. You have to understand that crops will fail, animals will die, and rain might be less than normal, and everything you planned out will not happen like clockwork. Urban homesteading takes time and you should wait to get the best out of it.

## Thank You!



Thank you for purchasing and downloading my book! I hope this book was able to help you understand the basics of Urban Homesteading and motivate you enough to become self-sufficient wherever possible!

Finally, if you enjoyed this book, please take the time to share your thoughts and post a review on Amazon. It'd be greatly appreciated! Click [HERE](#) to write a review.

This feedback will help me to continue writing the kind of Kindle books that would give you the maximum value and results. Thank you once again and good luck!

**Preview of “Container Gardening: A Beginners Guide to growing Organic Vegetables, Fruits & Herbs in a Small Space”**

## ***Understanding Container Gardening***

There was a time, not very long ago, when the term, garden, used to bring a picture of a neatly mowed lawn with rows of bright and beautiful flowers adorning the front yard or a patch of healthy vegetable garden in the backyard, to your mind's eye. Although this is a good image to have (and a good garden to have!), not all of us are fortunate enough to have a spacious lawn waiting to be converted into a garden. We have to change with the changing times; and these days when we have to make do with urban jungles, a pot or a pan is a good enough place to grow a garden. Amazing, isn't it?

Everyone likes a bit of greenery – even the video game playing boy next door – and container gardening is the best choice for those who are on space and time constraint.

Container gardening is the practice of growing plants – fruits, flowers and vegetables – in pots or any other containers available at hand. If you have containers that are big and strong enough to hold the plant in, you are good to start your own container garden. Pots, tubs, vases and bins - not exactly the terms you would associate with gardening; however, these are the most important parts of the container gardening practice.

Container gardening is one of the easiest, cheapest, and simplest ways to have your own garden and to grow your own food. This type of gardening doesn't require long hours toiling in the sun or tilling the soil. You would, however, need creativity, enthusiasm and natural aptitude for having fun.

Similar to [Square Foot Gardening](#), Container Gardening gives you the ability to grow organic vegetables and fruits right at your house. Regardless of where you live, in a house with a lawn or an apartment facing the road, a condo or a trailer, you can plant and harvest your own fruits, flowers and vegetables. Moreover, you will completely alter the appearance of your house, bring in a lot of greenery and live a healthy and happy life. When you see your efforts at growing a garden yielding fruits (in the form of vegetables!), you will marvel at how your efforts have grown a simple seed into a sapling, a shrub, a plant and a vegetable. All it takes for a seed to become a singularly beautiful vegetable or fruit is your efforts and passion – and a few containers!

## ***Choosing the Right Containers for your garden***

The sheer number of containers that can be used for container gardening is mindboggling. Even with a cursory glance around your house, you will be able to discover number of pots, pans, buckets and tubs that can be used for container gardening purposes. From terracotta pots to waste baskets, from bowls to bins, you are limited only by your imagination. Since one of the most important aspects of container gardening is the containers itself, you have to be very careful while choosing the right containers for your garden. In fact, a lot of thought should go into identifying the right containers that suit your particular garden needs and plant needs.

Choosing the right container for your gardening can be quite a daunting task, since you can choose almost any container and it will have a purpose and a plant that can grow in it. There are some important factors you should consider while choosing containers for your garden.

- **Container Choices:**

The number of choices you have is quite staggering. Although you can pretty much pick any box or bin from you yard and convert it into a container for gardening, you have to consider a number of factors before doing so.

Here are some of the most popular container choices used by expert to novice gardeners.

- Clay containers such as terracotta, ceramic, drain tiles and more
- Molded plastic or fiberglass – make sure it is made of non-toxic materials
- Metal
- Plastic bags
- Glazed and unglazed pots
- Stones
- Aquariums
- Washtubs
- Wastebaskets
- Storage Bins
- Wine Crates
- Shoe holders (the one hung over the door with plastic or cloth pockets)
- Crates
- Bowls
- Pans
- Tubs
- Urns
- Cans
- Baskets
- Even your old pair of boots!

In fact, you can use some of the items you would probably just throw away if they are cracked or broken. For example, you can use empty coffee cans for planting small flowers. Just paint a little something on the coffee cans to make it look bright and start using it for planting. Your plastic sandbox is great to be a part of your outdoor vegetable garden. You can start using your soda bottles, half-gallon paper cartons, cups, and milk jugs to sow seeds initially before they are moved to a bigger pot.

In case, you are planning to go the creative way, then try using your vintage china cups and bowls for growing flowering plants. You can keep these as the centerpiece in your living room. The beauty of the china and the vibrancy of the flowers could be the most refreshing welcome your guests can get. Your old-fashioned square bath tubs need not go to the trash; they can be converted into a nice vegetable garden. Use your enamel bowls and cups for pep up your kitchen; or old canning jars to make your bedroom get a dash of greenery and color.

- **Container Size:**

When choosing the right size containers, you should consider a number of factors. Some of the most important factors to remember are:

- The size of the plant that you are going to plant in the container. If the roots of the plant need more room for growth, you have to choose a bigger container.
- Choose a smaller container if the seed is planted for a shorter period of time before it can be transferred to a bigger pot.
- Remember that larger pots have more space for root growth, can accommodate more soil and retain more moisture. Choose the container according to the plant needs.
- The container choice will also depend on the watering needs of the plant. Shallow containers should be used for plants that need to dry out before they are watered again. Plants that need constant moisture should be planted in larger pots that will retain water content.
- Larger pots, because of their ability to accommodate more soil, can retain more water and require less frequent watering. Choose a large pot, in case you are planning to go on a vacation or you can't be bothered about frequent watering through the day.
- Don't use a pot that is too big for the plant, and similarly, don't use a pot that is too small for the plant. Never trim the roots of the plant just so that they fit into the pot. Remember, plants don't need extra space to grow; the soil in larger pots will retain water for longer periods of time and this will make the roots soggy and they rot faster.
- Mix up the size of the containers completely so that the final look of your garden is good. Same sized pots might look uniform and even, but if you want to hit the creative mark, the best idea is to mix it all up.

- **Container Stability:**

The stability of the container is also important factor to be considered before choosing the right container for your needs. If you want to keep a few pots on your

balcony or rooftop, you should consider the stability of the pot. In addition to the pot's size and stability, always ensure that the pot is firmly anchored or strapped to the pavement.

The container's shape will lend it stability so that the plants don't tip over when they start growing or when a gust of wind decides to tip them.

- A square container with a strong base is the best and most stable container.
- Inverted traditional pots tend to tip over very easily, but pots that have straight sides are more stable.
- Small pots tend to be heavy at the rim, which makes them easy to tip and tumble.
- A pot that has a large and strong base will be able to resist the weight of the plant easily. Always keep in mind that a pot's base should be more than the pot's height; this will bring in a lot of stability to the pot and the plant!

- **Container Material:**

The choice of material has an impact on the plant's growth, appearance of your garden and the maintenance.

- Remember that containers made up of porous materials such as terracotta, wire and clay have the tendency to soak up water. This means that the plants will dry up very fast unless you water them at least twice daily.
- If you are going to use porous materials, try to use plastic lining so that it can help retain water in the soil.
- Remember that in winter, when water enters the pores of a pot, it tends to freeze. This will crack the pot very easily. So, during winters, make sure you cover your pots in plastic to keep them dry. On the other hand, if you are not using the pots in winter, you can always turn them upside down so that it doesn't get filled up with snow or water.
- If you are going to put your porous pot in the ground, make sure you completely cover the rim of the pot. If you leave the rim showing, water will start evaporating and the plant will dry out eventually.

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