Gardening in the Zone

with Iowa Gardening Magazine's Liz Gilman



Lettuce with bush-type tomatoes and cucumbers

Container Gardening

5/23/05

If you live in an apartment or condo and don't think that you can have a vegetable garden... well think again! Gardens can come in all shapes and sizes and can be more convenient than you think. This week I interviewed Linda Naeve, urban agriculture specialist with Iowa State University (ISU) Extension.

According to Naeve, just about any kind of container will do for container gardening as long as it's large enough to hold the plants and accommodate their root systems. Plastic or clay pots, old pails, bushel baskets, buckets or hanging baskets work well. Good drainage is the key though, so if holes need to be made, drill four or more quarter-inch holes evenly spaced around the bottom of the container.

Naeve recommends a light-weight, soiless growing mix. This type of potting mix is free of plant disease organisms and weed seeds and is less likely to compact so it can hold moisture and plant nutrients well. You can find soiless potting mixes in garden centers or you can mix your own with vermiculite, peat moss, limestone and fertilizer.

The size of the container depends on the vegetables you intend to grow. An herb garden will do well in six- to ten-inch pots while tomatoes and peppers will need a three- to five-gallon container. Other good vegetables for container gardens are green onions, beans, lettuce, summer squash, spinach and radishes. Container gardens can be ornamental as well as edible. Lettuce, for example, makes an attractive border in a planter box.

Gardens need at least six hours of sunlight a day so since your garden is mobile, you can move it to make sure it gets the sunlight it needs. Just make sure you water your garden almost daily because if the plants dry out completely between watering, it may cause the plants to drop their fruits or flowers. You may also want to apply a fertilizer every few weeks.

Then in no time you'll be conveniently harvesting the fruits of your labor from your balcony, windowsill or doorstep!

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