



urban
agriculture
AUSTRALIA



Designing an edible balcony garden

A kitchen garden on your balcony

Urban living doesn't have to mean living without a kitchen garden. It's easy to grow food in pots and it's surprising how much food can be grown in a small space.

Plants need sun, water and food. If your balcony gets sun for most of the day, you can grow a whole range of vegetables and herbs. Even in shady spots you can still grow mints and mushrooms.

Herb towers (tall pots with space for many plants) are a popular way to grow herb gardens in small spaces; you can also take advantage of a sunny balcony wall or railing by hanging a vertical garden, perfect for lettuces and herbs.

If you have a bit of floor space on your balcony, you can set up a modular above-ground garden bed – these come in all shapes and sizes and colours.

Some cheap, recycling solutions to setting up a balcony garden include using old ice cream containers as herb planters, ask your local nursery for used pots.

You can feed your balcony plants with seaweed solution and organic liquid fertilizer.

If you can fit a broccoli box into a shady corner, you can recycle your vegetable scraps through a worm farm – this is a clean way to turn green waste into plant food.

For most balcony gardens, hand-watering with a watering can will take less than ten minutes a day.

Food plants for balcony gardens

Most popular herbs grow very well in pots – parsley, oregano, sage and thyme are long lived and can be grown together in a medium sized pot for a continuous harvest throughout the year. Growing a bountiful amount of these herbs will provide you with a decorative as well as productive balcony garden.

Coriander, basil, rocket, lettuce, Asian greens, spinach and silverbeet will grow quickly and give you fresh greens at different times of the year. Try a plant pot filled with spring onions and chives – instead of pulling out by the roots, cut off just above the soil, these plants will grow back and you can keep harvesting without needing to replant. If you water well and feed regularly, a surprisingly small area will produce a lot.

Peas and beans grow vertically and need only 30cm deep pots for their roots to thrive. Dwarf plants will only grow to 1m high; other peas and beans will twine up poles dug into their pots to a maximum of 3m high. Before a delicious harvest of peas and beans, you can enjoy the multiple beautiful flowers that are scattered over the vines.

Tomatoes may seem like a backyard plant but will grow well in pots. Some tomatoes grow as small upright plants; some grow as tall vines that need vertical support like beans and peas. Varieties such as Tommy Toe, Brown Berry, Isis Candy, Yellow Pear and Christmas Grapes will give you brightly coloured, small fruit and will keep producing all summer and autumn. Tigerella is a medium sized tomato striped green and red which is as tasty as it is great to look at. Tomatoes need a deep pot to thrive and a lot of sun and feeding.

Mushrooms need a dry; dark and cool place and actually grow best in cupboards. Buy a ready-made mushroom farm and set it up in the darkest corner of a balcony that doesn't receive full sun.

Mints also grow well without sun – they thrive in a moist spot and don't need much feeding.

There's so much more

Balcony gardening is only limited by our imaginations – some edible plants, like tomatoes, can be grown upside down from hanging pots. This looks great and saves space.

If you have a deep trough or raised garden bed, you can even grow root vegetables, like carrots and beetroot. If you have enough space, you could really go wild and grow pumpkins, potatoes and onions!

Many food plants are decorative as well as tasting best when freshly picked. Supermarket rocket and tomatoes can't beat the real thing.

Start small with a couple of plants, your favourite herbs or greens, and see how food plants create an environment of abundance that is beautiful as well as tasty.

For further information on this topic

Check out the many websites and blogs for ideas and tips on kitchen gardening on your balcony.

Search

'gardening small spaces', 'edible balcony gardens' and 'urban gardens' in your web search engine.

Further reading

Indira Naidoo, *The Edible Balcony*, Penguin Books, 2011.
