

Vegetarian Newsletter

A Horticultural Sciences Department Extension Publication on Vegetable Crops

Eat your Veggies!!!!

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Make Room for Vertical Vegetable Gardening

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You may be experiencing sticker shock in the produce department these days. It costs a lot to bring vegetables all the way from Colorado (the origin of my bag of carrots) and Peru (the onions). If you have a couple of tomato plants and think that's all you have room for think again. You can ramp up your veggie production without taking over the entire yard. This is about containers but containers in a major way. Containers are great for controlling nematodes and weeds and providing a controlled environment for your produce – and many containers in a small space will give you lots more great edibles.

Just follow the example of Mr. M. T. Alden a gardener in Okeechobee County who grows 36 full-size plants in a vertical wall just ten feet by three feet and about six feet tall. Mr. Alden, a kind of container-gardening guru, has thousands of plants in hundreds of pots. But just one of his ten foot segments should grow enough for a family. This “Wall of Vegetables” can also block an unattractive view.



Here is his method. M. T. places three 8-foot landscape timbers in a row five feet apart. He buries them 18-inches in the ground after putting a notch in the top. The notch holds one-inch pipe at the top of the structure. This is the pipe that holds the 18 ten-inch pots in each section. These 18 pots are an under-approximation, as you can also put six pots on the ground. That would make 24 pots!

Pots are suspended, one under the one above, for three layers. The pots are filled with a lightweight mixture of composted manure, perlite and vermiculite. Our garden guru uses horse manure obtained from a friend, but this may also be purchased as composted manure at most garden centers. The other two ingredients for this mix are easy to find locally as well.



Mr. Alden grows just about all popular garden crops in his intensive container gardens. The ten-inch pots can accommodate one large tomato plant. The tomatoes are not staked and they have plenty of room to produce. Three strawberry plants, three of beans and peas, several large onions or many many scallions fit in these pots. Three corn stalks can grow upright from one pot and several potatoes can be harvested in this small size container. One pepper plant can produce lots of fruit also.

In addition to saving space, this gardening method gets fungus-susceptible plants up where air circulation is available so it is good for cukes and melons too. You may need to support heavy melons. Mr. Alden places them near a fence to provide horizontal supports.



Although there is an initial start-up cost for this method – timbers, pipe, pots and potting mix, the cost is pretty low. There are wholesale suppliers for pots and timbers are not expensive. Mr. Alden uses a drip irrigation system but a watering can or hose would suffice for a small garden.

This garden is portable – if you move you can take it with you. It is frost-proof too: if low temperatures are predicted you can bring the individual pots inside. And, if you add collecting troughs and a rain barrel to this installation to catch and store water that runs out of the pots, you can conserve water!

Adapted from an original article that appeared in the *Okeechobee News* December 21, 2008, and is archived on line at: <http://okeechobee.ifas.ufl.edu/News%20columns/FYN.Vertical.Veges.htm>.

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