

Turn Your Balcony into an Edible Garden

Written by Ginny Grimsley
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Tips for Growing Farm-fresh Herbs & Veggies in the City

Improvements in container gardening equipment and techniques have cleared the way for even the most “brown thumb” city dwellers, and anyone without a yard, to grow their own groceries.

“There’s nothing to stop anyone who wants a garden from having one,” says Roy Joulus, CEO of Greenbo, www.greenbo.co, a company that designs award-winning innovative products for urban gardening including the new Greenbo XL flowerbox.

“Plants add a great deal to our quality of life – from cleaning the air we breathe to keeping us in touch with nature. Fresh, home-grown herbs and vegetables not only taste so much better than supermarket produce, they’re convenient, and you know exactly where they came from and what was used, or not used, on them.”

While hydroponic and vertical gardening systems have been developed to maximize the yield in small spaces, Joulus says starting a balcony garden needn’t cost much. Start with the right materials and choose plants that are right for your conditions, and you’ll soon be eating from the pots on your porch.

He offers these tips especially for balcony gardeners:

Plant the right plants for the amount of sunlight you have:

Most herbs and vegetables require six to eight hours of direct sunlight a day. So what do you do if you have just one balcony and it doesn’t get that much sun?

• Choose edibles that can take partial sun/shade (three to six hours of sun in the morning or early afternoon) or light shade (two to three hours of direct sun or lightly shaded all day.)

Some partial shade herbs: cilantro and parsley (both prefer cooler weather); dill, bee balm, spearmint chamomile.

Some light shade herbs: garlic chives, peppermint, rosemary.

Some partial or light shade veggies: lettuce, broccoli, green onion, collards, cabbage, peas, carrots, strawberries, beans, sweet potatoes.

• Remember,

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pale-colored surfaces increase the light your plants receive. Plants in regions with short growing seasons usually need the full six to eight hours of light per day.

Choose the right pots:

- Bigger pots require less water and are less likely to blow over on high-rise balconies where the winds can be fierce. Terra cotta allows moisture to escape fairly quickly, which is helpful for people who like to water a lot. Non-porous plastic or glazed pots hold water longer and are better for windy balconies, where soil dries out quickly. Use brightly colored containers to add style and visual interest to your garden.
- Most vegetable plants require even watering – don't let them dry out completely and don't keep them soggy. Apply water directly to the soil.
- Make sure your containers have drainage holes or a drainage system. If they have an attached tray to catch excess water, don't allow the plants' roots to sit in the water, which promotes rot and fungus. Either empty the tray regularly, or use a design that holds the water away from the roots.
- Use the right dirt:
- It's important to use dirt that allows for good drainage. Most edible plants don't like to sit in wet dirt, and soil without good drainage tends to become compacted – a difficult medium for plants that like to stretch their roots out. You can buy a sterile soilless potting mix, a soil-based potting mix, or mix up your own batch using 1 part compost, 1 part perlite and 1 part potting soil.
- Don't use garden soil or top soil, which won't allow adequate drainage.
- On windy balconies, top-dress your container with small rocks to keep the soil from drying out so quickly.

Joulus offers one more tip for high-rise dwellers: Rely on self-pollinating plants, or plants that don't need pollination by insects, unless you're willing to hand-pollinate.

"You likely won't see many bees buzzing around the 40th story," he says.

Don't worry about pollination for root vegetables, like carrots and potatoes. Some self-pollinators include beans, peas, tomatoes and peppers.

About Roy Joulus

Roy Joulus is CEO of Greenbo, which was founded in 2012 in Florida with a focus on simplicity, efficiency and innovation in creating urban agricultural products. Its Greenbo XL flowerbox, designed to hang securely on any balcony railing up to 6 inches wide, won the prestigious 2012 Red Dot Design Award. Greenbo products are manufactured in a multi-cultural Israeli-Arab setting using sustainable and recyclable materials, and with safety the No. 1 priority. Find Greenbo products at garden centers and independent nurseries in the United States and Europe, and online at amazon.com.