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Grow a Beautiful Budget-Wise GARDEN ANYWHERE

Gardening is good for the mind, body, spirit, and your household budget. Here are a few tips to help you be successful, have fun and save money.

Container gardening: plants, combos and care

As long as you can provide sufficient water, nutrients and the proper growing conditions you can grow just about anything in a container. Many new compact varieties make it easier than ever to do just that.

Mix it up by growing vegetables, herbs and flowers in the same container. You'll be harvesting fewer vegetables, but you'll have more variety in this one container.

Grow a few tomatoes in containers on your patio, deck or balcony for easy access. Larger varieties produce best when grown in a 5-gallon pot preferably 14 to 20" wide. Smaller varieties can thrive in a 2- to 3-gallon container. Provide support for taller varieties.

Don't let the need for regular watering stop you from growing container gardens. Employ one or more of these strategies to save time and boost success. Invest in self-watering pots that need less frequent watering, or automate watering with an irrigation system and timer. Incorporate organic wool pellets into the soil to help retain water reducing watering by up to 25%. Use plant nannies, glass globes and similar items to extend the time between watering.

Provide needed nutrients throughout the season. Check the label of the potting mix used to see if it contains fertilizer and adjust fertilization accordingly. Provide plants with a steady supply of nutrients over a longer period of time, and reduce maintenance by using a low nitrogen slow-release fertilizer, like Milorganite. Add the fertilizer at planting and again 6 to 8 weeks later or as recommended on the fertilizer container and only if needed.

Make sure containers have drainage holes and self-watering pots have weep holes at the top of the reservoir to allow excess water to drain from the container. Even if you can water

perfectly frequent rains can lead to soggy soil and root rot in containers that lack drainage holes. If you can't add drainage holes to your containers try double potting. Place a few pebbles in the bottom of the container that lacks drainage holes. Use a nursery or other container with drainage holes to grow the plants. Set the planted pot on the pebbles in the decorative container. Water thoroughly, as needed, and pour off excess water from the decorative pot as needed.

Budget-wise and beautiful gardens

You can save money while growing a beautiful landscape filled with colorful gardens. Begin stretching your plant budget with these money-saving tips:

Buy plants, seeds and garden supplies in bulk and share the goods and cost with friends and family. You'll all save money when buying large packets of seeds and plants sold in multiple cell packs or flats.

Grow traditional flowers sold in flats at a lower cost per plant than newer introductions. Splurge on a few newer varieties to update your flower beds and containers or to add a bit of pizzazz.

Repurpose items headed for the recycling center into useful items for the garden. Convert 5-gallon buckets free of harsh chemicals, old nursery pots or other items into containers. Just add drainage holes and dress them up with a bit of paint as needed.

Save left over seeds for next season and beyond. Store them in airtight containers in a consistently cool, dark location like the refrigerator. Leave the seeds in their original packet or an envelope labeled with the plant name, the date seeds were purchased and any other helpful information.

Convert kitchen scraps into a nutritious soil amendment. Make your own worm bin from storage containers. Drill holes in the bottom and fill with shredded paper. Dampen the paper and add a handful of compost, redworms and kitchen scraps. Soon you will be harvesting worm castings to use on container gardens, seedlings and other garden plants.

New look to easy-care plant favorites

We all have our favorites — those that we like to grow, evoke fond memories or look great in our gardens. Change things up a bit by growing different varieties of your favorite annuals.

Salvias are hummingbird favorites and great choices for those sunny locations in the landscape and container gardens. Provide moist well-drained soil and enjoy flowers all season long.

Zinnias tolerate hot dry weather once established. Start them from seed indoors or directly in the garden and enjoy blooms in as few as eight weeks. Then watch as butterflies, bees and hummingbirds stop by to dine.

Celosia are another heat- and drought-tolerant plant. They make great fresh-cut and dried flowers and come in a variety of flower types including crested, plume and wheat.

Elevate your design with a few accent plants.

Sweet potato vine's colorful leaves make a great trailer in containers or annual groundcover in garden beds. The tuberous root of these ornamental cultivars of sweet potatoes are edible but, most agree, not as tasty as those varieties grown for their flavor.

Elephant ears' bold leaves add a tropical flair to any garden or container. When fall arrives, you can move them indoors and grow them as a houseplant, allow them to go dormant and save the "bulb" as with dahlias and cannas, or replace them with a different variety next year.

You'll find more gardening tips and resources at melindamyers.com.

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