



Lyon County - O'Brien County - Osceola County - Sioux County

# CLIPPINGS

*A Weekly Column from Iowa State University Extension and Outreach*

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## Week of May 16, 2016 For Immediate Release

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### **Grow More with Less Space**

*Margaret Murphy, Horticulture Educator and Regional Food Coordinator*

Growing up we had a very large vegetable garden in the backyard. Mom was a marvel in the garden. I don't remember a time when we didn't have fresh veggies to eat all summer long. She was also very adept at canning and freezing fruits and vegetables for great eating through the winter.

Over the years, the popularity of growing one's own food has waxed and waned, but in recent times, the trend is once again to have edibles in the home landscape. However, not everyone has the room or time (or mobility) to keep a large garden. Small gardens are easier to manage and keeping your garden size small doesn't mean you have to forfeit a bountiful harvest.

There are several techniques that can help gardeners get maximum productivity from a small space. The first is to interplant. With this technique you sow slow and fast maturing crops together in the same area. The fast maturing vegetables will be harvested before the slow growing ones come up. An example of this is to plant quick growing leaf lettuce next to slower maturing tomato seedlings.

Similar to interplanting is the technique of companion planting. This practice dates back centuries and has been employed in gardens all over the world. It involves growing two or more crops together for the benefit of one or all of them. A good example of this is the Three Sisters garden, a technique pioneered by Native Americans. In this garden, corn, pole beans and winter squash are planted together. The corn provides a structure for the climbing beans, the beans put nitrogen back into the soil, and the squash leaves serve as living mulch that conserves soil moisture and shades out weeds.

Succession planting is another technique to consider. As soon as one crop is finished you plant another in the same plot or container. An example of this is to plant a cold season, quick maturing crop such as radishes and after it is harvested for the season plant a warm-season crop such as cucumber in the same spot. As you are harvesting the cucumbers in late summer, you could plant another round of radishes for a fall crop. As a side note, radishes are considered to be a good companion to cucumbers as it is said they help repel cucumber beetles, but don't hold me to that. Succession planting is also used to describe staggered plantings of the same crop. For example, you can make successive plantings of beets every two to three weeks until midsummer for a continued harvest.

Square foot gardening is another space saving technique that was popularized by Mel Bartholomew in his book *Square Foot Gardening*. It involves growing crops in a space marked off in square foot plots instead of the traditional straight rows. The goal is to produce the largest possible harvest from a small garden space. This technique lends itself nicely to use in raised beds.

Then there is the practice of growing food vertically using trellises, cages, stakes or hanging baskets. This is an increasingly popular concept and truly does offer a way to grow food even with limited space. Many vegetables and fruits grow very well vertically, including beans, peas, cucumbers, zucchinis, melons, gourds, tomatoes, strawberries and grapes. Buy the vining varieties and not the bush types for vegetables like cucumbers and squash and the small-fruited varieties for melons. An added bonus of growing your food vertically is you can bring the plants up to eye-level, which makes harvesting much easier.

Lastly, if you lack land to cultivate don't despair. Many vegetables grow just fine in containers. All you need is a pot that provides good drainage and a sunny place to locate your vegetable garden. Most vegetables require a container that holds six to eight inches of potting soil though crops like carrots, tomatoes and other larger-sized plants will need deeper soil. Leaf lettuce, spinach, chards, beets, cabbage, peppers, radishes and cucumbers are just a few other types of vegetables that you can grow in containers.

To learn more about small space vegetable gardening Iowa State University (ISU) Extension and Outreach is hosting a workshop on Saturday, June 11, 9:30 a.m. to noon, at the ISU Demonstration Garden located at the Lyon County Fairgrounds in Rock Rapids. Through hands-on projects, participants will learn about space-saving planting techniques, how to grow vegetables using garden trellises, and how to maximize your efforts gardening with containers and raised beds. The event is free, however, pre-registration is required. To pre-register or for more information, contact Margaret Murphy at 712-472-2576 or [mmurphy@iastate.edu](mailto:mmurphy@iastate.edu).

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